

**Taking over the State from Below -
Populist Vigilante Violence and the 1920s Ku Klux Klan**

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Abstract:

The paper examines variation in violence of anti-immigrant anti-minority populist movements through the case of the 1920s Ku Klux Klan in the United States. The movement attracted followers throughout the US, but was violent only in the South and Southwest, and not the Midwest and Northeast. The paper shows that the variation cannot be explained by Southern racism, low state capacity, and electoral and economic threat. Using regional comparative case study analysis, the paper demonstrates that the Klan was violent where extralegal vigilante violence (EVV) was a common recent mechanism to address criminality and immorality (frontier justice in the Southwest), or to regulate race relations (South). Where the use of EVV was recent, the majority viewed violence by a group sharing its identity and values as legitimate, and thus local law enforcement was lenient, and the community cooperated with the movement as witnesses, jury members, and clients of EVV.

Movements that mobilize against immigrants and minorities have been gaining success in Europe, the United States, and beyond in recent years. This surge of exclusionary majoritarian movements raises concerns that violent rhetoric will be accompanied by physical violence. Under what conditions are exclusionary movements violent? This paper examines variation in violence of anti-migrant anti-minority movements through the unique case of the 1920s Ku Klux Klan in the United States. The movement was different from the well documented KKK of the 1860s and 1960s: it attracted followers throughout the United States, and was particularly popular in the Midwest. The movement opposed racial, ethnic, and religious minorities and immigrants, supported patriarchal and conservative family values, and promoted an exclusive American identity belonging to White, Protestant, native born. Despite this unified message, the movement differed in one fundamental way across regions: it was physically violent in the South and Southwest, but generally not physically violent in the Midwest and Northeast. This variation cannot simply be explained by the racist regime of the South, as much of the Klan's violence was not directed against the black community but instead against white victims viewed as a danger to the integrity of patriarchal society (outlaws, poor, unemployed, wife beaters, and women of loose morals). Other common explanations for violence such as low state capacity, and electoral and economic threat to the majority group also fail to capture the regional variation.

I argue instead that the variation in the use of violence is the result of the interaction of the rise of the movement and recent experience with extralegal vigilante violence. The Klan was violent where vigilante violence was a common mechanism to address criminality and immorality in recent decades (frontier justice in the West and Southwest), and where vigilante violence was a common mechanism to regulate race relations (the South). These places had a recent history of groups of private citizens taking the law into their own hands and punishing "undesirable elements of society" including criminals, the poor, and in the

South prominently members of the black community. Conversely, where the recent practice of extralegal vigilante violence was absent, the Klan was similarly populist but less likely to employ direct violence. The mechanism behind this empirical finding lies in the relationship between the community, local law enforcement, and the group. Where the use of extralegal vigilante violence was recent, the majority viewed the use of violence by a group that represented its identity and values as legitimate. As a result, local law enforcement treated the movement with leniency, and even more importantly, the community cooperated with a movement that represented their identity and some of their values, in their role as a source of information for law enforcement, as jury members, and as "clients" for the vigilante violence the group provided.

The paper has two broad purposes. First, it challenges existing perception on ethnic community violence. Many scholars approach violence as a tool elites employ to generate support for ethnic parties or hinder the potential for class based coalitions (Gagnon, 1994; Lake and Rothchild, 1996; Wilkinson, 2006). In contrast to this view, this paper demonstrates that violence was often unrelated to elite interests. It was also not necessarily the result of weak state capacity as many have theorized (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Skocpol, 1979). There was no clear link between violence and state capacity in the cases examined here. In addition, I show that though political and economic threats contributed to the popularity of the movement, they cannot account for the variation in violence. Instead, the paper shows that recent use of extralegal vigilante violence (EVV) made the community and local law enforcement amenable to Klan violence, and thus determined whether violence would be a part of the repertoire of the movement (Tilly, 1977).¹

Second, I suggest in this paper that exclusionary populist movements would be particularly sensitive to the approval of the community generated by recent use of EVV. Like

¹ This relational approach follows Tilly (2015); and Basu (2015).

many of the current exclusionary movements, the 1920s Ku Klux Klan was a right wing populist movement: it rejected the establishment as corrupt, and promised to give voice to concerns of "good" middle class Americans. It also promoted traditional patriarchal family values, and was nativist, white supremacist, and exclusively Protestant (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Mudde, 2004). Populists' anti-establishment stance means that they reject other political actors for being corrupt and failing to represent the will of the people, and presents themselves as the only ones that can translate the people's will into political power. As noted by several researchers, populism is a thin or an empty ideology. It has no particular aim aside from representing the will of the people and exposing corrupt elites (Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2000). As a result, populists cannot use an argument of "end justifies the means" to justify strategies that are unpopular with the base - there are no ends higher than the will of the people, or at least the will of the base of supporters. If populists choose to use violence then, they likely have a tacit consent of their community. Recent use of EVV explains why some communities give their consent to violent exclusionary movements despite their disruptive nature.

The paper proceeds as follows, I first turn to reviewing existing theories of ethnic community violence and present my own theory of extralegal vigilante violence as explaining variation in Klan violence. Next, I discuss the 1920s Ku Klux Klan and how the theory of recent EVV should apply to the case. The following two sections are empirical: first I demonstrate that common theories of ethnic violence fail to explain the regional variation in the violence of the 1920s KKK. Next, I delve into specific case studies from the different regions and demonstrate that recent use of EVV can account for the observed variation in KKK violence. I conclude with some of the implications of the 1920s KKK to current day right wing populist movements.

Explaining Ethnic Community Violence

This section presents existing theories explaining ethnic community violence. I then turn to present my own theory of recent use of Extralegal Vigilante violence (EVV) as accounting for variation in violence. I argue that none of the existing explanations can account for the regional variation in violence of the 1920s Ku Klux Klan as following empirical sections will demonstrate.

Common Explanations

Broadly, there are three types of explanations for community ethnic violence common in the literature: weak state capacity; threat; and racism.

Low State Capacity

Ethnic community violence often occurs in the context of state collapse (Kalyvas, 2006; Petersen, 2002; Snyder, 2016). The power vacuum created when the state collapses empowers non-state actors to achieve their goals through coercion (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Skocpol, 1979). The collapse of authority may also lead existential fear that causes individuals to seek security within their ethnic group (Posen, 1993). If this was the case for the 1920s Ku Klux Klan *we should expect that the lower the capacity of the state, the more Klan violence we should observe.*

Threat

Theories of threat focus on the threat that a minority group poses for the majority community. Some of these accounts focus on the elite as the key player: threatened by a rising minority, political elites incite hatred, and support and organize violence because they view ethnic mobilization as a mean to rally their supporters, and thwart attempts at interethnic coalitions that would diminish their power (Brass, 2000; De Figueiredo & Weingast, 1999; Gagnon, 1994; Wilkinson, 2006). Following the logic of this theory for the

1920s Klan *we should expect to observe violence where elites are facing the threat of an interethnic coalition.*

Other accounts maintain the logic of political threat as leading to ethnic community violence, but shift the process from elites to individuals driven. Instead of elites seeking to preserve their power, the key actor is individuals of a privileged group who feel that another group is threatening their advantageous position (e.g. electoral advantage, privileged access to material and cultural resources). To protect their status they violently crack down on the threatening group and diminish its material resources, suppress voting, and even break its power through ethnic cleansing (Blalock, 1967; Kopstein & Wittenberg, 2011). If this theory explains the case of the KKK in the 1920s *we should expect to see violence where the majority group faces the most significant electoral challenge by minorities.*

A related explanation for ethnic community violence is economic threat or competition between ethnic groups. Accordingly, the higher the economic competition, the more violence we should observe (McVeigh, 2009; Olzak, 1990; Wright, 1996). Similarly to electoral threat, *we should expect to see violence where the majority group faces the most significant economic challenge by minorities.*

Racism

The case of the Ku Klux Klan in particular raises a third type of explanation, that of racism. According to this explanation, violence is the result of racial hatred and discrimination. Racism can be an outcome of formal institutional discrimination, in which case the institutions themselves (such as the police and judiciary) may be complicit in violence. Racism can also be a family or community tradition of hatred between groups. This emotional hatred can drive individuals to acts of violence (Petersen, 2002). Arguing that racism was the cause for variation in Klan violence in the 1920s can be complimentary to the

theories presented above, as racism can originally be the result of low state capacity or threat. However, there is no need to observe immediate threat or weak state to argue that racism was the cause of violence. Instead *we should expect that where racist practices against a minority are more common (such as formal and informal discrimination against a minority group) the more violence against the discriminated minority we should observe*. For the case of the Klan this would mean that we should observe more violence against members of the black population in the South where racism was most prevalent both formally and informally.

Beyond the explanations of state capacity, political and economic threat, and racism, there may be regional differences that can account for the regional variation in violence in the specific case of the 1920s KKK. First, the movement might have mobilized on different issues in the different regions leading to a variation in violence. Second, it is possible that the individual characteristics of members differed between the regions. If the social and economic context of Klan members in the South and Southwest points at a propensity for violence more than that of Midwestern members, that could account for the difference in use of violence between the regions. I evaluate all these explanations in the empirical sections vis-à-vis the theory of EVV I present next.

Extralegal Vigilante Violence (EVV)

I define Extralegal Vigilante Violence as organized private citizens taking the law into their own hands and punishing "undesirable elements of society". EVV might be common in places where the reach of the state is limited, leaving remote areas with no effective law enforcement system. In such cases, alternative organizations will often substitute formal institutions and provide law enforcement. These may be warlords or criminal organization or they may be private citizens banding together to represent the community. The latter is a form of EVV. Though these private citizens may commit extreme acts of violence in their self-assumed role of law enforcers, communities are likely to condone their activity as they are

viewed as providing order (Brown, 1975, pp. 96-97). As such members of the community may turn to the vigilantes to resolve disputes, and in cases where formal institutions turn against the vigilante, the community may protect them by hiding their identity and actions or providing shelter.

Another form of EVV occurs where the state is biased against a group. In cases of formal discrimination against a group, individuals from the dominant group may use violence against members of the discriminated minority to maintain the hierarchical relationship between groups in society. In this case again, since domination is common, members of the dominant group might condone the violence and protect the instigators.

I argue that where EVV was practiced in the recent couple of decades, the community is accustomed to EVV and will therefore view violent practices by a group from the majority as acceptable behavior. Such a violent group will not automatically be classified as disruptive, and may even be viewed in a positive light during period of rise in crime or social change. As a result the community may cooperate with the group in the ways mentioned above: turn to the group to settle disputes, protect it against formal law enforcement, and even provide shelter. Even if the initial conditions that gave rise to vigilante groups such as law state presence or state discrimination against a minority no longer apply, the mere recent experience of EVV will make the community more amenable to cooperate with a vigilante group that represents, or at least reflects in composition, the majority.

The recent practice of EVV also affects the response of law enforcement toward a vigilante violent group of the majority. Law enforcement officials that are a part of the community, such as the local police, might be as likely as the rest of the community to show leniency toward the vigilante group. First, local law enforcement officials are a part of the community and the recent experience of EVV is their individual experience as community

members. Second, if the recent past experience of EVV was viewed as an ally by local law enforcement, then current local law enforcement are more likely to view a new vigilante group of the majority as an extension of formal law enforcement. Thus both as individuals, and as part of a local law enforcement institution, local law enforcement in places that experienced EVV in the recent past are more likely to condone it in the future.

The tacit assent of the community brought about by a recent past experience of EVV should weigh in on the decision to use violence of some groups more than others. Populist exclusionary groups in particular should be dependent on a community of supporters. Populists oppose establishment elites and portray them as corrupt and as failing to represent the 'true' will of the people (Mudde, 2004, p. 543) Populist rhetoric is people centered, which means it is focused on the 'will' of the people, perceived as the will of the majority of people or the will of the 'real' people, those who are the legitimate part of the community. The definition of the real people varies and has included for different populist movements economic, occupational, geographic, ethnic and racial definitions or a combination of these. Generally, this is a majoritarian perception of the people which discounts minorities and oppositions. Populist have no ideology that trumps the will of the people (and in fact in their rhetoric and action they often wish to remove boundaries to the expression of the will of the people such as unelected liberal institutions, and due process). When using violence populist exclusionary groups should be different from ideological or territorial terrorist groups. The latter groups can justify their actions as serving a high purpose even if it does not gain the support of the mainstream local population - the violence may serve their ideology or promote political goals. For populists the highest goal is expressing the will of the people, and thus support from their core community should be particularly important to populists. As I argue that a recent past of EVV is the cause for community support for a present violent

group representing the majority, a recent past of EVV should best support violence by an exclusionary populist movement.

The 1920s Ku Klux Klan

The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s was an exclusionary populist movement that operated throughout the United States but was violent only in some parts of the country and not in others. Klan violence during this period was mostly directed against whites deemed immoral, rather than exclusively against the black population like the 1860s and 1960s KKK. This section provides background on the movement, explains the selection of comparative cases within the US, and explains broadly how the theory of recent past of EVV applies to the case.

Inspired by D.W Griffith's film 'Birth of a Nation', which heroically depicted the Ku Klux Klan of the reconstruction era, William Joseph Simmons, a veteran of multiple fraternal organizations, "revived" the KKK in 1915.² The Klan of this era was founded on exclusionary identity and Southern pride. In the early years the movement was not particularly successful. In 1920 the Klan rebranded its message under the umbrella of 'One Hundred Percent Americanism'. The Klan defined the exclusive borders of Americanism: It is a society of white, native born, Protestants; its members support traditional family values, and oppose those who stray from them (liberated women, abandoning husbands, disobedient youth, the unemployed, criminals), they also promoted prohibition, supported public schools over parochial schools, and opposed corruption of politicians and law enforcement (Pegram, 2011).

Historical accounts often define the Klan of that era as populist (Maclean, 1994; Moore, 1997), because of the movement's strong opposition to corruption, big business and growing economic concentration. The Klan was a small business middle and lower middle

² The Klan's revival was also linked to the 1915 lynching of Leo Frank in Atlanta. Frank was a Jewish industrialist convicted in the murder of a thirteen year old employee.

class movement that sought to reassert its supporters' place in social and political life. In the South the movement was a successor of the Populist Party of the 1890s. It shared with the Populist Party a resistance to elitist politics and economics and an aversion to urban lifestyle.³ However, unlike the Populist Party, it was white supremacist and certainly did not view an interracial alliance as a goal or even a possibility.⁴

While the original reconstruction era Ku Klux Klan was a vigilante organization dedicated to violence and intimidation of newly liberated African Americans, the 1920s Klan was a more broad based organization. It operated as a political force and as a large social movement albeit a racist and bigoted one. The Klan's activities were varied and included family events such as fairs; intimidation of the likes of uniformed parades and cross burnings; aggressions such as economic boycotts; and physical violence (Blee, 1991).

The recruitment message of the KKK was adjusted according to local needs, but the general framework of One Hundred Percent Americanism was applied everywhere. And the Klan indeed expanded everywhere, with between three and six million members at its height in 1924. The most prominent stronghold of the Klan was the Midwest. In Indiana for example one out of every three white Protestant males was a Klan member (Jackson 1967, p. 154; Moore, 1997). The Klan had successful branches in the South, the Southwest, the West, and even the Northeast with large membership in Pennsylvania, Maine, and New York State (Jackson, 1967; Chalmers, 1987).

Though the message of the Klan was similar everywhere, the repertoire of strategies of the organization changed from one area to another. Most notably, in the South and Southwest, the Klan was a violent movement. It had units tasked with acts of violence

³ Although the movement was not based in the countryside as it is often portrayed. It had strong support in American Cities. Jackson (1967).

⁴ The populist nature of the Klan was reinforced by the support of the 1890s populist leader, Tom Watson, who by 1920 abandoned the idea of an interracial movement in favor of the Klan's brand of populism. Maclean (1994), p. 48

(Maclean, 1994), it encouraged acts of violence of at least some of its members, and it was associated with violent outcomes. The pattern of violence differed between the South and the Southwest. In the South approximately half of the violence was directed at African Americans and half of it against whites (Maclean, 1994, p. 163). In the Southwest the majority of the targets of violence were white, in most places there were no violent incidents targeting African Americans, and the level of violence against whites was more severe than in the South. Though much of the propaganda of the Klan was directed against minorities, a lot of the violence was directed at individuals who broke the Klan's traditional moral code.

In the Midwest (and in the Northeast) the Klan rarely perpetrated direct physical vigilante violence. This is not to say that the organization did not target minorities. The Klan organized boycotts against minority owned businesses, at times leading them to financial ruin; it attempted and succeeded in dismissing Jewish and Catholic teachers and health workers; it campaigned against minorities running for office; and it spread false accounts on the influence of Catholics and Jews in public life.

Case Selection

The paper compares the KKK in the Southwest, South and Midwest. To do so I examine five case studies representing the different regions: Southwest: Dallas, Texas; Tulsa, Oklahoma; South: Atlanta, Georgia; and Midwest: Chicago, Illinois; and Indianapolis, Indiana. These specific cases were selected for several reasons. First, the cases represent the regional variation of the movement. Dallas, Texas is located in the boundary of the South and Southwest and demonstrates patterns of both regions; Tulsa, Oklahoma represents the frontier nature of the Southwest that will be explored below. In 1920 Oklahoma was a recent member of the United States and still maintained its frontier character; Atlanta, Georgia is a Deep South city, and Chicago and Indiana are both Midwestern cities.

Second, in each of the examined cities Klan membership was high. I take as a starting point that the movement was popular and only examine the variation in use of violence. Third, the cities selected are relatively comparable in size with the exception of Chicago. Chicago is far larger than the other cities, but its dynamic nature and demographics are comparable to those of Dallas and Atlanta. Moreover, at the time the South did not have large scale cities. I have chosen to focus on cities because the comparable data on them is superior. Though there are several excellent studies on the Klan in smaller towns and rural areas,⁵ it is difficult to build comparable study based on the data.

Recent EVV and the Klan Explained

I argue that recent practice of extralegal vigilante violence (EVV) played the most crucial part in determining Klan violence. In the South, EVV was heavily racial and intended to terrorize and suppress the rights of the black community (Hale, 2010). In frontier areas, EVV was an extension of the justice system in addition to formal institutions, or where these were absent (Brown, 1975). The mechanism behind the centrality of EVV lies in the relationship between the community, local law enforcement, and the Ku Klux Klan. Where EVV was recent, the community and local law enforcement viewed a violent Klan as a legitimate actor, and thus violence was a part of the repertoire of strategies. Conversely, where recent practice of EVV was absent, the Klan consciously left violence out of the repertoire of contention because of concern about the response of the community. (Table 1)

Table 1

	South	Southwest	Midwest
Extralegal Vigilante Violence (EVV)	Recent	Recent	Remote
1920s Ku Klux Klan Violence	✓	✓	✗

⁵ Most notable are MacLean (1994) on Athens Georgia; and Blee (2008) that has significant research on kokomo, Indiana

The Ku Klux Klan operated in both urban and rural areas, but in all settings, each Klan chapter belonged to a specific white Protestant community. These communities were familiar with the group's members despite the formally secret membership rosters. If acts of violence were committed, members of the community could usually name the proprietors.⁶ As such, it was in the power of the community to punish violent members in cooperation with law enforcement authorities if they chose to do so. The question of whether law enforcement authorities pursued investigations into Klan violence is also connected to the demands from the community. First, though state representatives are often theorized as a group with distinct interests (Skocpol, 1979), most local law enforcement officials were part of the white Protestant community. Their actions toward the Klan reflected those of the community at large. Second, local politician's incentives to target Klan violence was related to demands from their constituency. If the constituency viewed the Klan as a disturbing force, politicians were more likely to target them. There are some exceptions here. In several cases, individual competition between serving politicians and the Klan led local or state authorities to target the movement.⁷ Even when higher authorities were called in, the determinant of violence remained the attitude of the community. As I demonstrate below, investigations into particular cases of violence failed because of difficulty to collect evidence, or because grand juries were reluctant to indict Klan members. Crackdown on the movement through legislation or policing was met with resistance and became very costly for serving politicians.

⁶ In that sense the act of masking was not only intended to disguise proprietors of violence from their victims, but also to provide the community with plausible deniability as to the identity of the attackers.

⁷ Such was the case in Tulsa examined below

Extralegal Vigilante Violence and Community Cooperation with the Ku Klux Klan Empirical Analysis

The following two sections evaluate different theories of ethnic community violence based on the case of the 1920s Ku Klux Klan. First I examine the common explanations of state capacity and threat. I demonstrate that these common explanations fail to account for the regional variation in the violence of the 1920s KKK. The second section delves into the case studies within the Southwest, South, and Midwest to support the theory that a recent past of EVV determined whether the Klan used violence in a certain region. The analysis of the individual cases also demonstrates that racism alone cannot account for the variation in violence.

Common Explanations for Ethnic Community Violence and the 1920s Ku Klux Klan

Table 2 summarizes the empirical analysis of the different cases. As will be discussed in detail in the next section, I find that a recent history of EVV was the best predictor of Klan violence. The evidence is far weaker for competing explanations.

Table 2

	Dallas	Tulsa	Atlanta	Chicago	Indianapolis
Recent EVV	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
<i>State Capacity</i> - Violent Crime	High	High	High	High	High
<i>Threat-</i> Political Competition between Parties	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
<i>Threat-</i> Percentage- point change in Black population 1910-1940 ⁸	7.8	0	16.7	24.6	4.8
<i>Threat-</i> Class Composition of Members	Middle and lower middle class	Middle and lower middle class	Middle class	Middle and lower middle class	Middle and lower middle class
Mobilization	Law Enforcement; White Supremacy; Prohibition; Patriarchal family values	Law Enforcement; White Supremacy; Prohibition; Patriarchal family values	Law Enforcement; White Supremacy; anti Catholic; Prohibition; Patriarchal family values	Law Enforcement; White Supremacy; anti Catholic; Prohibition; Patriarchal family values	Law Enforcement; White Supremacy; anti Catholic; Prohibition; Patriarchal family values
Opposition	High	Low	Low	High	Low
Membership	High	High	High	High	High
KKK Violence	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No

State Capacity

The violence of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s did not occur in collapsed states. However, low state capacity could still open opportunities for actors and explain variation in violence (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). The theory that low state capacity is the cause for violence is represented in Table 2 by the variable *Violent Crime*. The 1920s were years of rising crime

⁸ The United States Census Bureau. The Great Migration 1910-1970. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/dataviz/visualizations/020/508.php>

due to the rapid growth of cities, and law enforcement authorities struggled to meet the new challenges. This was one of the reasons for the popularity of the Klan, an organization that mobilized on the promise of law and order.

The highest murder rate in the United States was in the South. However, the South also had the highest incarceration and execution rates, and although these rates were highest for the black population, they were also higher for the white population than the rest of the country.⁹ This data indicates that law enforcement activity in the South (the capacity of the state to address crime) corresponded to the crime in the region. Moreover, some cities in the Midwest (Chicago and Detroit in particular) had rates of crime that matched those of the South.¹⁰

In all of the cases analyzed here concerns of rise in violent crime and insufficient or inept state response were central. The Klan's law enforcement agenda thus resonated with individuals across regions. However, the rise in crime and the inadequate response from formal institution cannot explain the variation in Klan violence across regions. Notably, differences in state capacity might explain local level variation in violence rather than the more broad regional variation in violence examined here.

Threat

The variable *Political Competition between Parties* in Table 2 is an examination of political threat. The 1920s were a period of low political competition between parties. This was most extreme in the South where the Democratic Party was the only viable electoral option. The variation in political competition does not align with the variation in violence. The Midwest had the second lowest political competition whereas the extremely violent

⁹ Historical Correction Statistics in the United States 1850-1984 U.S Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from: <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/hcsus5084.pdf> (Southwestern states are divided between the South and West in this dataset)

¹⁰ *ibid*

Southwest had relatively higher political competition between parties. These findings suggest that political competition cannot account for the regional variation in violence.

Political threat can explain violence against the black community in the South during Reconstruction, and lynching in the decades that followed. These were intended to suppress the rights of the newly freed black population. This rule of terror was successful in its efforts and the suppression of civil rights was formalized in the Jim Crow laws. The role of elites in this process was particularly prominent in the late 19th century. Concerned about the rise of the Populist Party, elites used lynching to intimidate the black population but also to "other" it and create an impenetrable boundary between blacks and whites, rendering an interethnic coalition impossible (Olzak, 1990; Hale, 2010).

The logic of political competition however does not apply to the 1920s Ku Klux Klan. First, by the early 20th century, racial boundaries were fully entrenched and the voting rights of the black population were entirely suppressed making an interracial coalition inconceivable. Though black veterans returning from WWI did pose a threat in the South it never amounted to an attempt at a large scale organization. Second, most of the violence in both the South and Southwest was not directed at the black population or at other minorities. The violent squads of the Klan acted as a law enforcement branch, enforcing the organization's code of morality and targeting "undesirables" such as bootleggers, the unemployed, adulterers, Klan opposition, and so on. This does not take away from the fact that violent terror against the black population in the South continued during this period,¹¹ as did violent vote suppression (Chalmers, 1987).

The 1920s were a time of vast demographic changes in both the South and Southwest and in the Midwest. Many African Americans moved to cities in the South and the North, and

¹¹ Data available at: EJI <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/>

waves of migration brought new populations to cities all over the country. These demographic changes in combination with rapid industrialization put the white middle class in a state of economic threat and certainly contributed to the Klan's popularity (Maclean, 1994; McVeigh, 2009). There is no reason to believe that the economic threat was more significant in the South and Southwest than it was in other parts of the country. As demonstrated by Table 2 (*Percentage-point change in Black population 1910-1940*) there was no correlation between changes in the black population and Klan violence. Chicago that had the highest growth rates in black population did not experience violence whereas Tulsa that had no change in black population was the most violent city. Moreover, the Midwest also experienced greater rates of international migration.

The class composition of Klan members also does not point at differences in economic threat (Table 2: *Class Composition of Members*). Maclean notes that Klan members were, "If not the best people [...] at least the next best... the good, solid, middle class citizens" (Maclean, 1994, p, 53. ¹²). Using detailed records of the local Klan chapter, Maclean demonstrates that Klan members were predominantly middle class, white collar and lower-level white collar workers, many of them small business owners. For the most part unskilled laborers did not join the movement (Maclean, 1994, pp. 54-56). Kenneth Jackson (1967) finds similar composition of membership in Illinois. Using lists of members published by Klan opposition at the time, Jackson maps the occupation of Klan members (Jackson, 1967, pp. 108, 119-120). Klan members in the cities Jackson examines (Chicago and Aurora) are predominantly white collar workers, whereas in the rural area (Winchester) many of the members were farmers. Other studies as well point at the middle class composition of the Klan in multiple regions. Notable is Fryer and Levitt's study, which utilizes a larger dataset

¹² The quote in MacLean is from Frost, S. (1924). pp- 6,7

than most comparable studies. Overall, they too find support for a middle and lower middle class composition of the Klan.¹³

Regional variation that can account for violence

Ku Klux Klan Message

The movement itself was not sufficiently different to explain the regional variation in violence. Though every Klan branch had autonomy over recruitment and even message, several key factors were very similar throughout. As demonstrated in Table 2 (*Mobilization*) The Klan's recruitment agenda had only minor tweaks between the examined cases. In all the cases, law enforcement, prohibition, and traditional family values were the most important message of the movement. In the Midwest the anti-Catholic sentiment played a greater role than in the Southwest, though in the Southern case of Atlanta, anti-Catholic sentiment was strong. White supremacy was an issue everywhere, though in the South white supremacy was so prevailing within the white population that it was not a major mobilization issue of the Klan (Alexander, 1965; Chalmers, 1987; Jackson, 1967; Pegram, 2011).

Opposition

Finally, I examine in the cases, in particular in the case of Chicago, the role of strong opposition to the Klan. Though opposition to the Klan did not guarantee the absence of violence (Table 2: the variable *Opposition* does not correspond to *KKK Violence*), it did play an important role. Chicago was an extremely violent city and yet the Klan there intentionally refrained from violence. One cause for that is that though the city was violent it did not have recent patterns of EVV. To put a different way, the underworld in Chicago was violent, but the middle class community did not regularly take arms against it. Second, in Chicago there was a strong opposition to the Klan that did seem to make a difference in its struggle against

¹³ Fryer and Levitt (2012) find some variation across branches, but not in accordance with patterns of violence.

the Klan. Still the comparison to Dallas is striking. In Dallas too the Klan faced opposition and it was still one of the most violent branches in the country. Vigilante tradition in the county was very recent and it generated support for the Klan with the community and local law enforcement.¹⁴ Thus, the evidence points at the crucial importance of EVV as an explanatory factor.

Recent Extralegal Vigilante Violence (EVV) and Variation in Violence

Southwest Frontier Justice

While urbanization accelerated all over the country, a process that supported the Klan's spread, in the relatively rural Southwest the growth was especially stark. Between 1910 and 1920 the United States' urban population increased by 28.8 percent, whereas in Arkansas it increased 43.3 percent, in Oklahoma, 68.5 percent and in Texas, 61.2 percent (Alexander, 1965, p. 27). Throughout the Southwest, the growth of cities was accompanied by a sharp rise in crime (Alexander, 1965, pp. 29-32). The most common type of Ku Klux Klan violence in the 1920s was vigilante "law enforcement." The Klan would identify or receive complaints about certain individuals and set out to violently punish the offenders. The victims of Klan violence in these cases were mostly white. This was the movement's attempt to restore social order in a rapidly changing world. This type of violence was similar to the frontier justice that characterized different frontier areas in the previous centuries and decades.

The practice of battling crime outside the legal system was common in the Southwest region, which preserved its frontier character into the 20th century. Vigilance committees which took upon themselves the role of punishing or removing unwanted elements from the

¹⁴ As noted by both Jackson (1967) and Chalmers (1987), more than the Klan policed the citizens, the citizens allowed themselves to be policed by the Klan.

community were common in frontier areas. To that end vigilance committees would obtain suspects, determine their fate, and execute punishments which ranged from flogging to hanging (Brown, 1975). These groups varied in size from a few members to a few hundreds of members in larger settlements (Brown, 1975, pp. 305-319). There was some variation in the relationship of vigilance committees with formal law enforcement. In some places the committees were a substitute for law enforcement altogether, in others they acted as an extension of formal institutions, and more rarely they competed with the police and the justice system. While in the Midwest the practice disappeared by the mid-19th century, in the Southwest the committees were common into the 20th century.

The informal institution of vigilance committees facilitated the Klan's violence in several ways. First, the reason vigilance committees existed to begin with was a shortage of reliable formal law enforcement institutions in frontier areas. It is likely that the existence of vigilance committees in the near past indicates that law enforcement institutions were still lacking in the area by the early 1920s. This implies a straight forward relationship between low state capacity and Klan violence. Where adequate policing was absent, the Klan's vigilante arm filled in an enforcement need. The Klan's brand of law enforcement was of course racist, bigoted, and followed the group's own moral code.

The main mechanism however had to do with the tradition of extralegal vigilante violence of the white community the committees created. Having limited capacity, law enforcement often viewed vigilance committees as working alongside them for the mutual goal of maintaining order rather than as competing organizations. In places where vigilance committees were a recent practice, the chances for acquiescence of local law enforcement to Klan violence or even cooperation with the Klan violent arms were likely high. There is evidence for such cooperation: in the South and the Southwest, the Klan obtained its victims directly from police custody, and in many cases victims were released abruptly from police

custody and then taken by the Klan (Chalmers, 1987, p. 52). In addition, the Klan was deeply embedded in local law enforcement.

The connection between the Klan and law enforcement was not limited to the South and Southwest. In the Midwest police officers joined the Klan as well.¹⁵ However, in the Midwest there was also far greater opposition to the Klan within the justice system as I demonstrate in the case of Chicago. The message that the Klan was not a legitimate law enforcement actor was the key difference between the South and Southwest and other regions. The recent past of vigilante policing in the Southwest, and the long history of extralegal coercion toward African Americans in the South I discuss below, made communities in these regions amenable to the Klan's brand of coercion even if they were not Klan members themselves.

Dallas, Texas

The Klan arrived in Dallas in late 1920. Dallas had the highest per capita members in the country. In 1924 membership reached 13,000 out of a population of 160,000.¹⁶ In 1923 a Women of the Ku Klux Klan auxiliary organization (WKKK) was formed in the county. Though in the beginning upper class and upper middle class citizens joined the Klan, it soon became a middle class and lower middle class organization. The Klan gained support from multiple local officials in Dallas including the police commissioner, the police chief, as well as from several significant church ministers. On the other hand, there was significant opposition. The *Dallas Morning News* continuously published editorials warning against and condemning the actions of the Klan. Also opposing the organization were Dallas mayor

¹⁵ Fryer and Levitt 2012 find variation in policemen membership in the Klan in the few locations in their dataset. However they find that in Bowling Green Ohio (their only Midwest location), most or all of the police force was a part of the Klan.

¹⁶ 10K members in 1922, the organization gained 98,000 dollars from initiation fees that year. The data is from Jackson (1967); and Chalmers (1987). Population data is based on the 1920 census (158,976)

Shawnie R. Aldrege, the Dallas County Citizen's League, an organization of business and church leaders opposing the Klan, and other notable citizens.

The two sources on Klan violence in Dallas indicate that there were hundreds of violent incidents during the height of violence in 1921-1922. The newspaper *New York World* published a series of exposé papers on the Klan in 1921. It documented sixty cases of flogging in Dallas County during the spring of 1921 alone (Alexander, 1965; Blee, 2008; Chalmers, 1987; Jackson, 1967). In addition, a violent attack on a couple suspected of adultery in the county led to public outcry and investigators were sent from Houston. During the investigation it was revealed that the Klan imposed a reign of terror during which there was approximately one flogging per week over the span of eighteen months.¹⁷

In response to Klan violence, Dallas mayor asked the Klan to disband and requested that all city employees resign from the Klan. A few complied with the request but many did not. In terms of combatting the spread of extralegal vigilante violence, the city was not faring well. The first allegations against Klan members were investigated in 1922. Two store owners identified their attackers as three off duty Dallas police officers. However, the grand jury convened returned no indictments, and the policemen were only suspended for a short period (Jackson, 1967, p. 68). Responding to the incident, the Dallas Police Commissioner told his officers to forget about charges brought against members of the force. This was not an isolated incident. In Dallas, as in Tulsa, which is discussed next, investigations against the Klan were rare, indictments in even more so, and convictions occurred in only a handful of what were likely thousands of cases of Klan violence across the region. Every step of the way there were forces blocking action against Klan violence. In the case of Dallas, members of

¹⁷ Chalmers, 1987, pp. 44-45. 25 Klansmen pleaded guilty in the flogging case of the couple in Goose Creek and were fined.

the community and local police essentially worked alongside the Klan. In the case of Tulsa, the community and local law protected the Klan against external state authorities.

Tulsa, Oklahoma

During the 1920s Oklahoma experienced the highest number of Klan violent incidents: Klan floggings numbered in the hundreds, if not thousands, with Tulsa County leading the state in violent incidents (Chalmers, 1987; Alexander, 1965). The Klan entered Tulsa in early 1921. That year the organization already had over 3000 members of the 72,075 population. At its height, membership in Oklahoma reached 90,000, one in every twenty Oklahomans. The Klan thus had members from different walks of life, but it was mostly a middle and lower middle class organization. At the end of May 1921 a massive race riot broke in Tulsa. Although the Klan was not directly linked, these were the conditions for the rise of the organization. By 1922, the Klan was holding the city under a reign of terror. In Tulsa, as in other cities in Oklahoma, the organization had specialized violent units, including whipping squads. These squads abducted people from main streets and private homes, flogged, tarred, and feathered whomever the organization deemed immoral. The violence was controlled by the local branch rather than the whipping squads on the ground. Victims of the Klan were afraid to report the violence as many officials were themselves members of the Klan and retaliation was a very real concern.

The Klan did not face much opposition in Tulsa, but its main opposition in the state was Governor Jack Walton. Walton was a corrupt and inept governor, and the struggle between him and the Klan was personal and political more than it was ideological. In 1923, Walton escalated the struggle by placing Tulsa County under martial law following the flogging of a Jewish man directly after the man was released from police custody (Chalmers, 1987, pp. 51-53). Walton later placed the entire state under martial law in response to Klan violence. Under martial law, hundreds of flogging incidents were investigated in Tulsa

County alone. Although 31 Klan members were accused of whipping acts in the county, most charges were dropped-- only one Klansman was sentenced to prison and he was pardoned after the governor was replaced (Alexander, 1965).

Military officials that conducted the 1923 investigations faced challenges from both local police and the population. Though some victims testified and brought evidence against the Klan, it was difficult to find other cooperating witnesses and again in this case, juries did not convict Klansmen. Moreover, in the case of Oklahoma, the white protestant population was distinctly on the side of the Klan in the struggle against Governor Walton. Martial law was considered a line crossing that would diminish the reputation of the new state and scare off potential tourists and investors. The governor was impeached and replaced later in 1923.

The difficulty in securing the cooperation of the community and local law enforcement is best expressed by the most notable case of Klan violence of the era, the Mer Rouge murders. In Morehouse parish Louisiana, four white men were abducted, two of whom were murdered, which then ignited violent tensions between Klan supporters and opposition. The initial investigation by local law enforcement did not generate any indictments. Louisiana governor John Parker, who was one of the strongest opponents of the Klan in the South and Southwest, requested and received federal assistance. Eventually after many attacks in the region and personal violent attacks on him, the governor too declared martial law on Morehouse Parish. Despite a thorough investigation and hundreds of testimonies, the grand jury refused to return indictments in the case. The state still charged a couple of dozens of Klansmen but the charges were viewed as political persecution, and they were finally dropped in 1924. The case represents the higher profile cases of Klan violence. At the local level, no action was taken, and when state and federal level officials intervened, the local community thwarted action against the Klan. The Mer Rouge murders gained national

interest. In most cases in the region however, no measures were taken at all even though the identity of the law violators was known to their communities.

South Racist Violence

Over ninety percent of recorded incidents of Klan violence occurred in former slave states.¹⁸ Thus, a common interpretation of the variation in Klan violence is the racially repressive structure of Southern states. This explanation however faces a significant challenge. Much of the Klan's violence was not directed at the black population. Even in the Deep South, more than half of the victims were white.¹⁹ While a few of the white victims were "accused" of assisting the black community (e.g. lawyers representing black clients), most were violating the Klan's moral code by threatening family values, breaking the laws of prohibition, or opposing to the Klan.

Accounting for patterns of lynching in the South between the 1880s and the 1950s, Clarke (1998) identifies a sub culture of violence in the South, "...the defining elements in a subculture of violence are high and enduring rates of personal violence that are condoned and facilitated by a widely shared ethos."²⁰ The South was the most violent region in the United States. Homicide rates were consistently higher in the South compared to the rest of the country (Gastil, 1971). Slavery, the agreement among whites of all classes on matters of race, oppression of the black population through violence following the Civil war, "lynch laws", as well as other forms of violence made the South into a place where violence was a part of the ethos of the white community (Clarke, 1998).

The Klan's victims in the South were black and white, but the type of violence directed at them did differ. The Klan rarely lynched white victims, whereas lynching of black

¹⁸ Johnson, 1922 p. 444. The report is from 1922 but likely represents later years as well. Most of the movement's organized violence ended by 1923.

¹⁹ Maclean

²⁰ Clarke, 1998 p. 276 the general discussion of subculture of violence is based on Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967). On Southern culture of violence see also Gastil (1971); Nisbett and Cohen (1996).

victims was recorded far more often. However, the overall rates of lynching in the South during this period did not rise. There was a steady decline in this brutal practice from the 1890s onwards. The surge in violence brought on by the Klan contributed to a rise in other forms of violence (flogging, feathering and tarring), and other targets (white victims). Thus, the patterns of Klan violence were not merely a continuation of Southern racist violence, but they were influenced by these practices that left both the population and local law enforcement more likely to view a violent vigilante group as an extension of the law.

Atlanta, Georgia

Atlanta was the capital of the Klan. The organization was formed there in 1915, and the city was the home of Klan headquarters. Though this incarnation of the Klan was formed in 1915, the organization was not publically notable until 1920. Of Atlanta's 200,000 residents, a third were black, and approximately two percent were foreign-born whites (Jackson, 1967). In Atlanta, several politicians and ministers were associated with the Klan. Even those who were not directly associated with the organization accepted the premise of white Protestant supremacy. For example, following Klan mobilization, the Atlanta City Council passed a resolution in 1921 denouncing the large Catholic organization *Knights of Columbia* as un-American. The Klan faced little opposition in the city with the one exception of the city mayor who took steps to block masked parades.

Local law enforcement in the Atlanta as elsewhere in the South viewed the Klan as an extension rather than a competitive organization, and the community ascended to the Klan's vigilante activities. Klan victims were sometimes taken directly from police custody. This practice was not unique to the Klan and was typical to lynch mobs in the region.²¹ The Atlanta city police set out to investigate and intimidate Klan opposition, and did not investigate Klan violence. Though there was an epidemic of Klan flogging in Atlanta, no

²¹ See for example the abduction and lynching of Leo Frank which was one of the precursors to the 1920s KKK.

arrests were made, no cases opened. As noted above, though in Atlanta the rhetoric of the Klan was strongly white Protestant supremacist the violence was not directed at minorities, yet the police still aided the Klan and the community turned to its law enforcement services (Chalmers, 1987).

A strong indication of the community's acceptance of Klan law was that individuals would turn to the Klan to resolve issues through violence. Women asked that their estranged husbands be punished, people turned in family members, neighbors, or local vagrants (Maclean, 1994). The Klan was an authority of order to the community from which it emerged.

The 1920s South was racist and it continuously suppressed black civil and human rights through legal and extra-legal coercion. The Ku Klux Klan must be viewed in that context. Researchers are divided on the level of threat to the status quo of racial hierarchy the Southern white community was experiencing during this period. In the aftermath of WWI black veterans and the communities they returned to were altered, and newly articulated grievances in the black community turned into dissent. Some scholars argue that this underlying dissent continued into the 1920s and was perceived as a significant threat by the white population (Johnson, 1922; Maclean, 1994). Others however, believe that despite the general unrest of the period (Race riots a few years prior; Northern Migration; urbanization and economic changes for the black and white communities), the status quo of racial segregation was not threatened (Alexander, 1965; Moore, 1997). It is likely that much of the Klan's violence against the black population was a continuation of racist Southern practices intended to maintain the status quo. However, the racist system cannot account for the movement's violence against white individuals or the extremity of violence in the Southwest, even in non-slave states. Instead, traditions of violence as part of the local ethos better explains all the Klan's patterns of violence.

Midwest

Chicago, Illinois

In 1920 Chicago was the second largest city in the United States (2.7M). The diverse population included a million Catholics, 800,000 foreign born immigrants, 125,000 Jews, and 110,000 African Americans. Prejudice toward Catholics was deeply entrenched,²² and the city suffered from vehement struggles between the Klan and opposition in the early 1920s.

The Klan moved into Chicago in mid-1921. By early 1922, the city had the largest number of Klan members (but not the largest percentage), and unlike other cities it had multiple Klan chapters. Klan members in the city were mostly white collar workers.²³ Among its supporters were several ministers. Notable opponents to the Klan were many and included an organization formed to combat the Klan locally and nationally, the American Unity League (AUL), as well as several national civil rights organizations, the Chicago City Council, the Chief of Police, the Chicago Tribune,²⁴ the Chicago daily News, Catholic publication, the central black newspaper, the Defender, notable judges, and ministers.

The AUL employed the aid of spies, and continuously exposed names of Klan members in the newspaper *Tolerance*. This caused financial hardship to Klan member business owners who were boycotted by Catholics, Jews, blacks, and other Klan opposition. The Chicago US Attorney investigated the Klan as soon as the organization arrived, and deemed that it was likely to cause disorder, but was not illegal. In addition, Cook County Criminal Court Chief Justice Michael McKinley prohibited Klan members from serving as jury members. The act was controversial even for Klan opposition for violating civil rights.

²² American Protective Association among other late 19 century anti Catholic legacies.

²³ Using lists of members published by Klan opposition at the time, Jackson (1967) maps the occupation of Klan members. Klan members in the cities Jackson examines (Chicago and Aurora) are predominantly white collar workers, whereas in the rural area (Winchester) many of the members were farmers. pp. 108, 119-120

²⁴ Tribune preferred not to give the Klan publicity by an open struggle claiming in an editorial the organization like other hateful organizations was a fleeting phenomenon.

In Chicago then, the Klan had the support of a large community, but it also faced strong opposition from both middle class members of society, and local officials and law enforcement.²⁵ As a result, the Klan urged its members not to use violence. This was not merely a façade of objection to violence as the movement's leaders often expressed.²⁶ Klan members were warned that the Klan would denounce and try them if they were caught in acts of violence, and indeed the record of the group in the city was nearly free of direct violence (Jackson, 1967, p.100). This behavior of the Klan points at the movement's concern that the community and law enforcement in the city would not accept extralegal violence as legitimate.

Chicago was an extremely violent city. It had extensive underworld activity and high murder rates. Notably however, it did not have a recent history of EVV. Vigilance committees were common in the region before the 1850s and entirely disappeared by the 1860s (Brown, 1975, P. 309).

Indianapolis, Indiana

Indianapolis was the seat of the strongest Klan chapter in the Midwest because of a combination of very high membership and the leadership of D.C. Stephenson, a key national Klan leader.²⁷ The Klan arrived in the city in March 1921. By 1923 it had 28,000 members and by 1924, 40,000 members of the 317,194 Indianapolis population (Jackson, 1967). Less diverse than Chicago, Indianapolis had 60,000 first and second generation immigrants, 12 percent Catholics, and approximately 40,000 African Americans.²⁸ The Klan received strong support from the White Protestant population and by 1923 a substantial WKKK operated

²⁵ On Catholic response to the Klan in the Midwest see: Jacobs (2001); Tucker (2004).

²⁶ See for example the testimony of William Joseph Simmons in Congress in 1921 available at: The Ku-Klux Klan: Hearings Before the Committee on Rules, House of Representatives, Sixty-seventh Congress, First Session, 1921.

²⁷ Stephenson was later involved in the Klan's greatest scandal when he was convicted in the rape and murder of Marge Oberholtzer, a young state employee (Lutholtz, 1991)

²⁸ Jackson, 1967. The number of African Americans in Indianapolis doubled from 1910 to 1930.

alongside the Klan to organize family events like fairs and large picnics. Ministers were among the notable supporters, and many Klan events were held in churches. As elsewhere Klan members were mostly middle and lower middle class citizens, though due to the immense popularity of the organization members from all walks of life were represented (Moore, 1997). The Klan was not opposed by many notable Protestants as it was in Dallas and Chicago.²⁹

The Klan first arrived in town as a vigilante organization intended to battle crime. Under Stephenson's leadership, the Klan used old Indiana legislation to become the *Horse Thief Detective Association*. According to the 1852 law, vigilante groups fighting thieves could receive official state certification which allowed them to operate as constables without the regulations that applied to police officers. These vigilante associations were similar to frontier Vigilance Committees but they disappeared from the Indiana landscape decades before the 1920s (Brown, 1975; Jackson, 1967; Wade, 1998). The last vigilante organization operated in Indiana (and not in Indianapolis) in the late 1860s.

In some respects, the Klan did act as a vigilante organization in Indianapolis. It intimidated minority populations by marching in black neighborhoods, and attempting to burn crosses; it mobilized against Catholics in office and against Catholic schools; and it intimidated bootleggers and politicians alike to conform to Klan values. However, the organization was not linked to acts of direct violence despite the absence of strong opposition as in the case of Chicago.

²⁹ One enemy who did target the Klan was Indianapolis mayor Samuel Lewis Shanks. Shanks spoke out against the organization and banned masked demonstrations and cross burnings. The Klan targeted him in the city's Klan publication, *Fiery Cross*. Eventually Shanks ran for governor but lost to Klan nominee Edward Jackson; The AUL, the same organization that exposed Klan members in Chicago attempted the same strategy in Indianapolis, but the exposure of names was minimal and it did not negatively impact the members because of strong support from the Protestant community and the relatively small numbers of Catholics.

Conclusions

This paper demonstrated patterns of Klan violence in the South and Southwest. Local law enforcement authorities cooperated with the movement; the community persistently defended the Klan as silent witnesses to acts of violence, as lenient jurors, and as voters against Klan rivals. These patterns point to the central role of the community in the Klan's choice of violent tactics. Granted, the most prominent difference between the South and Southwest and the rest of the country was the regime of segregation. I acknowledge the importance of this fundamental difference in accounting for Klan violence. But I argue that the history of violence in these areas generated a community including local law enforcement personnel that viewed extralegal vigilante violence as part of legitimate society, and as an extension of formal institution. As such the Ku Klux Klan could police the black population as well as others that mainstream white society viewed as undesirable.

In general the 1920s were a time of vast technological, economic, and demographic change. In the United States these years brought on mass industrialization and urbanization, worker unions, women suffrage, and a new youth culture. These threatened to empower new groups, and upset traditional ways of life. Far more than other fraternal groups, the Ku Klux Klan seized on and augmented the fear of change felt by white Protestant men. Maclean finds that members of the Klan tended to experience economic uncertainty. Some of them recently joined the middle class and were afraid to lose the new gains; others were small business owners just on the verge of economic security. The Klan blamed their existential insecurity less on large economic forces and more on immigrants and minorities and the corrupt values they spread in white Protestant American society.

The rapid changes and the anxiety of the lower middle class that gave rise to the Klan in the 1920s resemble the current social and political climate. The case of the Klan therefore

has several key takeaways for the present day rise of populism. First, though the Klan's message of fear and hate was powerful everywhere, it only led to harsh violence in places that had a tradition of violence where the community was accustomed to and willing to be policed by a vigilante group. Today too we see and should expect to continue seeing that some communities experience more populist violence- those that have been forgotten by the state and are generally more violent. It is in those neighborhoods that populist violence is more likely, not because they are more racist or even because their economic condition is more precarious, but because vigilante violence is a legitimate tactic of policing for generally law abiding citizens.

Second, the movement was short lived. By 1926 it virtually disappeared, remaining active only in a few Southern strongholds. The movement collapsed from within- it was extremely corrupt and some of its key leaders were involved in large scale scandal which included the rape and murder of a teen (Lutholtz, 1991). But it also failed to deliver on its political promise (Chalmers, 1987). However, this wave of populism left in place a racist immigration act that survived for four decades, a legacy of exclusion that will reemerge again in the US in following decades, and the individual suffering of Klan victims, their families, and many whose lives were transformed because of the movement. For example, the intimidation in the South was so extreme that some black communities left their homes and lived in the woods for months, and many Jews left Atlanta in the post war years out of fear for their safety.

The case of the 1920s Ku Klux Klan is interesting both as a test case for right wing populist violence, and as part of long traditions of populism, exclusion, and violence in American society. Though it has been mostly forgotten for decades, the case has been

drawing both scholarly and popular attention recently.³⁰ The investigation into the case presented here would greatly benefit from detailed local data on Klan violence. Such data is not readily available because of the decentralized nature of the Klan, significant underreporting of Klan crimes, and biased reporting (for example cases of violence against white victims received more attention than violence against black victims). Hopefully, an exhaustive study focusing on the Klan's crimes in key locations can overcome these challenges.

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³⁰ See for example, Gordon (2017); McAndrew (2017); Kitchener (2017).

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