MAKE AMERICA HATE AGAIN: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS ON THE
EFFECTS OF PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC DURING THE OBAMA AND TRUMP
ADMINISTRATION

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CAPSTONE ABSTRACT

Make America Hate Again: A Quantitative Analysis on the Effects of Presidential Rhetoric During the Obama and Trump Administration

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This research paper explores the potential impact of hate rhetoric on the frequency of hate crime events in the U.S. in the past decade. It evaluates two different styles of Presidential speech in seeking to explain the incidence of hate crimes; President Obama’s more diplomatic speech approach versus President Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric. The project uses volunteer-coded speech analysis, to compare hate crimes on a quarterly basis and evaluate the annual fluctuation of hate crimes against Hispanics and Latino/as. This research paper finds a suggestive relationship between hate speech occurrences and hate crime events, but due to lack of appropriate data sources, it cannot claim causation.
This research explores whether President Trump’s use of anti-immigrant rhetoric correlates with more measurable violence against immigrants than Obama’s diplomatic approach. This project will evaluate instances of anti-immigrant speech for their proximity in time to increased hate crimes, protests with violent extremist presence, or instances of violence against those or are, or may be perceived as immigrants due to ethnicity, following Trump’s negative rhetoric. The same question also will be applied to instances of violence in close proximity in time to Obama’s more diplomatic rhetoric. Due to constraints of resources and researcher time, this paper will only attempt to answer whether there is a measurable relationship between hate speech and hate crimes. If this question can be sufficiently answered, this research could measure, and eventually begin to predict, the ways in which violence and hate crimes may increase when top political leaders engage in negative public speech.

Throughout the two terms of former President Obama, immigration and immigrant rights remained in the forefront of political conversation. He navigated policy challenges- like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), DREAM Act, enforcement priorities regarding deportations, and the Central American refugee flow- with a measured approach that emphasized both law and order and also the humanity of immigrants. President Trump is also navigating policy challenges in the form of DACA reversal, allocating funding to increase border security, and evaluating deportation protocol. Under the Trump administration media outlets increased public awareness of immigrant detention center treatment, as well as what Trump considers the crisis of the Central American refugee flow and his dire need to stem it (Barajas, 2019 see also Gainor, 2019). This political parallel of confronting immigration as an issue is key to the
successful examination of this project’s research question because immigration is a topic that goes through periods of high and low politicization (Massey and Pren, 2012). In this case, politicization has been high recently, under both presidents, allowing me to compare their approaches.

While both Presidents have dealt with immigration as a policy issue, their rhetorical approaches could not be more contrary. President Obama took a diplomatic approach—regularly pointing to the economic and innovation benefits immigrants bring to the United States, as well as the burden of blame our immigration system should acknowledge in the case of illegal border crossings. He repeatedly stated that the U.S. immigration system was broken and the main obligation of the United States was to address these flaws, rather than deporting those simply seeking better opportunities. Obama’s speech evidenced support for diversity and compassion regarding the situation that undocumented immigrants face in the United States. While critical of the immigration entry process, he spoke of immigrants respectfully. His campaign platform and immigration addresses centered on reducing illegality, by creating a path to citizenship for immigrants already here and those wanting to come. During a 2008 campaign speech, he said:

Ultimately, the danger to the American way of life is not that we will be overrun by those who do not look like us or do not yet speak our language. The danger will come if we fail to recognize the humanity of [immigrants]—if we withhold from them the opportunities we take for granted, and create a servant class in our midst...America can only prosper...That’s the idea that will lie at the heart of my presidency. Because we are all Americans. Todos somos Americanos. And in this country, we rise and fall together. (Obama, 2008).

On the other hand, Trump, when announcing his candidacy for President in 2016, was the first political opponent in that election to take a hard stance on immigration (Sanneh, 2015) -- and he was critical of Obama’s diplomatic approach. A comprehensive
media review of transcripts from 64 Trump rallies revealed that as a presidential candidate, Trump favored terminology like “invasion”, “alien”, “animal”, “criminal”, “predator”, “killer”, and “rapist” as descriptive language about immigrants (Fritze, 2019). Research has categorized this type of anti-immigrant speech as dehumanizing, vilifying, hostile, discriminatory, or fear mongering (Cassese, 2018). Existing literature has explored (Article 19, 2015 see also Calvert, 1997; Laaksonen, Haapoja, Kinnunen, Nelimarkka, & Pöyhtäri, 2020) various severity levels associated with hate speech. Trump’s political tactics have at times verged on advocacy for prejudice and discrimination – in fact, there was once a legal case pending against him in Kentucky for inciting violence through rhetorical tactics at campaign rallies (Civil Action No. 3:16-cv-247-DJH). Some representative examples of Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric include the below statements; the first from his 2016 campaign speech about immigration, and the second comment directed at his supporters regarding DACA protestors outside of a 2016 political rally where he spoke about the increased need for border security:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. (Mendoza-Denton, 2020 via Trump, 2016)

If you see somebody getting ready to throw a tomato, knock the crap out of them, would you? Seriously, OK? Just knock the hell ... I promise you I will pay for the legal fees. I promise, I promise. (Mendoza-Denton, 2020 via Trump, 2016)

This research project will explore if there is a relationship between leadership rhetoric and hate crimes by evaluating crime occurrences that follow speeches containing pro-immigrant or anti-immigrant statements within a three- to four-month period. It will further evaluate whether consistent rhetoric about specific ethnic groups (pro-immigrant
or anti-immigrant) has an overall effect on hate crimes through observable decreases, stabilizations, or increases in crime incidence occurrences against those groups. The project will contribute to the growing research debate surrounding the effects of political hate speech and the potential correlation between hate speech and hate crimes against the Hispanic and Latino/a population in the United States. This specific group offers the best opportunity for evaluation as a 2009 Pew Research project found that news media surrounding immigration mentions Hispanics and Latino/a groups ten times more frequently than any other ethnic group, or during 34% of the total immigration mentions (Pew Research, 2009). This percentage of media mentions has only increased under the Trump administration (Pew Research, 2018). Additionally, the 2009 research speculated that the words “Hispanic” and “immigrant” have become conflated within the United States population which may indicate a public failure to discern U.S. Hispanic citizens from immigrants (Pew Research, 2009).

This research will pair quantitatively-coded data from Presidential speech incidence, concerning immigration and immigrants, with FBI crime statistics to evaluate fluctuations in hate crime occurrences. It will pay special attention to annual fluctuations in hate crime occurrences against Hispanic and Latino/a populations. The hypothesis of this research is that Donald Trump’s utilization of anti-immigrant speech correlates with a rise in hate crimes overall, and anti-Hispanic hate crimes in particular. The basic theory underlying this hypothesis is that extremists and extremist groups opposing immigrants may see political speech from a top leader (a president or presidential candidate) containing anti-immigrant ideologies as an incitement to violence, or at least as an endorsement of it. For instance, a political candidate’s statement that the security of the
nation is in jeopardy due to immigrants may be interpreted (by extremists) that immigrants should be forced to leave- and hate crime instances may increase due to citizen’s fear for the safety of one’s self or family. If Donald Trump’s use of hate speech regarding immigrants can be connected by time proximity to rises in hate crimes as a whole, and to an annual rise in crimes against Hispanics and Latinos in particular, then the suggestive correlation would indicate that Presidential hate rhetoric does have the potential to incite violence. If the hate crime data shows no influx from Obama era speeches and Trump era speeches then researchers may deduce that Presidential rhetoric hosts little to no power in inciting hate crimes and therefore the examination of influence should be directed to other sources.

**Key Terminology**

This section lays out some of the key terms used in this project. Although the term “immigrant” in the United States functions as a blanket term for anyone not born within U.S. borders (or to American parents abroad or on military bases), the Immigration and Nationality Act defines an immigrant as “any alien in the United States, except one legally admitted under specific nonimmigrant categories” (DHS, 2017, INA section 101(a)(15)). For the purpose of this research the definition of “immigrant” will need to expand temporarily to include refugees, illegal and legal aliens. Additionally, children of immigrants are pertinent to this research due to the societal ethnic grouping that occurs in situations like DREAMers, (those who benefit from the DREAM act: Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors), or “anchor babies”, (those children born to noncitizen mothers that have birth right citizenship), where the public
often determines the child’s right to stay based on the actions of immigrant parents. The expansion of this definition is necessary for this research as media and political leaders often apply the term “immigrant” broadly across these groups without differentiation.

Another important term is “hate speech,” which is exceedingly difficult to define. Scholars do not necessarily agree on a definition, but generally the literature draws from international treaties that were generated in response to globally recognized genocides like Rwanda and the Nazi Holocaust (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966; see also Convention on the Prevention Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965). Based on these sources, hate speech is considered any form of communication that attacks an individual or group based on their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, or other portion of cultural or personal identity (Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, 1997; United Nations, 2019). This communication includes forms of propaganda, discriminatory websites, remarks by prejudiced groups, social media posts and discussions, political speeches and more (Ibid). This review of the extant literature suggests that “hate speech” is thus an appropriate term to apply to remarks such as those cited above by Trump that target individuals because of their membership in groups perceived negatively, especially by nationality, race, and/or ethnicity.

For the purposes of this paper, hate speech examples will include language that accuses without evidence, defames, disparages, or would be considered derogatory towards a group of people- by the “reasonable person” standard. This standard is legal terminology used in criminal and tort law. It is defined as the ability “to denote a
hypothetical person in society who exercises average care, skill, and judgment in conduct and who serves as a [comparative] standard for determining liability (West’s Encyclopedia of American Law, 2008). In other words, it helps determine if a crime is extreme by comparing it to accepted social norms. This expanded definition of hate speech is modeled by Article 19, an international nongovernmental organization that works with the United Nations and regional government groups and courts to educate and enforce the regulation of hate speech globally. Similarly, hate crime is defined as criminal acts perpetrated based on bias surrounding a “protected” characteristic (e.g. race, ethnicity, religion, gender) and linkable to this bias (King and Sutton, 2013; Burnap and Williams, 2015; Article 19, 2015). In this project I will be using these terms because my question is whether hate crimes can be linked, through proximity in time, to public hate speech by top politicians.

While the explanation of hate speech focuses on language and communication with injurious characteristics, the Federal Bureau of Investigation defines a hate crime as “a criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity” (FBI, n.d.). This research focuses on the relationship between speech occurrences and crimes. Ultimately, the larger question behind this research is whether hate speech by top politicians seems to incite radical response, measurable through racial or ethnically motivated criminal offences. My data in this project cannot get directly to “incitement,” as it would take a far longer and larger project in terms of time, money, and research work to collect and unpack the various types of data needed to show incitement. On this point, my limited data are suggestive rather than conclusive. Yet the suggestion
is strong from what I have collected and analyzed, and supports the general theory of incitement, as explained more below. In the “Limitations” section, I will further discuss why this data cannot actually show (but can suggest) incitement from hate speech to the commission of hate crimes.

**Historical Examples of Incitement**

Incitement, defined as the deliberate triggering of discrimination, violence, and/or hostility that lead to crimes, can be a dangerous consequence of hate speech. Indeed, the tendency of hate speech to motivate violence is one reason for its prohibition even in countries that otherwise tolerate free speech. This section will summarize in brief three key examples of heightened periods of hate crimes in multiple countries in the past century, including: genocide attempts in Nazi Germany during the Second World War; genocide during the Yugoslavian wars and conflicts in Bosnia during the 1990’s; and genocide in Rwanda during the 1990s. These examples are so well-known as to perhaps appear hyperbolic, but my point in showing them is not to be overly dramatic or to compare U.S. presidential rhetoric to anything in these brief case studies. The point here is simply to establish the historical and theoretical connection between hate speech and hate crimes, which is at the heart of my project.

The systematic, state sponsored “cleansing” of Germany to rid “undesirable” people culminated in the death of many within the disabled community, homosexual community, Roma population, and Slavic population- with the most notable targeted group being those of Jewish dissent or affiliation where over six million perished. During
the Nazi regime of 1933-1945 Hitler established the Reich Ministry of Public
Enlightenment and Propaganda. This institution enabled the spread of Hitler’s message to
the public- without the need for him to directly state “kill Jewish people” in speeches.
Hitler recognized, and wrote, in 1924 that the purpose of propaganda “is not to make an
objective study of the truth, in so far as it favors the enemy, and then set it before the
masses with academic fairness; its task is to serve our own right, always and
unflinchingly.” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.). Newspaper cartoons
and poster propaganda depicted Jewish people as dangerous enemies of the state, films
such as The Eternal Jew (1940) portrayed Jews as “wandering cultural parasites,
consumed by sex and money”, and Hitler’s own rhetoric prior and post leadership like
“only a national comrade can be a citizen. Only someone of German blood, regardless of
faith, can be a citizen. Therefore, no Jew can be a citizen” (Hitler, 1920). He later
reinforced this ideology in 1939 stating, “If international Jewish financiers inside and
outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then
the result will not be the…victory of Jewry but the annihilation of the Jewish race in
Europe” (Hitler, 1939). This rhetoric and propaganda served a common purpose- to
generate political loyalty, and produce “race-consciousness” throughout Germany (Ibid).

While it was the State committing the majority of hate crimes and genocide
against the Jewish community, not individual extremists, this propaganda encouraged the
public to maintain political support, and prevented the uprising necessary to stop the
“Final Solution” (USHMM, “The Nazi Myth”, n.d.). Hitler, in his attempt to “unify”
Germany used a multitude of resources defined as examples of hate speech to create an
exclusive community tied to a massive movement. This propaganda successfully
marginalized “undesired” people like Jews, the mentally ill, handicapped, and more from the overall public community of Germany. This bandwagon tactic is later discussed under the subsection “Generating Hate Crimes” as it relates to successful radicalization of communities.

Similarly, when Slobodan Milošević rose to power in Serbia, his alignment with the nationalist party and use of hate rhetoric encouraged ethnic discrimination and hatred in Yugoslavia among the primary ethnic groups - leading to war. He did this by restricting press- and the rhetoric disseminated included ethnically depreciatory descriptions, generated unsubstantiated threats cultivating Serbian fear, and manipulated media stories to serve his propaganda purpose (Prosecutor v. Milošević, 2004, see also de la Brosse, 2003). This control of the media again kept the Serbian public blind to the atrocities being committed by the State through the restriction of information - preventing public uprising. In the 1990s, under Milošević’s leadership it is estimated that approximately 100,000 Croats, and 700,000 Albanians and Bosnian Muslims living in Kosovo were "ethnically cleansed" by Serbian efforts. The refusal to speak with media sources that voice disagreement with the larger political mission is a commonality across governments that utilize hate speech as a political tactic; presumably because this disagreement would then be disseminated to the public and disrupt the process of gaining widespread support as was seen under the early years of Milošević’s tenure.

The most prominent examination of the relationship between hate speech and hate crimes in existing literature is in analyses of radio media hate rhetoric and its effects on hate crimes committed during the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 (Adelman and Suhrke, 2000; Des Forges, 2009; see also Chretien, 2009). The International Criminal Tribunal
for Rwanda found rhetoric broadcast from radio stations and political leaders targeted Tutsis through “ethnic stereotyping in a manner that promoted contempt and hatred for the Tutsi population” (International Criminal Tribunal Report, 2007). Examples of such rhetoric include political leader Léon Mugesera calling for the killings of Tutsis and for their bodies to be dumped in a river (1992). The popular RTLM station also dehumanized Tutsis using verbiage like “inyenzi” (cockroaches), “inzoka” (snake), or urging listeners to “cut down the tall trees” - a reference to Tutsi height, and “exterminate the vermin” (RTLM transcripts, 1994). These occurrences, specifically the verbiage used and subsequent hate crime action taken by the public, indicate that hate speech can be taken literally as a call to action (Melvern, 2000).

While conducting research about recent political upheaval in Kenya, Somerville found media networks to use “dehumanizing” language as they referred to Westerners as “beasts” or “animals” (2011). While he failed to conclusively find this rhetoric to be exclusively responsible for hate crimes committed, his research did reinforce the idea that politicians to have a vested interest in allowing hate speech to continue in times of political competition for affiliation purposes (Somerville, 2011). This is because rather than addressing national issues, political parties frequently find reprieve in allocating blame to marginalized groups within the country (Metzl, 1997; Somerville, 2011).

Similar manifestations of this tactic have occurred in Nazi Germany, Rwanda, and Serbia alike- where political power was established through the vilification of marginalized groups within the nation; and state sponsored crimes as well as hate crimes committed by individuals were accepted.

Generating Hate Crimes
The “reasonable person” standard suggests that hate crimes are extremist actions because the average person is unlikely to be convinced to commit a hate crime due to hate rhetoric alone (Fisher, Dugan, Chenoweth, 2018). In a 2018 study examining attitudes on terrorism, researchers claim rhetoric only serves as encouragement to those already prone to violence- naming right wing extremists (Ibid). This view, that rhetoric serves as an encouraging tipping point towards “taking action” for those with already deeply embedded ideas, is the commonality through research studies (Phillips, 2018; Yochai, 2017; Fisher et al, 2018). Kalmoe (2014), however, takes a more expansive approach, claiming that viewer/listener groups respond at various levels to violent speech. He argues that “critical interaction between individual personality traits and situational factors … ultimately produce[s] significant political outcomes”- and in the case of his study found young adults with aggressive tendencies are more likely to support or be influenced by radical statements than young adults without aggressive tendencies (Kalmoe, 2014, p. 546). This statement implies that unless viewers/listeners are already radicalized, it is unlikely they will partake in violence on the sole grounds that rhetoric suggests it.

A heightened context of politicization may mitigate the usual pacifism of the masses. Research on African genocides (as in the Rwandan case) has found that one does not necessarily need to be previously radicalized to commit hate crimes (Adelman and Suhrke, 2000; Des Forges, 2009; see also Chretien, 2009). These experts concede that hate violence would not have spontaneously erupted on its own; and agree with the research of Jeffrey Victor (1998) that it was through the inciting actions of “moral
entrepreneurs” and “moral deviants,” average citizens were radicalized faster- and that was enough to get it started (Victor, 1998, p.541-565). This research found that key political actors (the “moral entrepreneurs”) generated and enforced “moral rules”, or the social norms that dictate right and wrong. Moral deviants use stories, propaganda, media outlets and more to spread information during “moral panics” (Victor, 1998). A moral panic ensues when “a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians, and other right-thinking people; [and] socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions” (Cohen, 1972, p.9). Essentially, all this research points to a similar notion: in order to radicalize the public to a point they are willing to commit hate crimes, hate speech must begin with a person who hosts authority (or leadership potential), and be disseminated through the media enough times to make the public believe that the “issue” is urgent enough to react- often sped up in climates with existing political upheaval.

Political shifts are important as moral panics really begin to take hold in specific climates- but they are not enough to singularly generate moral panics. Research finds the existence of a combination of issues is necessary for a movement entrepreneur or deviant to exploit (Maroney,1998). It is typically social unrest, military tension, or economic issues, that team with political opportunity that offer breeding grounds for movements (Ibid). Situations that allow for new policy introduction- like a shift in in the political environment- enable a foundation of supporters to be identified, which may entice others to join a cause (i.e. bandwagon effect). This is largely why political leaders like Hitler,
Milošević, and Mugesera were able to not only rise to power, but utilize the media as movement entrepreneurs to turn large portions of the population into supporters of, or those committing, what was later determined to be morally reprehensible activities. These same panics can exist on smaller scales during times like elections where parties are shifting with oppositional policy proposals. This research paper evaluates the possibility that the shift in federal power from Democrat to Republican parties, politically conflicting ideologies regarding immigration policies, and media conflation of immigration issues was enough to generate a moral panic. If this was indeed the case, Donald Trump’s broadcasted hate speech including anti-immigrant sentiment would have the environment required to possibly impact hate crimes- especially because of his leadership position as presidential candidate.

Trump’s platform as candidate is relevant as instances of hate speech are more likely to incite violence based upon social position of the speaker. Hate speech would pose minimal cause for concern if the person speaking was ignored. Research published in 2015 found that the public is more likely to respect the stated ideology because of the spotlight or platform available to that speaker (Burnap and Williams, 2015). So, in 2016, for example, anti-immigrant rhetoric was being made by someone with influence and outreach, as Trump is both a celebrity and politician. The 2015 research also indicates incitement may be more successful if the audience is responding to a speaker of authority such as a boss or influencer (Ibid). Additionally, Burnap (2015) found significant events, such as the September 11th terrorist attacks, may exacerbate hate crime activity. Speeches given in connection with major events (like presidential elections where border
security is a key topic) may therefore have more leverage in inciting hate crimes because the event heightens passion around the subject matter.

Scholars have struggled to connect rhetoric and hate crimes because many additional factors can contribute to incitement. Frazer and Hutchings (2007) argue that rhetoric alone does not incite violence but the audience’s evaluation of the speech can. In their experimental work, following exposure to hate rhetoric, participants weigh the “need” for violent action, as prompted by the speech. If participants deem violence as justifiable means for solution, then rhetoric can be said to have encouraged violent response (Frazer and Hutchings, 2007). Frazer and Hutchings’ research mirrors the components Maroney’s research mentioned above, regarding factors movement entrepreneurs need to generate supporters because the incitement stems from rhetoric regarding social tension and unrest. The culmination of prominent speaker, shifting environment, and political hate speech where U.S. citizen safety is said to be threatened by the influx of immigrants may potentially explain hate crime occurrences.

**Coding Hate Speech Occurrences**

Due to financial and time limitations this project will evaluate a small data set. It will also utilize the methodology cited in various scholarly works that rely on human evaluation and coding of hate speech occurrences, rather than computer algorithmic trackers. It is important to delineate between generalizing, angry, or derogatory speech [e.g. “The southern border is a big problem, and it’s a tremendous problem for drugs pouring in and destroying our youth, and, really, destroying the fabric of our country.”]
(Trump, 2018) and hate speech (e.g. “[Mexicans] are rapists” (Trump, 2016)). This acknowledgement of severity levels, as modeled in multiple studies (Calvert, 1997; Article 19, 2015; Burnap and Williams, 2015; see also Laaksonen, Haapoja, Kinnunen, Nelimarkka, & Pöyhtäri, 2020) is important because it also helps differentiate what specific type of speech may incite violence. These categories range from “tolerable” or “protected” speech like name-calling or slander, to unrestricted expressions of intolerance to moderated advocacy for violence, discrimination, or hostility, and eventually incitement of terrorism, genocide, or violations of international human rights law (Article 19, 2015). Basic annotations such as “hateful”, “offensive”, or “neither” (Zannettou, Elsherief, Belding, Nilizadeh, & Stringhini, 2020) have been utilized as well, or numerical assignment to incidences like a “scale ranging from 0 to 3; with 3 clearly indicating hate speech, 2 indicating disturbing angry speech, 1 indicating normal discussion with a critical tone, and 0 being neutral” (Laaksonen, et al., 2020). This paper uses the latter model in a modified way for coding purposes in this project, as explained below.

Data Collection Methodology

In order to evaluate the potential relationship between hate speech and hate crime occurrences, this research began by examining Presidential statements and speeches regarding immigration. Instances included key speech occurrences such as Obama’s DACA executive order and Trump’s call for border wall funding. Instances were determined to be “key” occurrences based on the frequency of immigration issue mentions within a larger speech, and speeches or comments made with the sole purpose
of discussing immigrants and immigration issues. Excluded instances contained ambiguous reference to all “minorities” or other ethnic or racial groups (i.e. Blacks, Asian, etc.), as these groups are not connected to immigration in the media on a regular basis (Pew Research, 2009). Presidential speech serves as the independent variable of interest. For the dependent variable, I tracked hate crime incidence perpetrated against Hispanics and Latino/as annually, as well as general hate crimes (both recorded and coded by the FBI) in the quarterly period immediately following that presidential (or presidential candidate) speech. The goal was to assess whether high-level political speech related to immigration potentially correlates with negative action (violence and hate crime) within the overall population as well as impacts anti-Hispanic and anti-Latino/a hate crime on an annual basis. Time is a critical factor here; if there is a relationship, a rise in hate crimes should show up in both the proximity in time to the anti-immigrant rhetoric as well as in an influx of anti-Hispanic crime annually. The FBI’s hate crime data is broken down annually by ethnicity of victims, and quarterly by total crimes reported. The FBI collects data from participating police precincts and consolidates it into a statistical report containing multiple variables, including those most relevant to this project, victim ethnicity, and crime date.

To quantify Presidential pro- or anti-immigrant speech, this research uses an expanded scale based on previous research (Laaksonen, Haapoja, Kinnunen, Nelimarkka, & Pöyhäätäri, 2020). The original scale ranged from 0-3 with zero being neutral, one indicating normal discussion with a critical tone, two indicating disturbingly angry speech, and three clearly indicating hate speech (Ibid). For the purposes of this research the scale was modified to add three further categories, allowing for a numerical range of
negative three (-3), indicating severe anti-immigrant sentiment, to positive three (3), indicating strong pro-immigrant sentiment, with 0 being neutral. The categorization attached to each numerical value is represented as such: -3 clearly indicating hate speech; -2 indicating disturbing angry speech; -1 indicating normal discussion with a critical tone; 0 indicating neutral stance; 1 indicating normal discussion with a positive tone; 2 indicating optimistic immigrant language; 3 indicating persuasive pro-immigrant sentiment. The coding was done by seven volunteers ranging in education level, age, gender, political affiliation, and location. This diversity can help protect against bias, but makes it necessary to check intercoder reliability, to ensure that ratings were broadly similar. In judging intercoder reliability, speech occurrences were placed in a randomized order, where speaker, platform, and year information were removed to allow evaluation of language without introducing political bias (although this project recognizes each President has a distinct speaking style so it is impossible to fully eliminate this bias).

To judge intercoder reliability, prior to analyzing Presidential speech regarding immigration, volunteers coded 10 public speech examples by President Obama and President Trump (e.g. tweets, memorandums, and formal speeches) about the LGBTQ+ community. Using a different issue was effort to avoid over-saturation of President Trump’s immigrant rhetoric, as the time period of his tenure is much shorter than President Obama’s. Since the LGBTQ+ community also experiences instances of hate speech and subsequent hate crime the ability to identify hate speech remained consistent. The intercoder reliability quotient was 75.6%, as indicated in Table 1 below. This percentage signifies moderate to significant agreement, and therefore we can have confidence that the data coding decisions in this project have reasonable reliability
The data for this project consisted of 67 speech occurrences (30 from Obama, and 37 from Trump). These were chosen by simple “subject matter” searches within the Twitter or speech library platform (e.g. Trump tweets about immigration, Obama speeches regarding immigration reform, Trump speeches about border funding, or Obama on DACA).Occurrences were not included if context was necessary for the example to be understood, or when the speech occurrence did not focus on immigration/immigrants, and contained generally positive or offensive speech. The volunteer coders each quantified the total sixty-seven (67) occurrences, using the scale described above and in the same manner as the comparison set. The selected occurrences assigned to each volunteer were randomized through Excel’s “RAND formula” feature, and a spreadsheet of random order occurrences was assigned to volunteers individually.

**Speech Data Collection**

Speech incidence are derived from American Rhetoric, an online speech bank that holds transcripts and audio for Presidential speeches, The White House’s historical presidential archives, and Twitter’s historical tweet bank. These speech occurrences...
include announcements regarding immigration, key political shifts like reform suggestions, and political rallies mentioning funding or security allocations. In all instances, speech occurrences are available from the time of a candidate’s announcement that they are seeking the presidency through office tenure. This method allows for evaluation of both leaders’ time in the “political spotlight”- meaning from the time the candidate had the advantage of a public platform to generate support for their ideology. One problem with comparing speech across presidents, though, is that the format can differ from person to person. Unlike his predecessors, one of President Trump’s most frequent methods of communication is Twitter. Former presidents, including Obama, used social media on occasion, but mostly to highlight statements given in speeches or executive orders while in office. For this project, coded speech instances from both Presidents will include a mix of memos, question and answer interview sessions, press statements, social media posts, Presidential remarks, and formal broadcasted speeches. Of the sixty-seven (67) total speech excerpts in the data set, thirty-five percent (35%) of each president’s speech occurrences are comprised of “off the cuff” speech (e.g. tweets, question and answer sessions) and unscripted internal memorandums.

Comparison Process and Rationale

To investigate the relationship between hate rhetoric and hate crimes, this study will utilize the FBI annual report of Hate Crime Statistics from 2012-2018. These data from 2012-2015 represent years where the Obama administration focused most heavily on immigration reform, with 2015 offering crossover- as Trump announced his candidacy
and began political rally appearances then. Data from 2016-2018 should provide clear indication of the impact on hate crime of Trump’s more controversial and incendiary speech. Using a yearly measure of incidence of violent attacks, the project will evaluate changes in hate crimes committed against Hispanic, and Latino groups specifically, as these ethnicities are the most common population of immigrants mentioned in recent (Obama and Trump era) political rhetoric. Using a different measure, this research will also evaluate the change in violent hate crime as a whole (against all ethnicities) by quarter. These quarterly data are more fine-grained as regards to time, but the FBI statistical reports do not break down hate crimes by ethnicity in these quarterly data. I therefore must use both measures (the annual measure examining ethnic-specific violence and the quarterly overall hate-violence crimes measure) to triangulate.

As the literature review indicates, members of the public who are prone to violence may be radicalized after prolonged exposure to rhetoric, propaganda campaigns, movement entrepreneurs, and a tense, volatile political atmosphere. My research is focused on whether or not high-level political hate speech correlates with increased hate crime violence in a nation not facing severe economic recession or extreme social upheaval. For this evaluation to work, my research must be able to draw timing correlations between an isolated speech occurrence(s), first, followed by a rise in hate crime occurrence(s). Establishing a relationship is difficult if too much time elapses between the political speech and the hypothesized spike in hate crimes. This is because a time lapse increases the plausibility of additional factors contributing like political atmosphere, prolonged exposure, or significant global events such as terrorism or disease.
These data I have to work with are not ideal; it would be preferable if I could connect speech to crime, within, say, a month of the speech, or at least the same quarter to a specific ethnicity or citizenship status. But a year can still serve my purpose if necessary, as an indication of potential incitement, under certain conditions. If hate crimes are elevated in time periods with many speech occurrences or one major speech occurrence (i.e. frequent rally speeches or the State of the Union address) that has a severely negative valence against immigrants, this finding could indicate that political rhetoric may serve as incitement. If hate crimes remain unaffected, it may suggest that political rhetoric alone is not a strong enough motivation to incite violent response.

**Limitations of Project**

The availability, access, and quality of data often produces obstacles and caveats researchers must navigate to generate valuable insights; this project was no exception. Various limitations to these data exist, beginning with the longevity of each President’s time in the political spotlight. As Obama served in office for a full eight years, and the FBI hate crime reports have been published for each of those subsequent years, his tenure offers a larger, fully complete data assessment. In comparison, President Trump has only served three full years in office, and the FBI hate crime report has only been published for two of those years. This means more Trump speech occurrences are pulled from a smaller portion of time than Obama. Consequently, the report would only be able to speculate what 2019 hate crime data will look like based on the prior two years of information. Further, as the FBI report on hate crimes is broken down on a quarterly
basis, hate crimes must elevate within a four month period post speech to count as correlation. A more in-depth investigation into the details of specific incidents of hate-based violence would be necessary to claim causation, although correlation may be suggested by time proximity.

Another limitation to the project is the President’s use of very different means of communication with the public. In President Trump’s self-instituted distancing from traditional press, he gave substantially fewer formal speeches, remarks, or interviews per year. Rather, his representatives (i.e. the press secretary) released the majority of formal statements. Therefore this study necessarily includes off-the-cuff tweets along with professional “pre-crafted” works (e.g. speechwriter material). This issue largely does not exist under the Obama administration. To balance this limitation, speech occurrences stemming from interview question-and-answer sessions following press conferences and Presidential memorandums were used for both Presidents.

Another limitation of these data are that they cannot give purchase on prolonged exposure factors that may play a part in rhetorical incitement. There is no way to evaluate how much exposure to political hate speech a hate crime offender had, short of interviewing those prosecuted. Rhetoric may be enough on its own to incite hate crime, but it may take more than one instance to inspire that form of radicalized action.

Unfortunately, this research can only serve as a preliminary evaluation of the relationship between hate speech and its effects because it does not individually track people’s level of exposure to presidential rhetoric.

Due to the FBI statistical report structure, two additional limitations arise. First, these data fail to account for multi-bias motivated offenses- such as joint ethnic and
sexual orientation crimes; or joint ethnic and gender crimes. While these data evaluated here focus on ethnically-motivated hate crime, it is impossible identify the possibility that a crime would or would not have occurred absent a secondary bias. Secondly, the FBI data are based on police departments voluntarily collecting and reporting these data. Of the 16,000 police precincts contacted for hate crime figures, less than 15% regularly respond. While this is a serious limitation the FBI hate crime data report is currently the most comprehensive source of its kind. This research recognizes the FBI reports issue of sample bias could lead to a systematic undercounting of hate crime. Until there is required reporting from police precincts nationally, researchers may never fully understand the extent of this bias because large portions of the population are discounted in the percentages.

Finally, coder bias may have been introduced through the supplied coding instructions; as I inadvertently included a line in these instructions explaining the purpose of this paper, which included a definition of “hate speech” and the stated research question about whether such speech can incite political violence. Although remote, there is the possibility that this additional information in the coding instructions may have primed volunteers to code speech occurrences in a certain way. Coder bias may have also been effected through the coders relationship to me as the lead researcher. As I am married to an immigrant, the coders have been made aware of the struggles my partner and I have faced while proceeding through the immigration process, which may have colored their viewpoint.
Data Results

Initial examination of general (not ethnic specific) hate crime occurrences between 2010 and 2018 display seemingly normal fluctuation across measured quarters, with some quarters showing increases or decreases in hate crime events. According to online speech storage resources President Obama did not mention immigrants or immigration as a key issue through his first year in office. Due to this, no speech occurrences are evaluated from those quarters - making quarter one (Q1) January of 2010. Figure 1\(^1\) shows hate crime occurrences ranging from quarter three (Q3) (Jul-Sept 2010) through quarter thirty-six (Q36) (Oct-Dec 2018), indicating the fluctuation of hate crime instances committed from July of 2010 through December of 2018. An explanation to these increases and decreases may be found in Figure 2, where key immigration events are placed on the graphic as they occurred.

As shown in Figure 2 below, the quarters with general hate crime “spikes” are linked to major immigration events in the figure. When reviewing these details, the incidence of hate crimes appears to be linked in these data to major immigration events. These events included Obama’s announcement of legislative protection for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Trump’s candidacy announcement when he joined the 2016 election race, major speeches including or regarding immigration policy (State of the Union, reform speeches, etc.), and Trump’s announcement of a travel ban (which barred immigrants from specific countries entry). The presence of speech

\(^{1}\) All graphical images (Figures 1-7) are available for reference in larger dimensions at the end of this paper.
occurrences surrounding key events, and the measurable fluctuation in hate crime incidence indicates a relationship between rhetoric and hate crime.

When looking at Figure 1 and 2, there is a steady fluctuation of hate crime across the quarters, with hate crimes increasing by 33.3% from Q21 to Q23 (2015), when Trump announced his candidacy intent. Hate crimes continued to increase during the time period when Trump’s rally speeches overlapped with Obama’s remaining tenure. Specific quarters relevant to key instances of presidential speech are evaluated in Figures 5-7, in an attempt to more closely specify the relationship between hate speech and hate crime. Overall, the trends shown above in Figures 1 and 2 suggest an uptick in hate crime violence once Trump announced candidacy, and this increase persisted during his time in office, with some normal fluctuations.

The numerical coding of speech occurrences for President Obama and President Trump suggest why we might observe this rise in violence; the coding demonstrates the 45th President’s deviation from Obama’s more measured and diplomatic rhetoric. The majority of Obama’s speech occurrences are coded as a 2 or 3; that is, coders deemed these remarks to be optimistic about immigrants or even pro-immigrant. When looking at Trump’s rhetorical approach to immigration quantitatively, however, the mode is -2, indicating substantially negative speech or remarks that fit the categorical definition of hate speech. The end of 2012, following Obama’s implementation of DACA, through the beginning of 2015, prior to Trump’s candidacy announcement (Q12 through Q21 in Figures 3 and 4) indicate the majority of pro-immigrant speech with the lowest hate crime incidents recorded. The end of 2018, when Trump consistently spoke of border wall funding and threatened a government shutdown over congressional reluctance (Q34
through Q36) host the majority of “angry” or hate speech occurrences, and these respective quarters have the highest reported hate crime incidents of all measured quarters. These quarters may suggest a relationship between Presidential hate rhetoric and hate crimes as the increase in immigrant-related hate speech occurrences corresponds in time with a simultaneous increase in general hate crime occurrences.

Figures 3 and 4, presented below, show presidential speech incidents over time (between 2010 and 2018), by quarter. On the X-axis is the annual quarter in which the speech was given (with the year in which that quarter occurred highlighted below the quarter names in orange). The y-axis shows the scale of pro- vs. anti-immigrant valence, from positive 3 (highly positive toward immigrants) to -3 (highly negative and anti-immigrant speech). The average coding for each speech incident (across coders) is shown with a black dot; more than one of these could occur in each quarter. Figure 3 gives all the data for Obama’s coded speeches, across his presidency, while Figure 4 does the same for President Trump, between 2015 and 2018. The clustering of the dots above the 0-line for Obama show his general pro-immigrant positivity; the opposite clustering for Trump (below the 0-line) shows his hostility toward immigrants. We can also see from Figure 4 that Trump’s speech incidents on immigrants and immigration appear to increase over time, with more occurring in 2018 than previously.

Figure 5 below, shows an enlarged detail from Figure 2, to point out that Trump’s candidacy announcement in 2015 coincided with a rise in hate crime incidents, which decreased again at the end of 2015 and beginning of 2016 (Q24 and Q25). This decrease in crime incidents overlaps with Obama’s amplified pro-immigrant rhetoric during the broadcasted Naturalization Ceremony- a public event which welcomes eligible
immigrants to American citizenship in Q24 (late 2015), and State of the Union Address in Q25 (early 2016) where he pointedly expressed his position regarding the value immigrants have in the American economy and community. Following Trump’s candidacy announcement, which included statements like the incendiary “rapists” line quoted above as an example of negative presidential speech, hate crime incidents increased by 33.3%, the largest documented rise between the quarters evaluated in this study. In the following quarter, Q24, hate crime incidents remained 14.4% higher than they had been in quarters containing no negative speech from Trump. While Obama remained in office during these quarters, the rise in hate crime can be connected by location to areas hosting Trump rallies (Feinberg, Branton, Martiez-Ebers, 2019).

Data in Figure 6 indicates that reported hate crimes spiked in Q23 coinciding with Trump’s candidacy announcement. In an overall examination, the number of hate crimes reported per quarter has remained, on overall average, at a higher level during Trump’s time in office in comparison to Obama. My analysis, using rally speeches, interviews, and media mentions shows that hate crime incidents continued to increase in parallel to elevated hate speech occurrences, as shown in Figure 6. Hate speech incidents spiked again in Q28 (Oct-Dec 2016), overlapping with Trump’s 2016 victory in the Presidential election. Following Trump’s inauguration, hate crime incidents surpassed Obama-era quarters at regular intervals- with the increasing hate crime events overlapping time periods when the new President focused heavily on immigration issues. As Trump wrapped up his first year in office (Q32) hate crime incidents were 34.6% higher than they were during the quarter containing Obama’s final State of the Union Address as President in early 2016. During President Obama’s final year in office, the incumbent
used only pro-immigrant public speech (as coded by this project’s volunteers), whereas in Trump’s first year, only one out of twelve speech excerpts received “neutral” discussion coding, with the rest being negative or anti-immigrant.

The most convincing indication of the correlation between hate speech and hate crime becomes apparent when evaluating key immigration events—such as Obama’s executive order and press conference announcing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Trump’s demand for border wall funding. Obama’s pro-immigrant DACA order of 2010 directly challenged Congressional opinion on immigration policy-making it a prominent reform to previously-accepted immigration regulations. In the six months following the executive order, hate crime incidents decreased by 24.8%, while pro-immigrant rhetoric from the president was at its highest level. During 2018, Trump challenged congressional budget allocation to his anti-immigrant border wall project, threatening a government shutdown if funding approval was not granted. His actions made his debate with Congress unusually prominent and public. This moment showed an anti-immigrant peak in the speech data. Six months prior to the congressional address 1,528 crimes were reported and six months following the address 1,850 crimes were reported—an increase of 21%.

Another useful comparison is the two presidents’ public remarks about their preferred immigration reforms, in 2013 and 2016. In 2013 Obama gave his comprehensive immigration reform speech, suggesting immigration system and policy reform. This proposal suggested changes to allow illegal immigrants an opportunity to achieve legal status, continued border security improvement while working to reform immigration policy to expedite legal entry, and the creation of an employment
verification system designed to hold American companies accountable for illegal employment, rather than immigrants alone. By contrast, when Trump was still a candidate, he gave a campaign speech suggesting quite different immigration reforms – his proposal was fairly negative, suggesting zero tolerance deportations, erecting physical border restrictions, and defunding sanctuary cities. The quarter of Obama’s reform speech, which was given in January of Q13 (Jan-Mar 2013), reported 1265 hate crimes, and coders identified four instances of pro-immigrant rhetoric. At the end of Q27 (Sept 2016), Trump gave his immigration reform speech, and coders identified three instances of immigrant specific hate rhetoric. In the quarter following (Q28, Oct-Dec 2016) the FBI found 1,817 occurrences of hate crimes- a difference of 43.6%. This one comparison cannot suggest a trend, but it provides a useful example of the difference between presidents.

Moving from the quarterly data to annual data, we can look at hate crimes against specific ethnicities. Evaluating yearly trends of hate crime incidents against Hispanic and Latinos (the key group of immigrants regularly identified in both administrations), Obama’s administration, on average, saw decreases in crimes committed. In comparison, annual crimes against this group have, on average, increased since President Trump assumed office. This data is only suggestive of the relationship between hate rhetoric and crime, and the overall picture is more complicated than the data reveals. For instance, it is unreasonable to assume all hate crime is connected to hate speech, and not impacted by societal changes.
Summary of Results

The scarcity of specific data related to my question means that this project has some severe limitations – but even so, this paper provides some initial suggestive evidence that highly public anti-immigrant speech by top political leaders may correlate with hate crime incidents. According to these data, pro-immigrant speech typically decreases hate crime instances, while anti-immigrant hate speech increases the occurrence of hate crime instances. Further, when comparing the quarters where Presidential speech incidence overlap (Q22-Q28, 2015-2016) to the quarters that lack overlap (Q29-Q36, 2017-2018) these data indicate that without the introduction of pro-immigrant statements crime rates are more likely to stabilize than reduce. The spike in hate crimes following Trump’s candidacy announcement and the average annual increases in such crimes following Trump’s election where anti-immigrant public speech was more commonplace, while pro-immigrant speech seldom occurred, lends evidence that this may be the case.

Conclusions

As I conducted this research and began analyzing the results of these data, I realized a major issue which resulted from the manner in which the FBI presents crime statistics- ultimately meaning these data I gathered and analyzed was insufficient to adequately answer my research question. While these data results were suggestive in the analysis that Presidential hate rhetoric may incite hate crimes, the evaluated data was
inconclusive in its ability to draw correlation. For this question to be addressed and proven, the FBI, or another reliable organization, would need to track hate crime instances by ethnicity on a quarterly bases, so the hate crime instance could be connected within short time proximity to the broadcasted hate rhetoric. Even more valuable data would supply crime data by ethnicity and location, so the crime instance could potentially be connected to an event- like a rally. While media has connected hate crimes committed in Trump rally areas to specific ethnicities (Feinberg, Branton, and Martinez-Ebers, 2019), the FBI data, and additional hate crime trackers (such as: Anti-Defamation League, Pro Publica, and the Bureau of Justice Statistics), do not adequately track this information for analysis on large scale. These data I did collect and analyze suggested that the immigrant-specific hate speech tracked had an impact on general hate crimes, but was unable to link them to anti-immigrant causes alone. It may be assumed that exposure to hate speech perpetrated a general environment of group-based hatred because of the dehumanizing characteristics and effects of hate rhetoric; however, this has not been adequately measured based in part on some of the aforementioned limitations.

**Future Research**

Though this study evaluated the relationship between hate speech and hate crime, certain terminology trended more positive or negative than others with volunteer coders. While this paper does not embark on an endeavor to define what forms of speech should be regulated, it is important to recognize which terminology may be seen as “fair” or “dehumanizing” in perception- even if the definition is the same. For instance, Obama
frequently referenced illegal immigrants as “undocumented” while Trump favored the term “illegal alien”. By United States Citizen and Immigration Service’s standard the terms are synonymous- but when evaluated by volunteer annotators six out of seven coded “alien” references as “disturbingly angry” (-2) or “hate speech” (-3), while “undocumented” received annotation of neutral (0) or “normal speech, negative tone” (-1). This example lends evidence to the power of terminology. Future researchers may be suggest changes in United States policy language and definition as a potential mitigation to evoking positive or negative cognitive response.

In order reliably to evaluate the effects of hate speech on hate crime, future research may attempt to compile a more complete data set than the FBI annual report. With 85% of national data missing, as well as educational institution data restricted, this research serves as preliminary segmented data, rather than a picture of the United States as a whole. While specific key event evaluation (i.e. reform speeches) linked quarterly to hate crime incidents offers compelling evidence of the adverse effects of hate speech and incitement, there is not enough evidence to state direct causation. This is partially due to the microsegment of speech evaluated. A look at Presidential speech occurrences surrounding terrorism and its socially linked ethnic and religious roots (i.e. September 11th and the Middle East), civil rights movements (i.e. Anti-Black crime and challenges to racial inequities), or LGBTQ+ community and policy challenges (i.e. marriage reform) would offer a more complete picture of leadership hate speech and hate crime incidents.

As this study limited its review of rhetoric specific to immigration, there is still opportunity to evaluate Trump’s rhetoric regarding blacks, women, disabled persons, Asians, Muslims, and other groups for a more complete picture of his impact on hate
crime. It is interesting that as a politician Trump appeals to such a large, and diverse, supporter base as his speech tactics are so controversial when compared to politicians previous to him. A plausible explanation to this may be that Trump has continuously claimed he is “not” a politician, and in his appeal to the “common” man, has rejected political correctness as a tool- reminiscent of old age politics where blatant racism and discrimination was not rejected by the masses. A comparison of effective political tactics may offer more insight into voter appeal and how to generate public understanding of manipulative political strategies.
Figure 1
Figure 2
Figure 4
Figure 5
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Figure 6
Figure 7
Figure 8
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