A Quantitative Exploration of Common Trends and Themes in the History of American Conservatism: A Case-Study of Antigovernment Group Formation, 2012-2015

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ABSTRACT

How do current-day antigovernment groups represent both a continuity and discontinuity with previous generations of 20th CE American conservatism, as defined by the historical field? This study uses a historical-sociological approach to assess whether county-unit level antigovernment group formation is correlated with the important social, demographic, and economic factors observed in the historical scholarship of American conservatism. Though the classification models generated are not meaningful for prediction, this study offers a novel theoretical framework and methodology for a quantitative assessment of how trends in the historical literature appear to rise and fall over time.

INTRODUCTION

Localized "Patriot" militia organizations became a popular topic of interest among sociologists following the 1995 "Unabomber" attacks of the Oklahoma City Federal building. Timothy McVeigh, the perpetrator of these attacks, was widely reported to have ties to militia organizations, spurring a decades-long spike of sociological interest in American militant anti-government ("Patriot" or "militia") groups in the 1990s.[1,2] In the burst of literature that followed, sociologists borrowed heavily from existing social movement theories about the opportunities and constraints that impact successful grassroots social movement mobilization. These social movement theories offered sociologists a useful framework for considering the material/structural constraints behind group formation alongside the various types of ideological/cultural motivators that inspire community members to mobilize for group activism.

Though this sociological approach remains promising for the study of antigovernment group formation, the findings from existing sociological scholarship also inspire interesting questions for historical inquiry. The many similarities observed between this current crop of antigovernment groups and Cold War conservatives suggest some degree of continuity between the conservatism of the 1960s and 1960s and the conservatism of antigovernment groups today.

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[1] Because this study will use data collected from the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) *Intelligence Report*, the terms "Patriot" or "anti-government" groups will refer to the SPLC definition, which defines these groups "as opposed to the 'New World Order,'" and who "engage in groundless conspiracy theorizing, or advocate or adhere to extreme antigovernment doctrines. Antigovernment groups do not necessarily advocate or engage in violence or other criminal activities, though some have. Many warn of impending government violence or the need to prepare for a coming revolution. Many antigovernment groups are not racist." Southern Poverty Law Center. *Antigovernment Movement*. Retrieved from https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/antigovernment. Accessed April 23, 2017.

[2] Militant groups, or militias, are not necessarily violent groups. The Southern Poverty Law Center designates groups as "militias" if they "[engage] in paramilitary training aimed at protecting citizens from…feared impending government crackdown." Southern Poverty Law Center. *Antigovernment Movement*. Retrieved from https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/antigovernment. Accessed April 23, 2017

Indeed, existing sociological scholarship has identified common features of militia groups (which the SPLC now extends to antigovernment groups, generally) that appear to map closely onto the unique strain of Cold War conservatism observed among conservative, suburban mothers in the post-WWII period. For one, these post-WWII suburban mothers share an ethos of grassroots, or local and community-based mobilizing similar to that of antigovernment groups today. More importantly, however, they also seem to share parallel worldviews and ideologies, including a deep distrust of the New (global) World Order, antagonism towards the government, and a curious predilection for conspiracy theorizing.

And yet, these similarities also present something of a puzzle to the historian. Current historical consensus identifies a distinct shift in conservative thought following the failed 1964 Goldwater presidential campaign, moving away from the anticommunist, conspiratorial conservatism of the post-WWII period towards a new emphasis on social conservatism (Nickerson, McGirr). Within this historical narrative of transformation, how should we make sense of this apparent resurgence of Cold War conservatism? And more broadly, in what ways does this current crop of antigovernment group represent a continuity and a discontinuity with the various strains of American conservatism observed within the historical field?

Regrettably, because historical scholarship generally lags behind the period of study by at least twenty years, the rise of militia groups in the 1990s has been too recent for any serious historical engagement with this question to have yet occurred. Rather, much of the existing scholarship on antigovernment groups has been generated by the field of the sociology. However, the last decade has seen a dramatic decrease in the number of sociological studies of American anti-government or militia group mobilization. Sociologists have also yet to significantly expand the study of rightwing group organizations to the study of non-militant antigovernment groups. I suspect this is due, in part, to a shift to a newfound global interest in Islamic terrorist group mobilization and recruitment – a likely consequence of the 9/11 attack on the U.S. World Trade Center by the Al-Qaeda terrorist group. The field of domestic terrorism has also increasingly shifted towards a renewed attention to "hate groups" and "hate crimes," further diluting academic focus on domestic antigovernment and/or militant group formation. Given the absence of recent antigovernment group scholarship, the academic field lacks the capacity to provide any meaningful response or assessment of the ostensible rise in the number of American antigovernment groups over the past ten years.[3]

To investigate how well this new generation of antigovernment group falls within the various trends in American conservatism identified within the existing historical scholarship, I take a historical-sociological approach, adopting existing sociological approaches to perform a historical assessment of antigovernment groups identified by the SPLC during the years 2012-2015. Based on common themes in the historical literature, I select the common social, economic and demographic factors that historians have used to explain conservative mobilization in

[3] The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) reported a massive spike in anti-government groups from 2009-2012; most shockingly, SPLC data reports a nearly 10-fold increase in the number of antigovernment groups in the 2012 year, as compared to annual numbers of antigovernment groups observed during the period from 2000-2008. Southern Poverty Law Center. *Active Antigovernment Groups in the United States.* https://www.splcenter.org/active-antigovernment-groups-united-states. Accessed April 23, 2017.

decades past and construct two classification models to predict the existence of antigovernment or militia group at the county-unit level. I use these models to conduct inference about which themes in the history of American conservatism appear to be significantly correlated to the formation of recent antigovernment and militant groups. By evaluating all antigovernment groups separately from just those that are militant, I hope to gain some additional insight into the ways that militant groups might represent a unique subset among antigovernment groups. In the following pages, I will first explore the theoretical underpinnings behind this historical-sociological approach, then will proceed with an introduction of the data and methods used. I will close with a discussion of the results, and end with a reflection on the future direction of this research.

EXISTING THEORIES AND SCHOLARSHIP

In the section below, I begin with a discussion of the two social movement theories commonly applied to sociological investigations of antigovernment groups. I then proceed to a discussion of common themes within the historical scholarship on 20th CE American conservatism, exploring the ways in which they challenge and align with the assumptions of social movement theories. I will then close with a broader discussion of the recent studies of militia group formation. Given the dearth of sociological work on non-militant antigovernment groups, this literature review will focus exclusively on academic studies that examine militant antigovernment group mobilization within the United States.

Social Movement Theories

Through their study of New Left and fascist-state social movements, sociologists have developed several strains of social movement theories that predict the success of grassroots social mobilization efforts. Scholars of antigovernment groups have primarily focused on the reactionary and structural causes of social movement formation.[4] I sketch the outlines of these two strains of theory, below.

Reactionary -- Social Strain Theories

Theories of social strain propose that structural changes to an individual's social, cultural, or political environment result in psychological strain. To cope with this strain, individuals may turn to social movements, such as antigovernment groups, in hopes of restoring traditional order and stability and/or in hopes of managing the stress of these changes. Social strain can take many forms, stemming from economic (Dobratz and Shankes-Meile 1997) and political (Tilly 1978) change. Changes to rural farming cultures (Dyer 1997) and increasing migrant populations and/or ethnic cultures (Lipset and Raab 1970) have also been identified as a source of social strain in antigovernment group formation. More "modern" types of social strain produced by the globalization and technological advances have also been applied to studies of militia movement formation specific to recent decades (Castells 1997).

[4] Though by no means complete, I offer here a couple examples of theories from the literature that do not fall cleanly into the reactionary or structural theory type: In *Rage on the Right*, politics and government professor Lane Crothers emphasizes the pre-existing cultural foundations that facilitated the formation and growth of several key American militant groups throughout the 1990s. These cultural foundations include the crucible of pre-existing American myths, ideology and political cultures that fused a "populist justification of rage" with militia ideology. In an even earlier attempt, Adorno et. al (1950) put forth a theory proposing that individuals with "authoritarian" personalities were more likely to join extreme social movements, see *The Authoritarian Personality*.

However, social strain theories are not always applied in isolation. For example, Neil Smelser's Theory of Collective Behavior (Smelser 1963) combines social strain theories with a structurally determinist view of society, positing that social structures must firstly be conducive to social movement formation for any mobilization to occur. Even after strain is introduced, charismatic leaders and social control mechanisms (such as socio-cultural norms and values) play critical roles in defining the nature and character of any resulting social movement formation. A more recent application of social strain theory combines the strain caused on individual social status from feminist and civil rights movements with a growing American "paramilitary culture" to explain the rise of militia movements among American males (Gibson 1994). Regardless whether they are applied solo or in tandem with other forces, social strain theories all assume that social movements form, at least in part, due to *reactionary* behavior.

Structural -- Resource Mobilization Theories

Resource mobilization theories presume that structural inequalities (perceived or real) may exist among society members, but will not result in social movement formation unless resources (social, cultural, economic, political) can be sufficiently mobilized to overcome the structural forces that perpetuate the very structural inequalities that populations are seeking to overcome (McCarthy and Zald 1977). McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly famously refined resource mobilization theory by emphasizing the opportunism within social movement formation, citing the importance of capitalizing upon the dynamic emergence of political opportunities and of appropriating existing institutions for efficient mobilization and recruitment (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 2001). Resource mobilization theories thus place specific focus on the structural realities that facilitate or obstruct the formation of social movements. Therefore, this theory assumes that structural factors like the homogeneity of populations, community institutions like churches and synagogues and economic prosperity can actually play positive roles in facilitating the successful formation of antigovernment groups under certain societal conditions.[5]

Themes in the History of 20th CE American Conservatism

In contrast, the historical literature on 20th CE American Conservatism does not show such an explicit split along reactionary and structural causes; most historical works in the field identify a mix of key themes that fall variably into the Social Strain and Resource Mobilization Theories. In the section below, I provide a detailed summary of the various themes in the history of Cold War conservatism, discussing the ways in which it engages with existing social movement theories. I follow this with a brief overview of other potentially relevant themes that emerge elsewhere in the history of American conservatism.

Cold War Conservatism (1950s-1960s)

The works of McGirr, Nickerson and Molloy all point to a Cold War political conservatism deeply rooted in anxieties over the New (global) World Order and anti-statist sentiments. Fears around domestic and foreign Communist infiltration, subversion and brainwashing further predisposed Cold War conservatives to conspiracy theorizing. In their studies of the Southern California landscape, McGirr and Nickerson also highlight a specific strain of Cold War

[5] It may seem odd to speak of economic prosperity and higher-education levels in the same breath as "structural inequality." Structural inequality does not necessarily always take on economic or educational character. Imbalance of power, or perceived status inequalities (male versus female, urban versus rural) may also serve as indicators of structural inequality against which antigovernment group members may wish to mobilize.

grassroots conservative activism largely spearheaded by suburban wives and mothers. On the whole, these women were highly educated transplants from the Midwest and the East Coast who cherished and celebrated so-called "traditional" gender norms. For these women, traditional gender norms offered an empowering vision of motherhood; mothers, they argued, were uniquely capable and responsible for protecting the sanctity and moral character of the home. Accordingly, they were incredibly active in mobilizing community members against perceived government intrusions in the schools and the public sphere. These facets of Cold War conservatism, as observed within the historical scholarship, fall well within the "social strain theories" – or *reactionary* model – proposed by the sociological field.

However, other facets of Cold War conservatism also suggest an alignment with Resource Mobilization Theories. McGirr, especially, also engages with the impact of structural causes on the emergence of this strain of Cold War conservatism. McGirr places specific emphasis on the impact of the "built environment" of Orange County suburbs on the burgeoning conservatism movement, noting the ways that the suburbanization of the urban periphery precluded the formation of any organic sense of community. For this reason, she argues that the neighborhood coffees (*kaffee klatches*), discussion groups and book clubs intended for conservative proselytizing were especially appealing to Orange County suburbanites because they satisfied a more profound lack of community belonging. By this logic, then, efforts at social mobilization should generally have stronger appeal within urbanized spaces where suburbs can form, compared to non-urban spaces, where traditional community institutions are more likely to remain. And yet, the effect of the suburban space is not simply limited to the Cold War period; McGirr, Nickerson and Lassiter all assert that the suburban space continues to shape conservative politics and grassroots mobilizing efforts into the 1970s and 1980s.

Other structural factors like the relative wealth and racial homogeneity of the suburban space also play a significant role in the Cold War conservatism in McGirr, Nickerson, Molloy and Lassiter's scholarship. For one, the wealth in suburbia often translated to large numbers of stay-at-home suburban mothers and wives. As Nickerson illustrates, these stay-at-home mothers took great joy in the opportunities for political activism that this abundance of free time provided. For these women, wealth gave them access to a much more valuable political resource: time. Similarly, the racial homogeneity of the suburban space offered conservative mobilizers structurally easy-access to a pre-existing sense of racial allegiance and a shared racial culture that made it easier for community members to find a common political identity. Together, the reactionary and structural forces observed in the historical literature suggest the necessity of new theoretical approach that can account for the multiplicity of factors affecting antigovernment group formation.

<u>Conservatism, Elsewhere</u>

Though there appear to be many similarities between the Cold War conservatives and members of antigovernment groups today, the anti-statist, or antigovernment rhetoric and sentiment among this recent crop of antigovernment groups is significantly more hostile and antagonistic than the anti-statist sentiments of Cold War conservatives. As such, we must be careful to avoid viewing these groups as a repeat resurgence of the Cold War conservatism of the past. Rather, we should engage the ways in which this recent strain of grassroots conservatism might also borrow from

other trends/themes in the history of American conservatism. I offer a brief assessment of these trends here.

Employment in the Private Sector
Various historical works on "sunbelt" economic development and the economic "conservatism" of corporate leaders in the post-WWII period have also identified the influence on private sector economic interests on the conservatism of laypersons at the grassroots level. Phillips-Fein, specifically, delves into the history of private sector political activism. She describes how, over the course of the 20th century, private sector company owners and managers were increasingly encouraged to educate and mobilize their employees for economically conservative causes. Given the entrenchment of free-market, "neo-liberal" economic policies today, it is less clear how significant this practice of educating employees might be in effecting conservative attitudes today. Nor is it clear whether economic conservatism is necessarily related to the antigovernment groups in existence today.

The Establishment of the All-Volunteer Force Army
Historical consensus holds that the 1973 establishment of an All-Volunteer Force (AVF) and the end of the military draft posed an existential crisis for military servicemen, politicians, and military families, alike, as volunteer ranks were increasingly filled with lower-class, non-white, and female populations. As Mittelstadt argues in *The Military-Welfare State*, the changing face of the army also complicated military welfare practices in the 1980s and 1990s, as Americans and politicians grappled with the question of whether soldiers were equally or more deserving of welfare benefits relative to the general population. Gulf War Veterans represent the first generation of wartime servicemen who experienced the full "weight" of the switch an All Volunteer Force. Not only was the Gulf War fought entirely by volunteers, Gulf War servicemen and families were also the first generation of soldiers to suffer the drastic cuts in military welfare benefits enacted in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Existing sociological studies have also pointed to the significance of Gulf War Veterans on militia group formations (O'Brien and Haider-Markel 1998).

Women and the Family
Lastly, one of the most common themes in the history of American conservatism centers around feminism and the family. To varying degrees, Self, Young, McGirr, Nickerson, Lassiter, and Dochuk have all argued for the centricity of women and the family to the social conservatism of the 1970s and beyond. These historians argue that the economic pressures and cultural challenges to so-called "traditional" female gender norms created at best, a sense of instability and at its most extreme, stoked fears about an apocalyptical decentering of the nuclear American family from American society. By this logic, conservatism represents a *reaction*, a call to the defense of the American family. Thus, in areas where women are forced by economic circumstances to violate traditional female gender norms, or do so by choice, we should generally expect higher levels of conservatism. Whether the conservatism of current antigovernment groups falls into this particular strain of American conservative thought has yet to be seen.

Recent Studies from the Sociological Field

A Discussion of Available Datasets

Many sociologists have engaged social strain and resource mobilization theories in the study of American militia group formation. However, much of the difficulty in applying quantitative approaches to the study of antigovernment group comes from the paucity of data on the subject. No U.S. federal agency currently tracks the national trends in the formation of antigovernment and hate groups. The two organizations best known for collecting such data are the American Defamation League (ADL) and the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). Unfortunately, since the ADL stopped collecting such data since 1995, recent scholars have overwhelmingly been forced to rely upon SPLC antigovernment and hate group databases for their analysis. This is complicated for two reasons: firstly, the inclusion of such groups in the SPLC's annual database is highly dependent on the SPLC's ability to not only find, but also correctly classify whether a group is a hate group, antigovernment group, and/or is militant using "field reports, group publications, the Internet, law enforcement sources and news reports" alone, while also correctly identifying whether or not a group is active.[6] Secondly, the SPLC has been criticized by some scholars for its bias against paramilitary groups (Aho 1990, Chermak 2002, Dobratz and Shankes-Meile 1997). Unfortunately, this bias is difficult to confirm or deny given the supposed confidentiality of some SPLC sources, and the absence of any comparable dataset for purposes of comparison.

A handful of sociologists have attempted to bypass complete reliance on the SPLC data by combining quantitative approaches with a qualitative approach, involving (hand-coded) content analysis of Internet posts and follow-up interviews (Weber and Rodeheaver 2004). Weber and Rodeheaver enhanced the list of 1996 and 1997 SPLC identified militia groups with their own research of antigovernment groups, obtained through Internet searches and other news sources to obtain a final list of 244 militias of interest for their study. This approach allowed them to comment on the geographic representativeness of the results obtained using SPLC-identified militia groups by looking at the relative geographic spread of Internet-only (non-SPLC-identified) militia groups. Other scholars of hate groups and hate crimes have also attempted to skirt the issue by combining SPLC's "sister database" of hate groups with in-depth, journalistic-type research into the organizational-level characteristics of specific hate groups to identify independent variables not found in any one database for use in logistic regression models. These independent variables include characteristics like recruitment tactics, leadership type, perception of public legitimacy, primary ideological concern, and membership demographics (Chermak, Freilich and Suttmoeller 2013). Unfortunately, though these approaches avoid complete reliance on SPLC data, they are also limited in the generalizability of their results, since neither of their final datasets can claim representativeness of American antigovernment groups (or hate groups, depending on the study in question). Still to this day, only the SPLC datasets alone attempt to capture all groups that fall within the antigovernment or hate group categories.

Freilich and Pridemore carried out a commendable study comparing the different results obtained when applying 1995 SPLC, 1996 SPLC, 1995 ADL data to state-level analyses of antigovernment group formation using OLS and negative binomial regression (Freilich and Pridemore 2006). Ultimately, the authors' results do not make a compelling case to disregard

[6] Southern Poverty Law Center. *Active Patriot Groups in the US in 2016.* Retrieved from https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2017/active-patriot-groups-us-2016 . Accessed April 23, 2017.

SPLC data altogether. At best, their results make a strong case for disregarding ADL data, while also confirming the robustness of the correlation between rates of Gulf War veterans and paramilitary culture with state-level anti-government group formation. Regardless of the criticism levied against it, thanks to its continued availability and geographic specificity, the SPLC dataset remains the primary dataset relied upon for tracking antigovernment (and hate) group formation at county and state levels: ultimately, at present, SPLC data simply remains the best available option for scholars in the field. I will engage further with the debate over SPLC data quality in the Limitations section of this paper.

Findings from the Field

Though scholarly interest in militant group formation has declined in recent years, sociologists, criminologists and government agencies have nonetheless compiled an impressive body of work on the matter. A 2009 leaked government report (now unclassified) from the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Intelligence and Analysis theorized that the recent 2007-2009 economic recession and the election of the first black president "are driving a resurgence in rightwing extremist recruitment and radicalization activity."[7] The same report goes on to discuss parallels between present-day domestic, rightwing extremist rhetoric and significant rightwing mobilizing factors from the 1990s, including concerns over "economic hardship," "illegal immigration," "legislative drivers" such as restrictive gun and ammunition laws, and the "perceived risk of threat from other countries," as well as continued evidence of active recruitment by extremist groups of "disgruntled military veterans."[8]

The conclusions of the 2009 government report agree strongly with the findings of academic qualitative case-studies of 1990s American militia groups (for some examples, see Stern 1996, Crothers 2003). Other qualitative case studies have also pointed to the importance of religious activity in militia group formation and recruitment (Aho 1990, Kelley and Villaire 2002, Akins 1998, Crothers 2003) not accounted for within the government report.

Sociologists and criminologists have also attempted to use more quantitative approaches to determine what factors affect antigovernment or militant group formation. These studies generally rely on only 1-3 years of antigovernment group data, ignore recent decades of antigovernment or militant group formation, and rely on either OLS or negative binomial regression models (Dyke and Soule 2002, Freilich 2003, Freilich and Pridemore 2005, O'Brien and Haider-Markel 1998). The results of these studies generally show more evidence to support social strain theories than resource mobilization theories. Factors that support resource mobilization theories were not significantly correlated militia group formation: education (O'Brien and Haider-Markel 1998), anti-militia/paramilitary training statues (Freilich 2003), membership in evangelical Protestant churches (Freilich and Pridemore 2005), conservative voting patterns (Freilich and Pridemore 2005, Dyke and Soule 2002). However, factors that tend to support social strain theories were found to correlate significantly and positively with state and county-level militia group formation: these include the presence of Gulf war veterans (O'Brien and Haider-Markel 1998), economic disruption due to job loss or loss of farms (Dyke and Soule

[7] See page 3 of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security report: *Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment.*

[8] See pages 4-7 of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security report: *Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment.*

2002, Freilich and Pridemore 2005), and strong paramilitary culture (Freilich and Pridemore 2003).

However, these studies also differ in surprising and puzzling ways. Only Dyke and Soule found significant correlations between increases in the non-white population and militia group formation. This finding was confirmed at both the county and state levels, with significance increasing considerably at the county-level analysis. However, these results seem to contradict Freilich and Pridemore's work, who controlled for demographic variations by examining the number of "white, non-Hispanic males" only, where Dyke and Soule used a dummy variable to denote "above average increase[s]" in non-white populations. Similarly, Dyke and Soule found evidence to support Gibson's theory of "backlash" against feminist movements, finding significant correlation between the percentage of female legislators and the formation of antigovernment groups, while Freilich and Pridemore's measure of female empowerment ("ratio of female median income to male median income") showed no significant correlation to militia group formation.

Ultimately, it is difficult to make sense of the results of these various studies for several different reasons. Firstly, as is obvious from the discussion above, authors operationalized their variables in very different ways, and existing scholarship gives us no clear answer which approach is more valid. Secondly, the O'Brien and Haider-Markel study utilizes ADL data which, as previously discussed, may not be a sufficiently accurate means dataset for this type of analysis (see Freilich and Pridemore 2006). On the one hand, because antigovernment group research has declined in academic favor or interest over the past decade, there is little literature available to resolve these discrepancies. On the other hand, the lack of methodological consensus in the sociological field also presents a timely opportunity to explore new quantitative models for the study of antigovernment groups. A more detailed discussion of my chosen model specifications is provided in the Data and Methods section below.

DATA & METHODS

Sources

County-level social, demographic and economic data are obtained from the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates for the years 2012-2015. Data are collected and maintained by the U.S. Census Bureau. All data were obtained via the U.S. Census Bureau's API excepting records for Veteran Population by Period of Service, which were gathered through the American FactFinder tool.[9] All records are identified with a FIPS (Federal Information Processing Standard) county-code.

Degree of county urbanization was obtained from the National Center of Health Statistics' 2013 Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for counties. Data are available in .txt and .sas from the NCHS website and are derived using the Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) provided by the Office of Management and Budget.[10] Counties are assigned a 1-6 value score to indicate degree

[9] Options for downloading data can be found through the ACS "Data Tables & Tools" webpage. https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/index.php.

[10] National Center for Health Statistics. *NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties*. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data_access/urban_rural.htm. Accessed June 1, 2017.

of urbanization, where values 1-4 indicate some degree of metropolitan character and values 5-6 indicate non-metropolitan character. Please see "Data" folder in the GitHub repo for a copy of the full 2013 NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties report. All records are identified with a FIPS (Federal Information Processing Standard) county-code.

Annual antigovernment group (a.k.a. "patriot" group) data were obtained from the Southern Poverty Law Center's (SPLC), a non-profit organization that monitors antigovernment, militia, and hate groups in the United States. The SPLC publishes a yearly list of U.S. antigovernment groups in their quarterly periodical, the *Intelligence Report*. Articles were accessible online from 2005 to 2016.[11] Links to each of the relevant articles can be found in Appendix I. According to the SPLC website, these reports of antigovernment and/or militant group existence are "compiled from field reports, group publications, the Internet, law enforcement sources and news reports."[12] Each group is classified by the state and city or county (typically). Militia status is reflected either using asterisks or is made explicit in the organization name. No membership numbers are provided.[13] Concerns about SPLC data quality and required data cleanup are discussed in further detail below.
To match each SPLC record to the relevant county, I obtained two datasets matching U.S. city to county. Each dataset was merged to the SPLC dataset, then city-to-county matches were compared. The subset of mismatched or unmatched records were either match to the relevant county or counties, or dropped from the data. The first dataset was obtained through the U.S. Small Business Administration API.[14] This database contains city, county, state, and FIPS codes. According to the API webpage, data come from USGS Geographic Names Information System. The second was obtained from the Gaslapmedia webpage, and contains zip code, city, county and state fields.[15] Between the two datasets, 4,735 SPLC records were matched to a County and FIPS county code. 1,649 records could not be matched due to vague location assignments by the SPLC: "Statewide" (1625 counts) or unlisted (24 counts). An additional 247 records could not be matched because the location listed indicated a region, instead of distinct city or county. The remaining records were checked one-by-one. Where necessary, county or counties were assigned using Google searches.

A final dataset of state and county FIPS codes was obtained from the U.S. Census bureau.[16] These were used to match the newly assigned counties in the SPLC dataset to the matching FIPS code. Using FIPS state and county code and year of observation, I merged ACS and NCHS data

[11] Attempts to obtain digital records for this data spanning back through 1995 or digital records directly from the SPLC were unsuccessful. Our contact at the SPLC provided SPLC's digital records for hate groups from 2000-2015, but indicated that the same was not available for militia groups.
[12] For further discussion about the complications of using SPLC data, please see the Literature Review section of the paper. Southern Poverty Law Center. *Active Patriot Groups in the US in 2016.* Retrieved from https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2017/active-patriot-groups-us-2016 . Accessed April 23, 2017.
[13] It is not uncommon for antigovernment groups to obfuscate membership records and numbers for privacy and security reasons.
[14] Code for this is provided in the "Untitled 1.ipynb" document in the repository. U.S. Small Business Administration. "U.S. City & County Web Data API". Retrieved from http://api.sba.gov/doc/geodata.html.
[15] Gaslap Media. "DOWNLOAD: ZIP CODE LATITUDE LONGITUDE CITY STATE COUNTY CSV." Retrieved from https://www.gaslampmedia.com/download-zip-code-latitude-longitude-city-state-county-csv/.
[16] U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from https://www2.census.gov/geo/docs/reference/codes/files/national_county.txt.

to the SPLC dataset to create a final dataset of county level social, demographic, and economic facts for the 2012-2015 years, flagged for presence of militia or antigovernment group by year.

SPLC Data Cleanup

SPLC data were manually copied from *Intelligence Report* articles and reformatted into a Pandas dataframe using a combination of Excel and Python. A total of 7,836 chapter location records were compiled for the 2007-2016 years.

For the 2013 and 2014 years, SPLC antigovernment group data was published in pdf format. All other years, the list of antigovernment groups were provided in html format. Groups are reported in vertical list format, categorized by state. Most years, organization name was reported in bold, with relevant chapter location(s) within the state reported in the next line in regular font. Militia status was often indicated by an asterisk by the organization name or the chapter location, but in some years, militancy was indicated within the organization name field instead. SPLC provided the state and annual tally of groups based on the number of ***chapter locations*** observed, rather than by number of unique organization names, although this count did not always match the number of groups listed in the *Intelligence Report*.

There was considerable variation in SPLC's reporting format from year to year, and some reporting errors observed. For most years, however, these mistakes were readily identified and corrected. The 2012 year presented additional difficulties: organization name could not be distinguished by format (bold, font size, capitalizations, etc.) from the chapter location(s). As a result, each record from the 2012 report was manually classified as either organization or chapter location using a combination of records from other years and Google searches, where necessary.

After correcting for obvious errors, however, the total number of antigovernment groups reported annually by the SPLC and those I compiled from the *Intelligence Report* differed for some years. There was an especially high number of unexplained number of discrepancies found in the 2006 year. Time constraints prevented further validation of records with the SPLC. Given the proportionally smaller number of groups observed in the 2006 year, and lacking a logical explanation for the large discrepancy observed, it was determined that both 2005 and 2006 year data should be removed from the future analysis.

For some years, SPLC's *Intelligence Report* provided a larger tally of groups for than were found listed in the *Intelligence Report* records, even after initial cleanup. Fortunately, this discrepancy could be reasonably explained by the number organization names that were erroneously misclassified as chapter locations – recall, SPLC tallies groups by the number of individual chapters, instead of by organization name. In both the 2011 and 2015 years, the number of misclassified organization names play an important role in accounting for the "missing" number of group records for the given year.[17] Based on available evidence, the number of records compiled here appears more accurate than the annual tally provided by the SPLC.

Table 1: Comparison of Group Numbers by Years, from the *Intelligence Report*:

[17] For example, in the 2015 year, the following organizations were erroneously counted as chapter locations: New Jersey, R.V. Bey Publications; Michigan, We the People, Washington, Washington State Militia. These artificially increased the annual tally of groups reported by the SPLC.

SPLC Tally versus Number Compiled by Author

Year	Group Number: Compiled by author	Group Number: Reported by SPLC	Delta
2016	623	623	0
2015	985	998	13
2014	874	874	0
2013	1102	1096	-6
2012	1361	1360	-1
2011	1273	1274	1
2010	824	824	0
2009	512	512	0
2008	149	149	0
2007	131	131	0
2006	134	147	13
2005	131	132	1

[1]GRAYED OUT rows = years removed from analysis

<u>"Statewide" or Region-level SPLC Records</u>

The large proportion of records with the location listed as a region or "statewide" in the SPLC data presented a particularly thorny problem. First and foremost, the label itself indicates that the SPLC was unable to detect a physical focus of activity.[18] Because this study aims to assesses the significance of county-level social, demographic and economic factors on antigovernment group formation, our analysis is probably best suited to observe only those groups that have some semblance of physical rootedness at the county-level of community. I reason that the ability to detect a focus of activity at the county or city level indicates a greater degree of an organization's "establishment" within a community and that organizations require some semblance of physical rootedness within a community to feel the "lived effects" of the socio-economic environment, in the county in question. I thus conclude that only those groups with a detectable community presence are suited for this type of methodological approach: antigovernment groups that are *not* detectable by a physical community presence are likely insufficiently rooted in the community to be impacted by county-level characteristics. The necessity for a detectable focal presence of activity holds even more strongly for militia group formation, which require in-person, physical organizing in order to facilitate efficient weapon depot access and the practice of military maneuvers. As such, I reason that we can assume that the absence of detectable physical foci of activity also should indicate an absence of strong county-level militia activity. Ultimately, from

[18] I conclude this given the fact that where there are multiple chapters of an organization within a state, the SPLC has consistently listed each location, every year in their *Intelligence Report.*

this perspective, organizations that do not have a distinguishable physical focus of activity are distinct from the type of county-level organizations that are the focus of this study.[19]

Secondly, because the term is so vague, it is practically difficult to translate the term "Statewide" into a meaningful analysis. An exploration of the SPLC data showed that in five of the years, all 50 states had at least one antigovernment group whose location was listed as "Statewide" by SPLC. This result again calls into question whether these records represent evidence of meaningful – that is to say, provide a significant "signal" – antigovernment or militant group organization.

Thirdly, the variability with which "Statewide" was used from year to year in the SPLC database raises serious questions about the consistency in the definition used. As the Table 2 shows, the term was not used until the 2009 year, and saw a rare drop in the 2014 year. Lacking clarification from the SPLC about what the usage of this term is intended to imply, it is impossible to interpret the term "statewide" in a meaningful manner for this analysis.

Table 2: Comparison of states that contain records with location listed as "Statewide", by Year

Year	Count of unique states with "Statewide" location field	Count of records with "Statewide" location field
2016	50	155
2015	48	102
2014	17	21
2013	50	351
2012	50	330
2011	50	349
2010	50	182
2009	49	135
2008	0	0
2007	0	0

[1]GRAYED OUT rows = years removed from analysis

Given the reasons above, I conclude that the analysis would be best served if those SPLC records listed at the region or statewide level were omitted from the final SPLC antigovernment dataset. Finally, I also interpret the sudden introduction of the term "statewide" in the 2009 as strong indicator of a change in the SPLC's data collection and/or reporting methods. In order to preserve continuity across the dataset, years 2007-2008 are dropped from the analysis. Due to the inaccessibility of American Community Service Profile Table data from the U.S. Census Bureau API before the 2012 year and are not available for the 2016 year, the years 2009-2011 and 2016

[19] I acknowledge that a subset of local, community-based antigovernment groups may intentionally avoid detection by watchdog groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center and still remain undetected by the SPLC. This is an unavoidable limitation of the data.

are also dropped from the analysis. Analysis was thus conducted with SPLC data from the 2012-2015 years only.

Data Overview

Summary statistics for the final dataset used for analysis are provided in the table below. Though ~20% of counties show antigovernment group presence in a given year, the low percentage of counties with militia groups (< 7%) complicates the creation and interpretation of prediction models since the prediction of no-militia group will be accurate over 93% of the time. Only about a third of counties are characterized as having some urban character.

Table 3: Summary Statistics of the Data

	Min	**Median**	**Mean**	**Max**
Birth_DiffSt_P	3.3000	23.3000	26.6500	78.2000
Veterans_Gulf_P	0.0000	0.0148	0.0165	0.1185
Veterans_PreGulf_P	0.0000	0.0616	0.0633	0.1744
Employ_Private_P	14.8000	75.7000	74.3900	89.6000
House_Fem_P	0.0000	0.0739	0.0779	0.3619
Education_BachPlus_P	3.2000	17.4000	19.7800	72.9000
Birth_Forgn_P	0.0000	2.6000	4.6170	58.9000
	Count of 1	**% of Total**	**Count of 0**	**% of Total**
Urban	6498	0.612672072	4108	0.387327928
AG_Max	8625	0.813218933	1981	0.186781067
Militia_Max	9884	0.931925325	722	0.068074675
Total Count of Records	10606			

Methodology

Selection of Independent Variables

I choose county-level social, demographic, and economic factors that reflect the various themes in the history of American conservatism and assess how well they correlate to the existence of antigovernment or militia group at the grassroots level. A summary of variable operationalization is provided in the table below.

Note, I also include a variable for the percent of foreign-born populations at the county level. Though this was not included in the themes of American conservatism discussed above, I hypothesize that the recent heightened concerns, especially among political conservatives, over foreign immigration are likely reflected in the ideology of antigovernment groups today. I include this variable in the model to test whether this represents a notable discontinuity with the themes of American conservatism, as defined by the historical field.

Except for the dummy "Urban" variable, all variables report the average population percentage over the previous 5-year period. I interpret this as the average "population effect" that a given variable exhibits over a 5-year period. This approach, however, will mask the effect of any sudden fluctuations in county demographics.

Table 4: Operationalization of Historical Themes
Selected Independent Variables

Variable Shorthand	Variable Description	Applicable Historical Theme(s)
Birth_DiffSt_P	% Native Population Born in a Different State	Cold War Conservatism Suburban Grassroots Mobilization
Education_BachPlus_P	% Population with Bachelors' Degrees or higher	Cold War Conservatism Suburban Grassroots Mobilization
Urban	Degree of Urbanization (1 = urban, 0 = not urban)	The importance of "built environment": the urban-suburban space
Veterans_Gulf_P*	% Population Veteran of the Gulf War	The impact of the establishment of an All Volunteer Force (AVF) army
Veterans_PreGulf_P*	% Population Veteran of pre-Gulf Wars	A control for veteran status, that does not account for the impact of the AVF
Employ_Private_P	% Population Employed in the Private Sector	Private sector activism on behalf of economic conservatism
House_Fem_P*	% Population of Family Households with Female-only Head	Women and the Family: usurpation of traditional female gender norms
Birth_Forgn_P	% Population Born in a Foreign Country	NONE

*Details on the calculation of these variables can be found in the Jupyter Notebooks in the GitHub repo.

Model Construction

Data were split into training and test sets (70:30). Using the training set, chosen variables were used to construct two logistic regression models. The first predicts whether one or more antigovernment groups will be present in a given county; the second predicts whether one or more militia groups will be present in a given county. The test set data was used to evaluate the accuracy and proportional reduction of error in the two models. The same independent variables are used for both models for comparison purposes. I hypothesize that the chosen variables should *not* be equally predictive between the two models, and thus expect to find that different variables will be more significantly correlated to antigovernment group formation than militia group formation.

The final binomial logistic regression models were constructed as followed:

INSERT MODELS

Coefficients were estimated using the generalized linear moments function, using the 'glm' package for R studio. Version of RStudio used is 1.0.136.

RESULTS

Antigovernment Group Model, Prediction at County-unit Level

Table 5: Antigovernment Group Model Summary

term	estimate	std.error	statistic	p.value
(Intercept)	-9.5935	0.5715	-16.7858	0.0000
Birth_DiffSt_P	-0.0004	0.0030	-0.1351	0.8926
Urban1	0.6485	0.0798	8.1259	0.0000
Veterans_Gulf_P	8.1723	3.4429	2.3737	0.0176
Veterans_PreGulf_P	12.0444	2.3002	5.2363	0.0000
Employ_Private_P	0.0633	0.0060	10.5209	0.0000
House_Fem_P	5.7031	1.5551	3.6673	0.0002
Education_BachPlus_P	0.0630	0.0045	13.8517	0.0000
Birth_Forgn_P	0.0539	0.0061	8.8299	0.0000

P-values for all estimated coefficients in the antigovernment group model are significant to <0.001, except for estimated coefficients for the independent variable measuring the percent of Native-born residents who were born in a different state and the independent variable measuring Gulf War Veterans as a percentage of total county population. Based on p-values alone, this model appears to confirm that urban areas, employment in the private sector, higher percentages of female-only-headed households, higher numbers of graduate degree holders and higher percentages of foreign born residents are all significantly and positively correlated to the existence of antigovernment group formation at the county-unit level.

Upon further interrogation, the lack of correlation between the percentage of U.S. native, out of state residents and antigovernment group is perhaps unsurprising. Though there is a common theme of interstate migration within the history of American conservatism, there were multiple flows of interstate migration during the 20th century, such that numbers of inter-state migration per state may appear sufficiently random across all states. Though Nickerson and McGirr both find explanatory power in the high number of interstate migrants observed among the Cold War conservatives, this may be more of a quirk of the post-WWII Southern California landscape that was the focus of their work, rather than a truly national trend.

Similarly, the low p-value for the Gulf War Veteran estimated coefficient indicates that the impact of the AVF establishment may not be as relevant to this strain of antigovernment group formation as initially hypothesized. Rather surprisingly, the model actually indicates that the population of Pre-Gulf War Veterans, which we inserted as a control, is much more highly correlated with antigovernment group formation than the Gulf War Veteran population. Unfortunately, this outcome is not readily explained by the existing historical literature on American conservatism or any of the previous sociological literature.

Based on p-values alone, these results seem to suggest that antigovernment group formation between the 2012-2015 may have been affected by similar "lived-effect" of *structural* forces to conservative

movements in decades past. These structural forces include degree of urbanization, proportion of graduate degree holders, and county-rate of employment in the private sector. Similarly, this model suggests that the "lived-effect" of *social strains* – represented by higher numbers of female-only headed households and higher numbers of foreign-born residents – are also significant to the formation of antigovernment groups.

Ultimately, however, these results should be received with extreme caution. Using the withheld test set, I evaluated the model accuracy, the proportional reduction in error and the ROC curve. Though the reported model accuracy was 81.6%, this result is rather meaningless. Indeed, ~80% of counties in the data set report no antigovernment group, such that the model accuracy is really no different than the accuracy obtained by simply predicting the absence of antigovernment group every time. This is confirmed by the proportional reduction in error: the model only offers a minimal ~8% reduction in error. The failure of this model to substantially outperform a random-guess model is illustrated by the ROC curve below, in which the diagonal line represents the random-guess model. As the ROC curve shows (see Appendix), our model is only slightly more sensitive than the random-guess model. Given the poor predictive quality of the model itself and the large residual deviance observed, we cannot confidently assert that our results actually hold true. Further evidence is required to confirm that these antigovernment groups represent a continuity any of the above themes in the history of American conservatism.

Militia Group Model, Prediction at County-unit Level

Table 6: Militia Group Model Summary

term	estimate	std.error	statistic	p.value
(Intercept)	-9.4798	0.8730	-10.8588	0.0000
Birth_DiffSt_P	-0.0061	0.0044	-1.3699	0.1707
Urban1	0.6052	0.1173	5.1601	0.0000
Veterans_Gulf_P	14.1324	5.0934	2.7747	0.0055
Veterans_PreGulf_P	3.8099	3.5346	1.0779	0.2811
Employ_Private_P	0.0775	0.0095	8.1818	0.0000
House_Fem_P	-1.6059	2.3318	-0.6887	0.4910
Education_BachPlus_P	0.0147	0.0065	2.2554	0.0241
Birth_Forgn_P	0.0247	0.0082	2.9910	0.0028

As expected, I find that different variables are significantly correlated to militia-specific group formation than antigovernment group formation at large. P-values for the estimated coefficients indicate that urbanization, higher proportion of Gulf War veterans, employment in the private sector, higher degrees of education, and higher numbers of foreign-born residents are all significantly and positively correlated with the formation of militia group at the county-unit level.

Interestingly, unlike the antigovernment model, in the militia group model, the correlation of Gulf War Veterans to militia group formation is very strong and highly significant. This seems to indicate that veterans who experienced service under the AVF may be more influential on militia group formation than antigovernment group formation. This, in turn, may indicate that veterans who served in the AVF, under a significantly diminished military welfare state, are more prone to militant organizing that veterans who

served in the army prior to the decline in the military welfare state. Lastly, as expected, Pre-Gulf War veteran populations have insignificant predictive power of militia group formation.

The insignificance of the proportion of native residents born out of state is likely due to the same reasons as stated in the discussion of the antigovernment model above: interstate migration patterns have sufficiently randomized the relationship between interstate migrants and militia group formation at the county level such that no significant correlation between the two variables can be observed.

Finally, p-values for the variable measuring the proportion of female-only-headed family households indicate that county-level militia group formation is not significantly correlated any social strain caused by the destabilization of female gender roles and the traditional nuclear American family. This is rather surprising, given the popularity of the theme within the history of American conservatism. These results seem to suggest that militia group organizing does represent a distinct break from mainstream trends in the history of American conservatism.

However, as with the antigovernment group model, I encourage readers to use extreme caution in receiving these results. When test set data was used to validate model robustness, I found that the model failed to outperform a simple random-guess model. Indeed, because less than 7% of counties in the 2012-2015 year were flagged for the presence of militia group(s), the calculated model accuracy of ~93% is effectively meaningless. The insignificance of this model's predictive power is further confirmed by the calculated 0% reduction in error. Again, as the ROC curve illustrates (see appendix), the militia model is not substantively any more predictive than the random-guess model.

Final Thoughts on Data Quality and the Interpretability of Results

SPLC data quality remains a significant obstacle to the accuracy of our interpretation of results. As discussed in the literature review and the data section above, the inconsistent reporting styles, numerous errors, and opaque data collection and reporting methodologies raises serious concerns about the accuracy of the SPLC data. Furthermore, in choosing to omit records with reports of region-wide or statewide presence, I may have artificially biased the model against antigovernment and militant group formation in small states, where region-wide or statewide presence may be more meaningfully concentrated for the purposes of our study than in large states like Texas or California.

CONCLUSION

The antigovernment group and militia group classification models are insufficiently predictive to allow us to conduct any confident inference about the similarities between this recent crop of antigovernment and militant groups and the larger themes in the history of American conservatism. Nevertheless, as I hope the discussion above illustrates, with this study, we have the beginnings of a potentially fruitful theoretical framework and methodology for quantitative explorations of American conservatism. There are, indeed, meaningful ways to engage the themes in the historical record through quantitative assessment. For the historian, this type of historical-sociological approach offers a novel, quantitative method for assessing the how trends in the historical literature rise and fall over time.

Furthermore, this research also suggests interesting new avenues for future research. One potential option for minimizing the problems observed with the region-wide and statewide SPLC antigovernment records would be to create a model that predicts the ***number*** of antigovernment group or militant group formation by county instead. With this type of model, we could accommodate both the "localized" and "dispersed" organizations by assigning counties with "dispersed" organizations a fraction of the full count assigned to a highly "localized" organization. To equalize this measurement across large and small states, we could use state size or number of counties to determine what size the fraction of the full count to assign to each county, for a given year. This type of approach may also help increase the measured "signal" of

antigovernment group formation in a given county, thus helping to alleviate the problem of meaningless prediction accuracy as discussed in the Results section above.

Lastly, the results from the study above also suggest that militant antigovernment groups are noticeably distinct from all antigovernment groups as a whole. Future studies should more explicitly explore the differences between non-militant and militant antigovernment groups. Though this is somewhat complicated by the fact that some counties contain both militant and non-militant groups in the same year, militancy does seem to be sufficiently different from other antigovernment groups to merit separate consideration from non-militant groups, and vice-versa.

Given the current political climate, I suspect that both militant and non-militant antigovernment groups will re-emerge as popular topics of academic interest. Though this study is unable to confidently assert any claims about how antigovernment groups today represent a continuity or discontinuity with previous trends of American conservatism, my hope is that this study has laid out sufficient theoretical and methodological groundwork to illustrate the possibilities and utility of this type of historical-sociological quantitative approach.

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