

Monkey Cage Analysis

# Counties that hosted a 2016 Trump rally saw a 226 percent increase in hate crimes

There is suggestive evidence that Trump's rhetoric matters.

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During an interview with CBS's "Face the Nation" this past Sunday, Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.) lambasted President Trump for emboldening white nationalism after a young man killed at least 50 people at two New Zealand mosques. Kaine was referring to Trump's answer after a reporter asked whether he sees "today that white nationalism is a rising threat around the world?" Trump responded, "I don't really."

This is not the first time Trump has been accused of catering to white nationalists after a terrorist attack. At an August 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, a young white man rammed his car into a crowd of counterprotesters, killing Heather Heyer. Afterward, Trump insisted that "there's blame on both sides" for the violence.

Then in October 2018, a gunman killed 11 congregants at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. When Trump announced plans to visit the synagogue, many people in Squirrel Hill, the city's predominantly Jewish neighborhood, took to the streets demanding first that Trump renounce white nationalism before paying his respects to the victims.

Trump has strongly rejected any charges that he's to blame, tweeting Monday:



**Donald J. Trump**  
@realDonaldTrump

The Fake News Media is working overtime to blame me for the horrible attack in New Zealand. They will have to work very hard to prove that one. So Ridiculous!

136K 9:38 AM - Mar 18, 2019

67.6K people are talking about this

Our research finds that Kaine could be correct, however: Trump's rhetoric may encourage hate crimes, as we explain below.

## **Does Trump's political rhetoric have a measurable link to reported hate crime and extremist activity?**

We examined this question, given that so many politicians and pundits accuse Trump of emboldening white nationalists. White nationalist leaders seem to agree, as leaders including Richard Spencer and David Duke have publicly supported Trump's candidacy and presidency, even if they still criticize him for not going far enough. The New Zealand shooter even referred to Trump as a "renewed symbol of white identity."

So, do attitudes like these have real world consequences? Recent research on far-right groups suggests that they do, especially when these attitudes are embraced and encourage by peers. Specifically, the quantity of neo-Nazi and racist skinhead groups active in a state leads to increased reports of hate crimes within that state.

### **How we did our research**

Using the Anti-Defamation League's Hate, Extremism, Anti-Semitism, Terrorism map data (HEAT map), we examined whether there was a correlation between the counties that hosted one of Trump's 275 presidential campaign rallies in 2016 and increased incidents of hate crimes in subsequent months.

To test this, we aggregated hate-crime incident data and Trump rally data to the county level and then used statistical tools to estimate a rally's impact. We included controls for factors such as the county's crime rates, its number of active hate groups, its minority populations, its percentage with college educations, its location in the country and the month when the rallies occurred.

We found that counties that had hosted a 2016 Trump campaign rally saw a 226 percent increase in reported hate crimes over comparable counties that did not host such a rally.

Of course, our analysis cannot be certain it was Trump's campaign rally rhetoric that caused people to commit more hate crimes in the host county. However, suggestions that this effect can be explained through a plethora of faux hate crimes are at best unrealistic. In fact, this charge is frequently used as a political tool to dismiss concerns about hate crimes. Research shows it is far more likely that hate crime statistics are considerably lower because of underreporting.

Additionally, it is hard to discount a "Trump effect" when a considerable number of these reported hate crimes reference Trump. According to the ADL's 2016 data, these incidents included vandalism, intimidation and assault.

What's more, according to the FBI's Universal Crime report in 2017, reported hate crimes increased 17 percent over 2016. Recent research also shows that reading or hearing Trump's statements of bias against particular groups makes people more likely to write offensive things about the groups he targets.

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