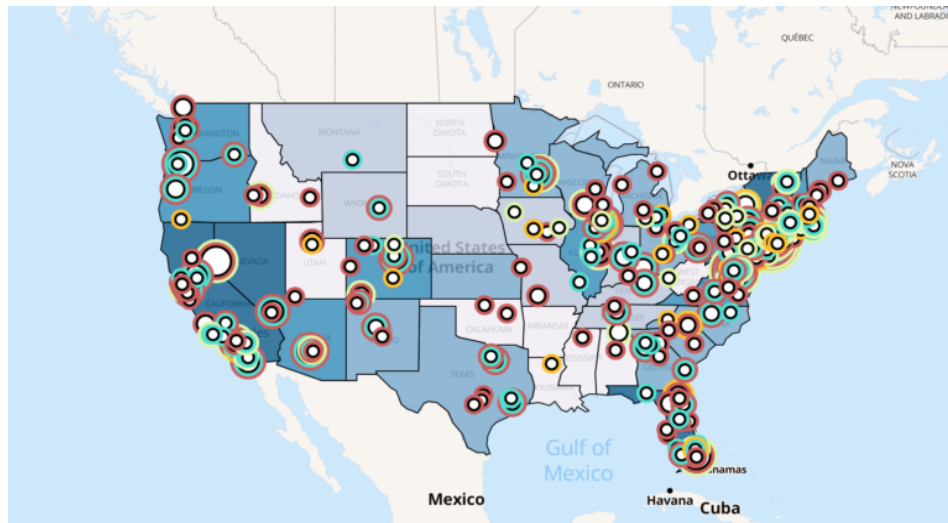# The Swastika Counter Project
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tracking Signs of Antisemitism in the United States (January 2016-January 2021)

Report by Laurie E. Gries and Kelly L. Wheeler

August 2024

ABSTRACT

*To better understand how visual signs contribute to contemporary antisemitism in the United States, **The Swastika Counter Project** tracked the circulation of swastikas between January 2016 and January 2021, the time period when Donald Trump came to dominate American politics. Based on a five-year public humanities project implemented by a team of interdisciplinary scholars with expertise in visual communication, critical geography, and social justice education, this report identifies data findings from the investigation of 1340 swastika incidents to help identify not only where and how swastikas surfaced across the United States but also who they targeted, what messages they conveyed, how they were reported, and how communities responded.*

Content Warning: This report offers descriptive findings that include disturbing details of swastika incidents. This report may trigger a variety of emotions for readers, and we ask that you are mindful of this as you explore this report. As researchers, we recognize a danger exists in drawing attention and thus recirculating this act of violence; this report could be used to amplify white supremacist ideologies and acts, possibly even putting some people and communities in further danger. However, in exposing the contemporary harm that swastikas do, we hope to provoke critical examination and stimulate dialogue about the ongoing visibility and materiality of swastikas; provide reliable data for anti-hate activism; and motivate education and community action to help de-escalate antisemitism, white supremacy, and white nationalism in the United States.

THE SWASTIKA COUNTER PROJECT: AN OVERVIEW

CONTEXT

[The Swastika Counter Project](#) is a public humanities project developed by Dr. Laurie Gries (CU Boulder), Dr. Kelly Wheeler (Curry College), and an interdisciplinary group of scholars, teachers, and students at CU Boulder and the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor to study how the swastika circulates and operates in the contemporary United States. Using the method of iconographic tracking, **The Swastika Counter Project** (henceforth referred to as SCP) investigated a total of 1340 swastika incidents that occurred between January 1, 2016 and January 20, 2021, the time period when Donald Trump came to dominate American politics.

The idea for SCP emerged shortly after the 2016 presidential election when an onslaught of incidents of hate and bias were occurring in the United States—from attacks on Jewish community centers to personally-mediated attacks against Muslim, Latino, and gay students. Due to such increased violence, which many linked to the rise of Donald Trump and his insightful rhetoric[1], a number of organizations, such as the Southern Poverty Law Center, ProPublica, ThinkProgress, and New American Media, began to document incidents of hate and bias in order to help account for this troubling phenomenon. Such data activism is necessary, ProPublica explained, because as of 2016, "there is simply no reliable national data on hate crimes. And no governmental agency documents lower-level incidents of harassment and intimidation."[2] As such, ProPublica argued, we need more new, creative approaches

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[1]Reports linking Donald Trump's rhetoric to increased violence were being published at the time by many activist and news organizations. See Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016; Moyer, 2016; Sidahmed 2016. See also more recent publications such as: Villareal, 2020.

[2] ProPublica, 2017.

to document and understand both high-level and low-level incidents of hate—"from hate-inspired murders to anti-Semitic graffiti to racist online trolling."[3]

SCP is a direct response to ProPublica's call to action. Around the time of Donald Trump's inauguration, Dr. Laurie Gries began noticing that a troubling wave of swastikas was sweeping across the United States and drawing intense concern as news reports emerged almost daily to report various sightings. In January of 2017 alone, for instance, a sticker with a swastika and the word "bomb" appeared on the bathroom wall of the Jewish Community Center of Staten Island. One day earlier in Toledo, Ohio, a Muslim family arrived home to find a swastika with the word "F*ck Arabs" spray painted on their garage door. And just weeks later, a swastika surfaced on the Mexican Consulate in Las Vegas, Nevada. Early data collection for SCP confirmed that such swastika incidents were targeting a wide range of marginalized peoples and communities, often going so far as to make explicit, violent threats when delivered with accompanying texts. Simultaneously, swastikas were surfacing in relation to Donald Trump, sometimes to show support, and other times to critique his widely-acknowledged appeals to white nationalism. Considering such widespread circulation and diverse functions, SCP began tracing, mapping, and analyzing swastikas that were surfacing on the ground in the United States in order to help document how this historical act of antisemitism was taking on both new and renewed actions.

METHODS AND SOURCES

Iconographic Tracking is a digital research method developed by Laurie Gries to study the circulation, uptake, and consequentiality of images across time and space.[4] SCP adapted this method to search for swastika incidents that occurred between January 1, 2016 to January 20, 2021, the period roughly between Donald Trump's entrance into the 2016 Republican presidential primary and his last day in the oval office. Using the search term "swastika," data was collected one month at a time via Google's image and text-based search engines. While certainly not comprehensive, researchers documented 1340 swastikas on the streets of the United States during this time period.

Four interrelated questions guided our initial research of these swastika incidents:

- Where are swastikas surfacing on the streets of the United States as Donald Trump gains presidential power?

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[3] Ibid.
[4] Gries, 2015.

- How are swastikas surfacing in terms of media, and with what other signs and texts?

- Who are swastikas targeting and who is spreading them?

- How are swastika incidents being reported and how are people and communities responding to swastika incidents?

To address these questions, researchers spent five years collecting, tagging, coding, mapping, and analyzing the documented 1300+ swastika incidents. To locate data, we read through thousands of incident accounts published in national and local newspapers, magazines, religious publications, student newspapers, organization websites, social media sites, etc. We then tagged and coded data related to the following:

- geographical location (city, state),
- date (day, month, year)
- reported source (national newspaper, local news, student newspaper, etc.)
- reporting frames (vandalism, graffiti, symbol of hate, racist message, etc.),
- accompanying text ("Trump," "Heil Hitler," etc.),
- accompanying pictorial elements (iron cross, Star of David, etc.),
- media (spray paint, marker, pinecones, etc),
- site of swastika incident (public space, local business, college, etc.),
- specific location (dorm building, library, restaurant, etc.)
- structure (bathroom stall, park bench, urban wall, automobile, etc.),
- targeted individual/community (race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, etc.)
- perpetrator (identified by gender and race/ethnicity)
- community response (identified by actor (police, school administrator, parents, etc.) and rhetorical move (arrest, statement, vigil, etc.)

To ensure reliability, all incidents were cross checked across multiple reporting sources and double coded by researchers. See Appendix A of this report to learn how data was coded/tagged, and to learn more about our research methods, see our data biography page on the SCP data advocacy website (https://theswastikacounter.org).

PROJECT GOALS

Based on our data findings, SCP established **5** main goals:

- deepen contemporary understandings about swastikas

- study how circulating swastikas function to uphold antisemitism and white power in the 21st century

- identify the relationship between swastikas and Donald Trump.

- identify how communities are responding to swastika incidents and struggling to adequately address antisemitism in the United States.

- generate reliable, open-source data to assist various stakeholders working on legislation, education, community support, and activism.

To learn more about SCP, please visit our data advocacy website (https://theswastikacounter.org) where you will find more details about our motivation and mission as well as our research and our team. On this website, you can also interact with maps; download data and visualizations; discover educational resources; and access this report along with a Community Response Report. NOTE: You can also access large-format data visualizations that are shareable and downloadable on our Tableau Public page.

DATA FINDINGS

LOCATIONS AND SITES OF SWASTIKA INCIDENTS

Swastika incidents proliferated in both private and public places across the United States between January 2016 and January 2021. Commonly targeted locations include religious institutions, public parks, local businesses, and private homes and automobiles. Higher education institutions and K-12 schools, however, were the most frequently targeted locations.

Sites of Swastika Incidents (January 2016 - January 2021)

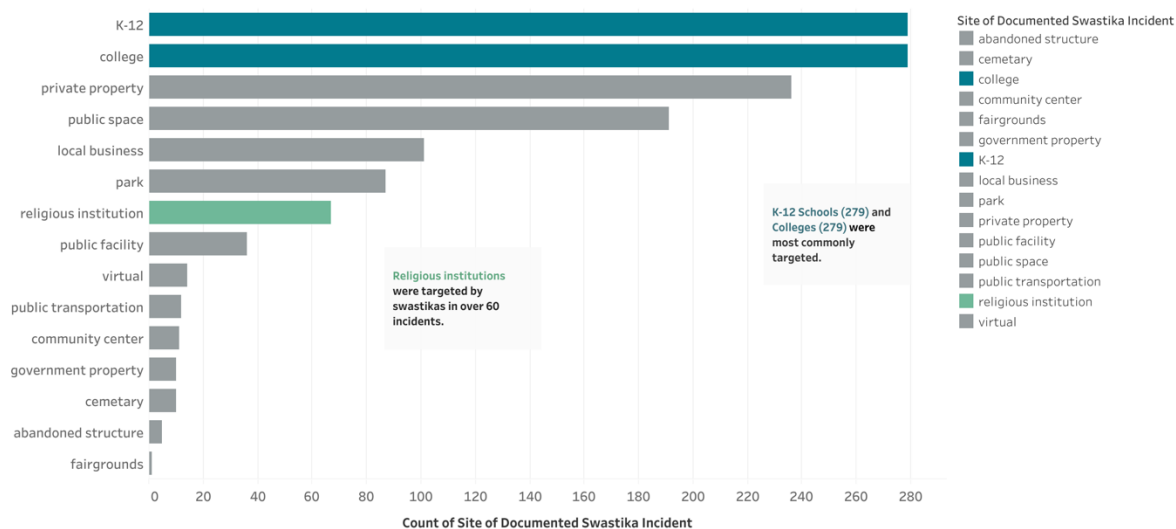Data Source: http://theswastikacounter.org/

Figure 1: Sites of Swastika Incidents (January 2016 - January 2021. For a larger resolution image, click on the figure to visit our Tableau Public Page.

Swastika incidents occurred between January 2016 and January 2021 in all **48** contiguous states and the District of Columbia. Swastika were documented most frequently in New York, California, and Massachusetts with the majority of incidents documented in the Northeast region of the United States. Data also indicates swastikas were most often documented in Democratic leaning states with the highest Jewish populations. The least amount of swastika incidents were documented in the Midwest, with only 1 incident documented in each of the following states: Arkansas, Hawaii, West Virginia, Wyoming, and Mississippi.

Over **18%** of the incidents occurred on private property such as businesses, homes, and automobiles. Over **20%** of incidents occurred in public spaces such as urban walls, public parks, and public facilities. K-12 schools, colleges, and universities across America experienced **42%** of the documented swastika incidents, triggering alarm in many educational contexts.
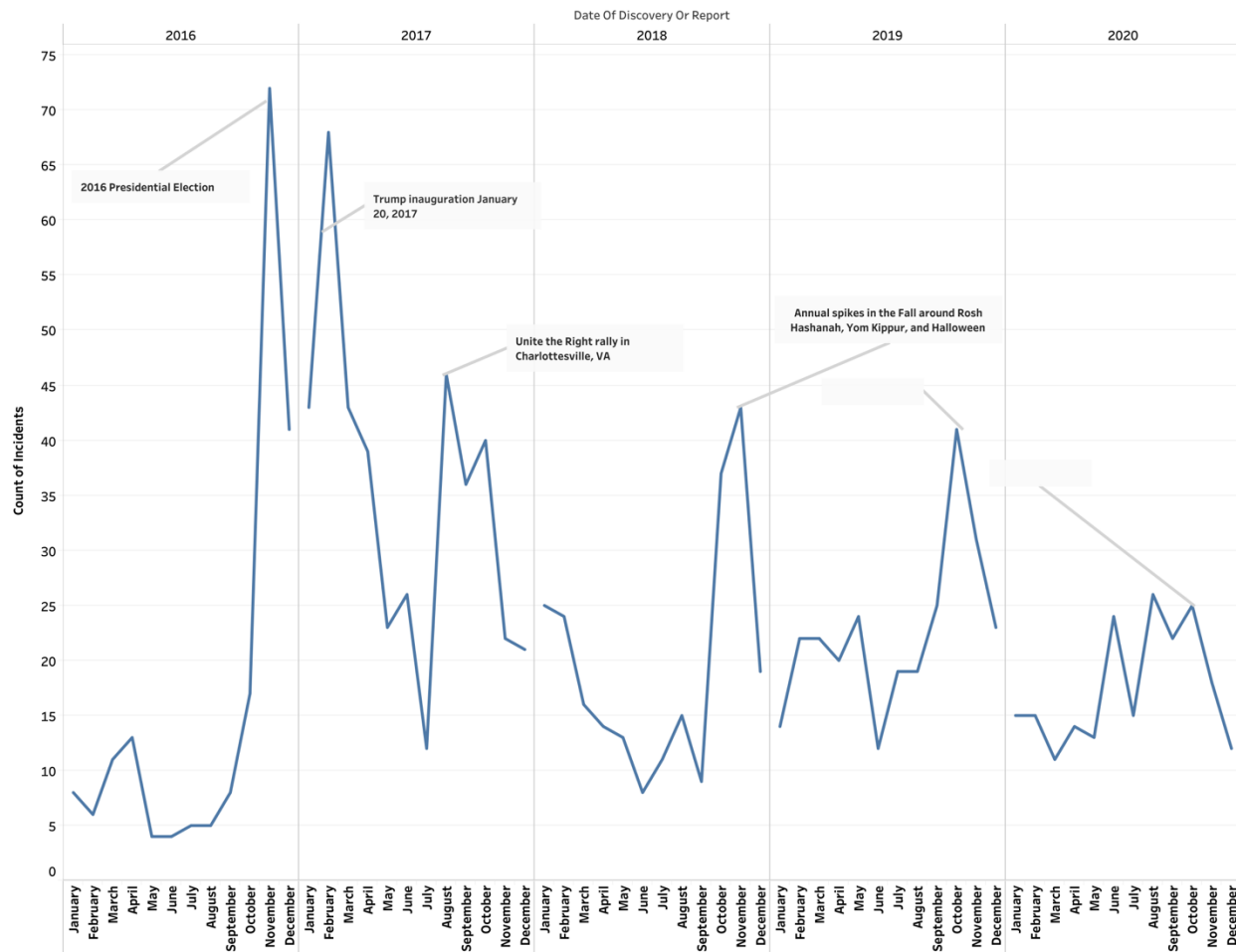
An interactive map documenting the location of swastika incidents in the United States between January 2016 and January 2021 can be accessed on The Swastika Counter Project's data advocacy website.

DATES OF SWASTIKA INCIDENTS

Swastika incidents persisted unevenly between January 2016 and January 2021 but escalated around the 2016 presidential election

and Donald Trump's inauguration in January of 2017. Swastika incidents also rose near Jewish High Holidays as well as the 2017 Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, NC.

Fluctuation of Swastika Incidents in the United States (January 2016 – January 2021)

Dates based on day of month that swastikas were discovered, and in some cases when that information was not available, dates that swastika incidents were reported.
Data Source: http://theswastikacounter.org/

Figure 2: Timeline of Swastika Incidents (January 2016 - January 2021). For a Larger Resolution Image, click on the figure to visit our Tableau Public Page.

Over **70** swastika incidents were documented around the 2016 presidential election in which Donald Trump won the Electoral College, with over **40** swastika incidents occurring the month of his inauguration in January 2017. This evidence may be unsurprising, considering that around that same time, the FBI, anti-hate organizations, and various news sources were reporting that Donald Trump's rhetoric was directly related to increased incidents of hate, bias, and violence happening around the country. In the **20** swastika incidents that occurred within 10 days after the Unite the Right Rally in August 2017, Trump was explicitly referenced in **8** of those incidents with expressions of support

such as "Go-Trump."

Examples:

Vallejo, CA. 11/9/2016. The day after Donald Trump was elected, a swastika with the words "White Power" and a racist slur were found spraypainted outside a bathroom in a public park. Reported by *The Jewish News of California*.

Cincinnati, OH. 1/21/2017. A day after Donald Trump's presidential inauguration, spray painted swastikas and the word Trump surfaced alongside forceful dismissals of Black Americans and LGBTQ+ community members outside a high school in Hyde Park. Reported by 9WCPO Cincinnati.

Bakersfield, CA. 8/15/2017. Days after the "Unite the Right Rally" in Charlottesville, a neighborhood fence was spray painted with the phrase, "WAR IS COMING." Reported by *Bakersfield Now*.

The Fall, in general, had notable spikes in swastika incidents as evident in the consistent high incident rates between September and November of each year in our data set. Such spikes in incident rates may very well occur due to the highly visible Jewish holidays that take place in the fall such as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. During the days of these two holidays in the years 2016-2021, for instance, **~40** swastika incidents took place, with **14** occurring during these holidays in 2017 alone. Halloween also proved to be a popular day for swastika incidents, with **1-4** swastikas surfacing every Halloween day between 2016 and 2020.

Examples:

Brooklyn, NY. **10/3/17**. During Yom Kippur, letters were mailed to at least seven locations, including Jewish owned businesses, with a swastika and text that reads "MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!!! JUDEN RAUS [Jews Out]. N*****S AND F*****S MUST BURN IN HELL. CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IS BACK." Reported by *Pix 11*.

Durham, NC. 10/31/2018. On Halloween night, a pumpkin with a swastika carved into it, as well as flyers with the words "It's okay to be white," were discovered on the campus of Duke University. Reported in *The Chronicle*.
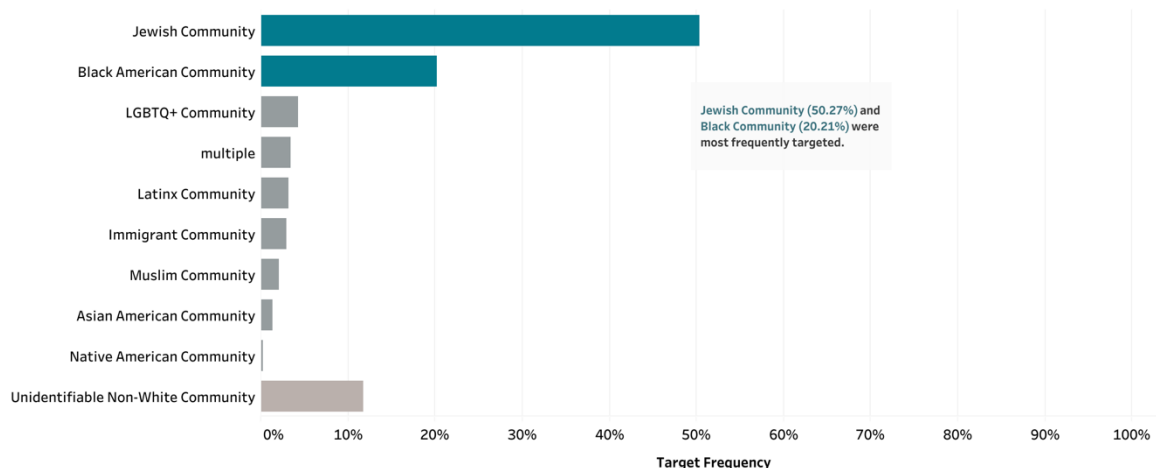
Racine, WI. 9/22/2019. A swastika and the word, "Jude," the German word for Jew, was found spray painted on a synagogue a week before the High Holy Holidays of Rosh Hashanah. Reported by *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*.

TARGETED COMMUNIITIES OF SWASTIKAS

Between January 2016 and January 2021, Jewish people and communities were most often directly targeted by swastikas. This

finding indicates how the swastika is still a very active weapon of antisemitism, catalyzing fresh acts of assault and trauma that map onto past histories of discrimination and violence against Jews in the United States and abroad.

Groups Targeted by Swastikas in the United States (January 2016-January 2021)

Data Source: http://theswastikacounter.org/

Figure 3: Groups Targeted by Swastikas in the United States (January 2016 - January 2021). For a Larger Resolution Image, click on the figure to visit our Tableau Public Page.

It is important to recognize that in many eyes, swastikas are always targeting the Jewish community due to the swastika's longstanding historical links with antisemitism. Yet, in our data set, we can only confirm who the swastikas are directly targeting in 400 of documented swastika incidents based on our coding of where swastikas surfaced and with what accompanying texts and images. Of those 400, we identified **192** incidents in which Jewish community members were explicitly targeted, which equates to **48%** of the documented swastika documents in which targeted individuals or communities were identifiable. According to documentations of these incidents, Jewish synagogues and temples (**23**), chabad houses (**3**), and Jewish community centers (**7**) were commonly targeted. However, the homes (**27**) and businesses (**7**) of Jews were also frequently assaulted with swastikas.

In K-12 and college settings, swastikas commonly surfaced on the desks and dorm doors of Jewish students as well in more public places such as elevators and bathrooms. As detailed below in this report, texts accompanying swastikas often compounded the violent threats to Jews, going so far to directly call for their annihilation and disempowerment and thereby contributing to the intensification of insecurity felt among Jews that has been oft-reported in recent years.

Examples:

Ann Arbor, MI. 8/18/2017. A swastika and the words "Jews Die" and "Free USA" were discovered in Veteran's Memorial Park. Reported by *Jewish Telegraph Agency.*

Athens, GA. 10/6/2019. Just months after a symbol of their Jewish sorority was torn down from their dorm door, a Jewish student found a swastika and the word "Heil" drawn on the dry-erase board hanging on their door. Reported by *The Red and Black*.

Oakland, CA. 10/20/2020. A swastika was spray-painted over a Star of David carving on the front door of a Jewish temple, where just fifteen days earlier another swastika had appeared with the words "Bye-bye-evil-evil-evil-Jews." Reported by *Times Union*.

While the Jewish community received the largest brunt of swastika attacks, Black Americans and many other historically marginalized individuals were also and often targeted, indicating how antisemitism in the contemporary United States enacts widespread multi-directional hate and violence.

Of the 400 documented incidents in which specific targeted individuals or communities were identifiable, Black Americans were targeted in **85** documented incidents, which equates to **21%** of the documented swastika documents in which targeted individuals or communities were identifiable. Locations of swastika incidents varied with Black Americans targeted **26** times on school campuses and **28** times on private property with less frequent targeting occurring at Black owned businesses and in public spaces such as parks. In one case, a Black American family's home that was tagged with a swastika was burned down, indicating that many of the threats that swastikas communicated in conjunction with texts evoking the N-word should not be taken lightly.

Over **100** of the documented incidents targeted unidentifiable non-white peoples but clearly called for keeping certain communities white and maintaining white power in the United States. Swastikas targeted LatinX (**16**), Muslim (**8**), and other historically marginalized populations in the United States. Immigrants (**15**) also received a palpable brunt of swastika attacks, with explicit demands, on more than one occasion, to go back home. In addition, members of the LGBTQIA+ community were specifically targeted by swastikas in **24** incidents, as were institutions such as churches that served as inclusive spaces.

Examples:

Fort Smith, AR. 10/1/2016. On the exterior window of a mosque, swastikas were spray painted alongside the words "Go Home" and "Go Back to your Country." Reported by *Newsweek*.

Schodack, NY. 5/15/2017. A swastika and racial epithet was spray-painted on the home of a Black American family before the house was burned down. Reported by *Times Union*.

Billings, MT. 1/25/2018. A LGBTQ friendly Methodist Church found a swastika painted on a choir door and the words "No Gays" scribbled on a sign out front that originally read "Open Doors, Open Hearts." Reported by *The Billings Gazette*.

Chico, CA. **6/2/2019.** On the exterior wall of a Mexican restaurant, four swastikas were drawn on a Mechoopda-Maidu mural with the phrases "white power" and "I got your land b*tch." Reported by *Chico Sol*.

ACCOMPANYING TEXT AND IMAGERY

Text accompanied swastikas in over 400 incidents, and the content of this text varied from political identifications and condemnations to racist and homophobic slurs to Nazi, Neo-Nazi, and white nationalist appeals to explicit threats of physical and genocidal violence. While images accompanied swastikas less often than text, imagery often depicted male genitals, pentagrams, the Star David, and SS lightning bolts.

Analysis of swastika incidents reveals that when accompanied by text and imagery, swastikas communicated a wide variety of attitudes, opinions, and messaging about a wide range of topics between January 2016 and January 2021. Yet swastikas with accompanying text often expressed opposition or support for local and national politicians. While Jewish politicians were sometimes targeted, Donald Trump, by far, was most often affiliated with the swastika. Such affiliation is evident in the fact that in over **24** incidents, Trump support signs, stickers, or banners on people's private party were defaced with swastikas and often alongside accompanying text that linked Trump directly to Nazism or fascism. In one instance, for example, a Donald Trump campaign sign was defaced when a person painted a swastika on Trump's forehead, a Hitleresque mustache above his lips, and SS lightning bolts on Trump's shirt collar. In addition, the original wording "We Want Donald Trump! Republican Candidate for President" was changed to "Heil Donald Trump! Nazi Candidate for President."

While swastikas often linked Trump to Nazism and white supremacy in order to express anti-Trump sentiment, associations between Donald Trump and swastikas was also evident in many incidents in which the text accompanying communicates clear support for Trump and, often, due to his perceived support of white nationalist efforts. Common appeals to white supremacy and white nationalism that accompanied swastika and the word "Trump" include popular slogans such as "Make America White Again." The swastika was also accompanied by less well-known phrases such as "Trump-Do-The-White-Thing," "The-white-man-is-back-in-power-White-is-Right," and numbers such as 14, which, as the ADL explains, refers to 14 Words,"--the popular white supremacist slogan meaning "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children."

It may be unsurprising, then, to learn that Nazi references circulating alongside swastikas was not unusual. Textual or pictorial references to Nazism (or neo-Nazism) were identifiable in over **140** documented swastika incidents. Among those textual references, "Hitler" surfaced **21** times and the word "Heil" (often spelled as Heil" or "Hail") surfaced over **40** times in

expressions such as "Heil Hitler" or "Heil Trump" or "88," which stands for "Heil Hitler." The word "Nazi" itself showed up along swastikas in **21** incidents in phrases such as "Nazis are Coming," and of documented swastika incidents with accompanying imagery, **over 15%** included Nazi references and Nazi imagery such as SS lightning bolts. In 2016, for instance, a pastor in Longview, WA found a swastika, SS lightning bolts, and an anti-Black Lives Matter phrase spray painted on the front of his Catholic church doors.

Analysis of documented incidents in which swastikas were accompanied by offensive words, phrases, and images reveal not only antisemitic and racist attitudes but also homophobic, transphobic, and Islamophobic ones. On some occasions, implicit threats such as "We are Everywhere" and "We are Watching You" were placed alongside swastikas for all to see. Yet explicit threats using well-known derogatory names and slurs were commonly directed to not only members of Jewish communities but many historically marginalized communities (Black American, LGBTQIA+, and Immigrant). For instance, alongside swastikas, threatening phrases such as "_____ Die" or "Kill _____" often surfaced on private property of historically marginalized people (cars, garage doors, etc.), as did more specific phrases such as "Gas the _____." When immigrants were targeted, swastikas were often accompanied by phrases such as "Build the Wall" and "Go Home."

Examples:

St. Petersburg, FL. 11/14/2016. A few days after the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, VA, a swastika with "MAGA" and "14-88" were found spray painted outside a church that values inclusivity and has many LGTBQ+ members in the congregation. Reported by WFLA News Channel 8.

Islip, NY. 11/26/2017. Graffiti was spray painted on a sidewalk that included swastikas, racial slurs and the statement "Make America White Again." Reported by *Long Island Press*.

Bellingham, WA. 10/10/2020. Several swastika stickers with the warning "We are everywhere" were placed on businesses in Fairhaven and downtown Bellingham. Reported in *The Bellingham Herald*.

The following collocate, created via Vouyant, presents a network graph of high frequency terms that appear in close proximity to swastikas. In the text corpus, the following words were most popular: Trump (77); White (58); N***** (55); Jew(s) (35); Power (29); KKK (27).
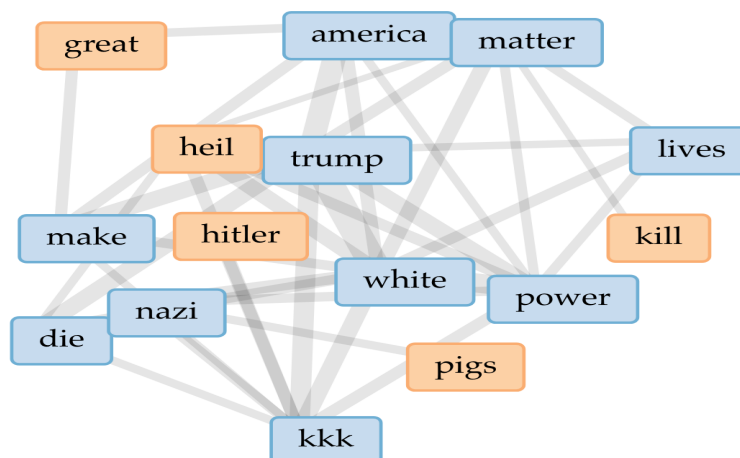
**Figure 4: High Frequency Words and Phrases that Appeared alongside Swastikas
(January 2016 - January 2021)**

Genres are common communicative actions that are used in recurring situations to accomplish similar goals. Flyers proved to be common genres for displaying swastikas and conveying antisemitic and racist messages via text and image between January 2016 and January 2021.

Over **15** swastika incidents documented between January 2016 and January 2021 entailed flyers placed in various spots around town, including people's mailboxes, college campuses, and local businesses. The purpose of these flyers ranged from recruitment efforts to expressions of solidarity and support to, more specifically, declarations of a "race war," instructions for preserving white power, and information spreading awareness about "the white genocide." While some flyers did not identify the responsible party, others, especially ones used for recruitment purposes, did. Responsible parties include but are not limited to: Folk Front, Atomwaffen Division, "Identity Evropa," Ironmarch.org, and a group identifying as the "Mullica Hill Militia." Such flyers also, in many regards, functioned to remind Jews and other minoritized individuals and communities that white power groups were present and that efforts toward maintaining white dominantion were happening.

Examples:
Spring Valley, Nevada. **1/7/2016.** Letters with swastikas written on faux letterhead from a homeowners association were found in mailboxes of Spring Valley residents. Letters instructed homeowners to "not sell or rent to Asians, black, Arabs, Jews, Mexicans, or gays. We want to keep Spring Valley white." Reported by KTNV/Las Vegas.

Seattle, WA. **2/15/2017.** An Atomwaffen Division flyer distributed on a local college campus included the swastika, the group's logo, which is a Waffen SS divisional insignia shield, and the text: "Where will you be when the race war begins?....Join your local Nazis. Congregating near you." Reported by *MYNorthwest*.

MEDIA IN WHICH SWASTIKAS SURFACED

Swastikas surfaced in diverse media in a variety of structures and locations across the United States. Swastikas commonly surfaced in spray paint on the exterior surfaces of businesses, homes, automobiles, and public buildings, while metal and wood etchings of swastikas often appeared in schools and libraries, with bathrooms being a popular location. Swastikas also surfaced in natural elements such as snow and a multitude of unusual, if not disturbing, media and arrangements.

Perhaps unsurprisingly due to its quick application, swastikas surfaced in paint in over 527 of the documented swastika incidents. Yet while paint was most commonly used to mark public walls, sidewalks, and park benches, swastikas surfaced in a surprising range of forms and places--from human excrement on bathroom walls to mulch on elementary school playgrounds to etchings on trees in public parks, as well as via natural elements such as snow and unidentifiable chemical fluids.

Swastikas carved out of metal commonly appeared on surfaces such as bathroom stalls, elevator walls, street signs, and playground equipment. Many of these incidents did not take place in broad daylight, discovered only the next day by local residents. However, swastikas were also commonly sighted out in the open on clothing, banners at various rallies, and flags displayed in residential yards.

Swastikas also commonly sighted were either tattooed or drawn on human bodies. In some cases, groups of people (typically teens) assembled themselves into human sculptures of swastikas or assembled plastic cups into swastikas in made-up games such as "Swastika Pong," also referred to as "Holocaust Pong" or "Alcoholocaust."

Examples:

Princeton, NJ. 4/8/2016. At a Princeton high school, students played a version of beer pong with cups arranged in the forms of a swastika and a Star of David. Incident captured on social media and reported about in *USA Today*.

Lorton, VA. 10/20/2017. A large swastika (40 feet wide) was mowed into a community field. Reported by *The Washington Post*.

Daleville, IN. 8/22/2020. Students formed a swastika on the gym floor and gave a Nazi salute. Incident captured on social media and reported about in *The Herald Bulletin*.

Missoula, MT. 1/2/2021 Rocks that normally form a large peace sign on a hillside over downtown were rearranged into a swastika. Reported by *US News*.

PERPETRATORS OF SWASTIKA INCIDENTS

Information about perpetrators of swastika incidents is limited due to lack of eye witnesses, reporting practices, and other factors. Locations of swastika incidents, such as schools, suggest that many perpetrators may be quite young. Data does indicate that in the incidents for which demographic details are available, offenders are most often male and white. In a few cases, organizations invested in white power were identifiable as the perpetrators.

Only **14%** of sources explicitly identified the race, gender, and other demographic details of individuals who were held responsible for swastika incidents that occurred between February 2016 and January 2021. However, according to those few sources, approximately **77%** of total perpetrators were reported to be male, and nearly **40%** were identified as white. Students comprised **15%** of the reported perpetrators. Nearly **9%** of reported perpetrators self-identified with white supremacist or nationalist ideologies and/or organizations. Perpetrators were caught by police or school authorities in only **10.5%** of documented swastika incidents in our data set.
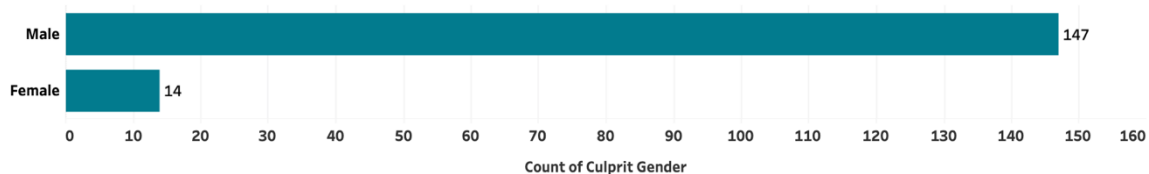
Examples:
Eugene, OR. 4/20/2017. White nationalists displayed swastikas on their vehicles visit a college campus on Adolf Hitler's birthday. Reported by *The Daily Emerald*.

Honolulu, HI. 2/24/2019. A Marine officer arranged missiles into the shape of a swastika and posts on social media. Reported in *Task & Purpose*.

Louisville, KY. 6/27/2020. A swastika with the N word was spray painted onto the driveway of a subdivision home, and a woman was charged not only with this incident but with harassing neighbors over a period of time. Reported in *Courier Journal*.
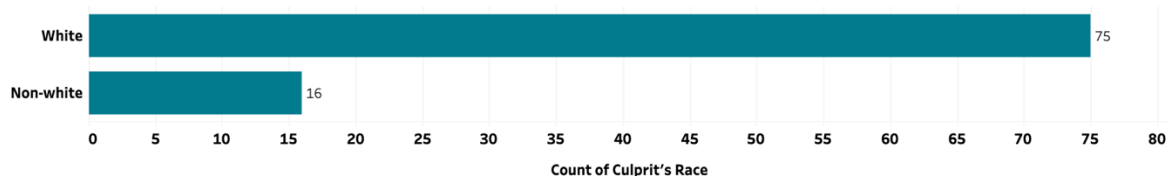
Gender of Swastika Incident Culprits (January 2016-January 2021)

Male: 147
Female: 14

Count of Culprit Gender

In most reports, the culprit was unidentified. In all reports of culprit identification, gender was identified as male or female, with the exception of one transgender count.
Data Source: http://theswastikacounter.org/

Race of Swastika Incident Culprits (January 2016-January 2021)

White: 75
Non-white: 16

Count of Culprit's Race

In most reports, culprit was was not identified, and of the reports when culprit was identified, race was most often not identified. Data here excludes category of "Unknown Race."
Data Source: http://theswastikacounter.org/

Figures 5 and 6: Gender and Race Demographics of Swastika Incident Culprits (January 2016 - January 2021). For a Larger Resolution Image, click on Image to visit our Tableau Public Page.

Interesting to also note about perpetrators is how they were perceived and discussed by community members. When the language was not outright condemnation, it could be described in three ways: euphemistic, ableist, and dismissive. Descriptors that police, community leaders, and school officials used ranged from calling perpetrators "misguided," "challenged," "childish," and "immature" to even, in one instance, calling them a "knucklehead that was maybe even inebriated at the time." Using such language works to dismiss perpetrator actions and further perpetuates stereotypes around certain vulnerable groups such as those with mental illnesses and teens, which causes those groups at large further stigmatization and harm.

Examples:

Mineola, NY. 11/30/2016. The words "Make America White Again" were painted on the sidewalk in front of a family home of Indian decent. The police said it was the behavior of "a misguided individual." Reported by *New York Daily News*.

Greeley, CO. 1/8/2017. Police responded to a swastika in the snow at a local park by saying, "There was nothing to indicate it's more than a knucklehead that was maybe even inebriated at the time." Reported in the *Greeley Tribune*.

Norridge, IL. 7/25/2018. A youth was charged with criminal defacement when he caulked "Nazi rules" on an elementary school. The police stated it was "a crime of ignorance" rather than the student identifying with any hate group. Reported in *The Chicago Tribune*.

COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO SWASTIKA INCIDENTS*

*See the SCP Community Response Report on the SCP data advocacy website (https://theswastikacounter.org) for more details about Community Responses.

Research findings indicate that there is no consistent protocol for responses to swastika incidents across educational institutions and communities in the United States. Yet commonly and to varying degrees, documented individual and community responses to swastika incidents ranged from clean up/cover up to public statements to protests, vigils, and demonstrations to police investigations. In only rare cases were arrestments made.

Swastika incidents sparked a variety of responses from community members–from personal outrage expressed on social media to organized community wide efforts. Many communities tried to paint over and/or erase the swastika's visible trace, going so far as to transform swastikas into messages of love, flowery imagery, and/or geometric designs. In fact, clean up or cover up by city or school officials or everyday citizens was documented in **395** of the documented swastika incidents.

As some community members noted after a swastika incident in Billerica, MA , "Covering over the graffiti [is] an easy task, erasing the pain and hurt caused by the use of that symbol is much harder."[5] Therefore, communities also sought other ways to publicly respond to swastika incidents, often in effort to establish public solidarity against hate and to catalyze community support. In response to over **100** swastika incidents, for example, communities organized vigils, protests, rallies, and local campaigns.

Examples:
Brooklyn, NY. 2/18/2016. Swastikas with the words "Go Trump" were covered with hearts, notes and flowers by local residents. Reported by *NPR*.

River Forest, IL. 1/17/2017. Chemical fluid was used to draw a swastika in student housing on a college campus. The campus community placed encouraging notes within a heart that was placed on the floor above the swastika. Reported by *The Chicago Tribune*.

Fort Kent, ME. 4/30/2017. Swastika was painted on the street, but the Public Works Director turned it into a game of tic-tac-toe until it could be painted over at a later time. Reported by the local online paper *Fiddlehead Focus*.

Billerica, MA. 1/11/2020. Civic leaders, interfaith partners, and community members gathered for a "Hate has no Home" rally after a swastika was found painted on a storage

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[5] Murphy, 2020.

container in a public parking lot. Reported in *The Sun*.

Most frequently, public statements were issued by school administrators, local officials and politicians and distributed via email and/or published in public media outlets. The majority of statements came from school administrators, perhaps unsurprisingly due to the large amounts of swastika incidents that happened in K-12+ institutions, concerns for student safety, and the high stakes for administration in the face of no response. Elected officials issued the second largest number of statements, with statements most frequently distributed by local and state officials and less commonly by federal officials. Yet beyond such statements, only **7** documented responses included direct action in the form of policy change, and no legislative change was reported as a direct outcome of swastika incidents.

When it comes to school responses to the **558** swastika incidents that took place in educational spaces, data indicates that the distribution of letters or statements by administrators was the most common means of response to swastika incidents, with **110** instances (**~20%**) resulting in policy change or creation at the educational institutions and **46**(**~8%**) instances resulting in direct victim support in the form of, among other actions, counseling, floor meetings, and security efforts. Alongside the Anti-Defamation League, Rabbis and Holocaust scholars were sometimes called upon to guide such responsive action, often to meet with and educate youth. In reports of swastika incidents at schools in our data set, only **40** instances resulted in disciplinary action for student perpetrators, most often in the form of suspension or expulsion.

Examples:

Williamsburg, VA. 11/15/2016. Letter from the Vice President for Student Affairs of William & Mary outlined responses to a swastika incident that included gatherings, student support, and presented a student website that provides resources. Reported in *The Virginian Pilot*.

Lewisboro, NY. 1/19/2017. School held assemblies for students. Reported in *Daily Voice*.

Montvale, NJ. 11/30/2018. Students invited local religious leaders to a rally against hate that featured a video of Holocaust survivors, a walkout to the football stadium, and a choir singing John Lennon's "Imagine." Reported in Daily Voice.

The police were involved in some way in **751** swastika incidents, which is over **50%** of the documented incidents. Police were often called to deal with swastika incidents on private property or at local businesses (**227** instances) as well as to handle incidents in locations such as parks, cemeteries, and other public spaces (**208** instances). When targeted individuals or communities were identified, police responded most often to those involving the Jewish Community (**51%**) and the Black community (**23%**). Their involvement ranged from clean-up to investigation to arrest, yet in only **12%** of swastika incidents involving police, the culprits were found and arrested. This may be because of several factors, one of which may be the

lack of hard evidence like witnesses or video.

Examples:
Darian, CT. 5/27/2017. Police cleaned up chalk swastikas drawn on a park tennis court. Reported in *The Darien Times*.

Gastonia, NC. 3/24/2018. Teens were charged with "two misdemeanor counts of injury to real property and one misdemeanor count of conspiracy." They were booked with a $14,000 bond. Reported in *Gaston Gazette*.

Boise, ID. 12/7/2020. Police helped remove nine stickers with swastikas and the words "WE ARE EVERYWHERE" from a city memorial. The local police chief called it "absolutely reprehensible." Reported by LocalNews8.
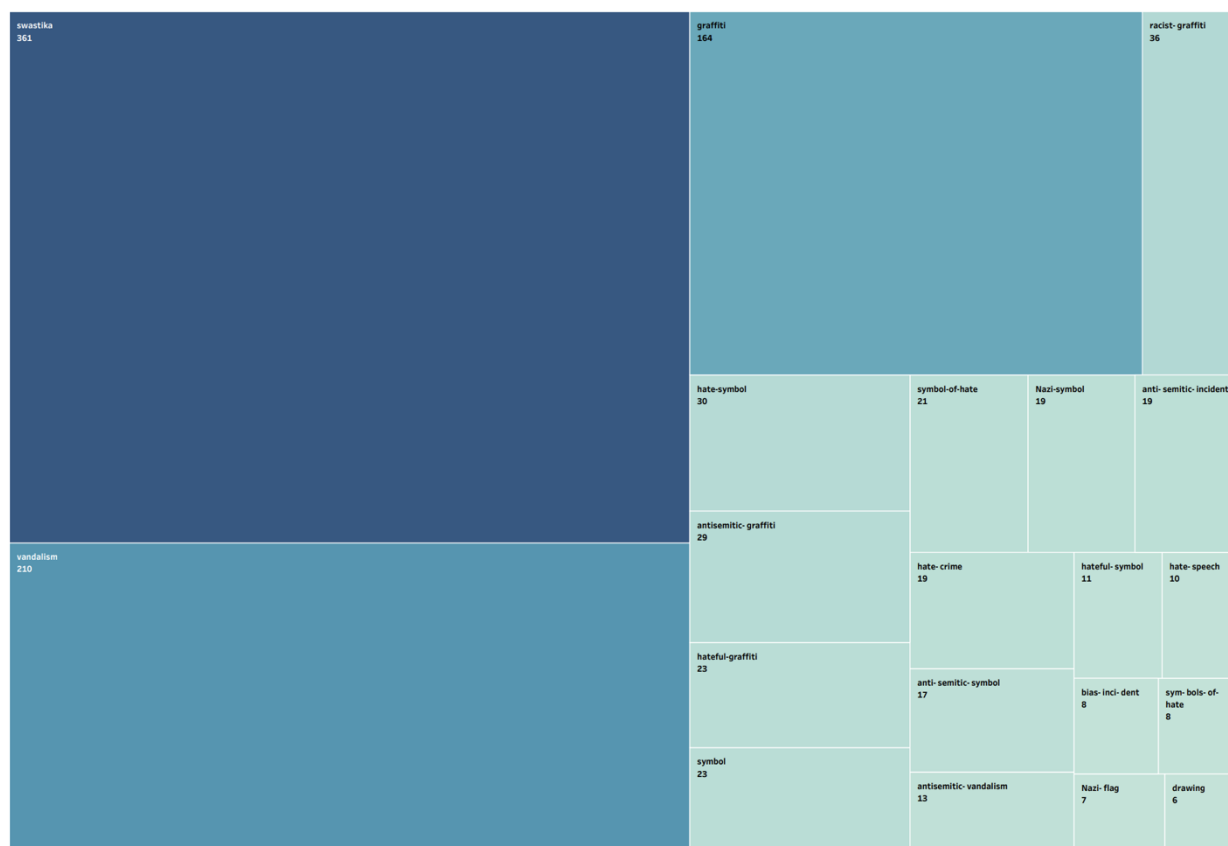

REPORTING FRAMES

Swastika incidents documented between January 2016 and January 2021 by online local, national, educational, and religious sources were most often referred to as vandalism and graffiti, with few identifications as antisemitism and/or racism.

Swastika incidents that occurred on the ground of the United States between January 2016 and January 2021 were documented by multiple online sources including local, national, educational, and religious sources, as well as social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. An open-access data set that includes the URLs to over 1300 online documentations is accessible on the swastika counter.org.

A frame refers to words or phrases that are used in reporting sources to describe certain events in order to shape readers' interpretations of those events. The frames used to identify swastika incidents between January 2016 and January 2021 varied from *bias incidents* to *symbols of hate* to *Nazi symbols*, among others. Swastika incidents were identified as racist messages and antisemitic in less than **10%** of documentations. In four times that amount of incidents (**~41%**), swastika incidents were identified a variety of ways but contained *vandalism* or *graffiti* in their description, or sources simply noted that there was a swastika and/or an incident had occurred.

Common Frames used by Reporting Sources to Describe Appearances of Swastikas in the United States (January 2016-January 2021)

Common Frames refer to words or phrases found in data set 5 or more times that are used in reporting sources to identify appearances of swastikas and shape readers' interpretations of the event.
Data Source: http://theswastikacounter.org/

Figure 7: Common Frames used by Reporting Sources to describe Swastika Incidents (January 2016 - January 2021). For a Larger Resolution Image, click on the figure to visit our Tableau Public Page.

Examples:

Thousand Oaks, CA. 8/18/2017. "Inappropriate symbol" and "vandalism" were used to describe a swastika painted on a public playground. Reported by *VC Star*.

Nashville, TN. 4/16/2019. "Antisemitic graffiti" was used to describe a swastika found on library furniture on a college campus. Reported by *The Tennessean*.

Naples, FL. 8/14/2020. "Racially charged vandalism" and "symbol of hate" were used to describe a swastika painted at a sanitation project site. Reported by WINK News.

SOURCES

The media sources documenting all swastika incidents, from which data was collected, is publicly accessible in an open-access CSV file stored in The Swastika Counter Project Archive hosted by OSF, the Open Science Framework. You can also

read about our coding and tagging methods on the DATA BIOGRAPHY PAGE under the ABOUT tab. See also Appendixes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
This appendix identifies the 16 categories of data related to each swastika incident that were identified for *The Swastika Counter Project*. Subcategories, if applicable, are listed, and some examples are given to indicate what we included in those categories and subcategories.

Data Points	Subcategory (if applicable)	*Examples*
Web Link		
Date of discovery or report of swastika incident		
City		
State		
Web Source	Local news	NBC, ABC affiliates
	National News	Newsweek, CNN, Reuters, The Washington Post

	International News	Times of Israel, World Israel News, Jewish Telegraphic Agency, The Jerusalem Post
	Student Newspaper	Daily Orange, The Tufts Daily, Indiana Daily Student, The Ithacan
	Online Magazine	Philadelphia (Phillymag), L. A. Taco, Reason, Bethesda Magazine
	Religious Journal	Cleveland Jewish News, Jewish Standard, New Jersey Jewish News, Jwsish Weekly
	Aggregate Community News Platform	Patch, Westside Register, Brooklyn Post, lohud.
	Non-Profit Website	Alums for Campus Fairness, VTDigger, AMCHA Initiative
	School Administration Website	
	Online Database	University of Nevada Reno Bias and Hate Incident Reporting
	Social Media	Facebook, Capital.Fox.com, Twitter
	Government Website	New York State Senate, Town of Reading Massachusetts
	Blog	Orlando Weekly, Palo Alto Online, West Seattle Blog, The Hill
	Tabloid Paper	New York Post

Reporting Frames		Vandalism, graffiti, racist graffiti, hate symbol, hate crime, symbol of hate, symbol of Nazism and White Supremacy, Nazi symbols, anti-Semitic graffiti, hate message, hateful graffiti, act of anti-Semitism, anti-Semitism graffiti, anti-Semitic symbols
Accompanying Text		(racial slurs), (homophobic slurs), Go Trump, F**k Trump, White Power, Go Home, Build a Wall
Accompanying Visual Signs		Male genitalia, Star of David, Hitler, cross, SS lightning bolts, pentagram
Nazi Reference	Yes/No	Yes meant that it had and accompanying image or some written reference to Hitler, the Nazi Flag, used German phrases like "Heil" or made some connection to what Nazis had done like "burn the J**s"
Media		Spray paint, marker, paper and ink, metal, paint, chalk, cement/pavement, cloth, cloth and ink, feces, grass, snow, tape, vinyl, wood
Site of Incident		College campus, elementary, middle, and high school, private property, urban street, public park, dorm, golf course, home, highway, library, law firm, medical center, memorial park, museum, neighborhood, parking lot
Location	College	
	Park	public park, memorial park
	Public space	Overpass, underpass, street
	Local business	
	K-12	Elementary school, middle school, junior high, high school

	Religious Institution	Synagogue, church, mosque
	Community Center	Jewish Community Center
	Private property	homes, automobiles, fences
	Public facility	Library
	Public transportation	Bus, train, subway
	Abandoned structure	
	Cemetery	
	Government Property	City Hall, police station
	Fairgrounds	
	Virtual	Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat, WhatsApp (only included when posts/tweets documented swastikas "on-the-ground" in various places across the U.S.)
	Unknown	
Structure		Exterior wall, bathroom, automobile, sidewalk, door, armband, political campaign signs, bulletin board/whiteboard/chalkboard, garage, flier, elevator, street, traffic sign, utility pole
Targeted Community	Jewish Community	
	Black Community	
	Asian Community	

	Native American/Indigenous Community	
	Latinx Community	
	Muslim Community	
	Trump Supporter	
	Biden Supporter	
	Black Lives Matter (BLM) Supporter	
	Non-White	
	Immigrant	
	LGBTQIA+	
	Multiple	
Culprit		
Community Response		(texts of letters and statements), listings of responses
Notes		connections to other swastika incidents, sprees noted, other news stories that contained the same incident, connections to other sources

APPENDIX B

This appendix offers links to 10 pictures of swastika sightings not identified above that occurred between January 2016 and January 2021. For more pictures, please see our data set located in The Swastika Counter Project Archive hosted by OSF, the Open Science Framework. You can also see some photographs in a story map on the SCP data advocacy website (theswastikacounter.org).

Longview, WA. 10/31/16 Swastika painted on Catholic church. Reported by Koin6.

Burlington, VT. 11/9/16 Swastika spray painted on a campaign sign. Reported by *The Burlington Free Press*.

Atlanta, GA. 7/20/17 Swastika drawn on a menu. Reported by WSBTV.

Phoenix, AZ 8/17/17 Swastika cut into a dog's hair. Reported by 12News.

Hartford, CT. 2/17/18 Swastika in the common area of a college campus. Reported by AMCHA Initiative.

Tomball, TX. 2/29/18 Swastika painted on school track at a junior high. Reported by *Patch*.

Brooklyn, NY. 2/29/19 Swastika painted in the subway. Reported by *Bklner*.

Edina, MN. 11/2/19 Swastika painted on an outbuilding of an elementary school. Reported by *The Star Tribune*.

Revere, MA 6/11/20 Swastika painted on a car. Reported by NBC Boston.

Waldo, ME. 8/7/20 Swastika drawn on a Black Lives Matter poster. Reported by 13 WGME.