

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: MORE THAN JUST ‘MOB VIOLENCE’: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT VIGILANTE VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNSHIPS

Mark Charles Gross, Doctor of Philosophy, 2016

Dissertation directed by: Professor Sangeetha Madhavan, Department of African-American Studies

Professor Andres Villarreal, Department of Sociology

Vigilante violence is generally understood as an alternative means of controlling crime and providing security where the state does not. It has been found in nearly all modern societies at one point or another. Currently, in South Africa, vigilantism is common, accounting for roughly 5% of daily homicides. Despite its ubiquity, vigilante violence has largely been ignored by scholars, and in South Africa, vigilante violence tends to be dismissed as “mob violence.” This dissertation draws on extensive fieldwork, multiple qualitative and quantitative data sources, and different theoretical and methodological approaches, to provide a comprehensive analysis of vigilante violence in Gauteng, South Africa. The first paper address critical theoretical issues surrounding the role of weak and failed states in fostering vigilantism. In this analysis, I use large-

scale quantitative data from the Gauteng City-Region Observatory 2013 Quality of Life Survey and an independently compiled database of newspaper articles detailing incidents of vigilantism in Gauteng. I employ measures of perceptions of government performance and the provision of state security to test the relationship between perceived state legitimacy and vigilante violence. I find that negative perceptions of government performance are actually associated with decreases in vigilante violence, while negative perceptions of state security are associated with increases. The second paper utilizes the same data sources and uses the well-established social disorganization and neighborhood effects literature to examine the relationship between neighborhood cohesion, collective efficacy, and vigilante violence. I find that, in contrast to existing research, higher levels of neighborhood cohesion and collective efficacy actually result in *more* incidents of vigilante violence. The third paper expands upon the micro-sociological perspective of violence developed by Collins (2008), “forward panic,” the process whereby the tension and fear marking most potentially violent situations is suddenly released, bringing about extraordinary acts of violence. Analysis of in-depth interviews shows that episodes of vigilante violence in townships are often clearly episodes of forward panic. Although the concept of forward panic focuses on individuals, I argue that if the pre-conditions that foster forward panics in individuals are structural, there is the potential for forward panic in entire groups or parts of communities.

MORE THAN JUST 'MOB VIOLENCE': AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT  
VIGILANTE VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNSHIPS

by

Mark Charles Gross

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Advisory Committee:

Professor Sangeetha Madhavan, Co-Chair  
Professor Andres Villarreal, Co-chair  
Professor Patricio Korzeniewicz  
Professor Kanisha Bond  
Professor Kevin Roy, Dean's Representative  
Professor Randall Collins (University of Pennsylvania)

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## Dedication

To Aviva,

Thank you for your constant support throughout this entire process. I have benefited immensely from your hours of reading, editing, advice, and unwavering support. I honestly could not have done it without you.

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## Introduction

On the morning of October 15<sup>th</sup> 2010, Leonard Makhubu, a resident of Mayibuye squatter camp in Gauteng, South Africa, noticed a potato-cutting machine and a sink had been stolen from his van during the night. A search for the missing items led Leonard and his brother to the local scrap yard, where thieves are commonly known to sell stolen goods. Shortly thereafter, Leonard, his brother, and a group of community members that had gathered during the search apprehended the suspect and “took the law into their own hands,” beating the suspect severely, until he was covered in blood. During the violence an angry member of the group yelled: “We’ve said enough is enough! This will teach people not to steal from here.” After he was beaten, the police came and took the suspect away (*Daily Sun*, 10/15/10).

In late 2013 in Alexandra, South Africa’s oldest township, a small group of young men go on nightly patrols looking for the “Plasma Gang,” which has been terrorizing the township for months, breaking into houses, assaulting, and murdering residents. When the patrols find suspected Plasma Gang members, they sjambok<sup>1</sup> them as punishment, get information, and then turn them over to the police. A local ANC official, Rhulani, described the situation in our interview: “The Plasma Gang ran for three months so we had to form a defense scheme. A group of guys would not sleep and would patrol at night because they believed that the police could not do more.”

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<sup>1</sup> A traditional cattle-whip.

Around the same time, on November 4, 2013, roughly 100km from Alexandra, the community in the township of Khutsong went on the hunt for alleged “gangsters” who had been robbing, assaulting, and murdering residents. Thabo, who was involved in the incident, told me in an interview, “The first person to burn was a sangoma<sup>2</sup> ... [then] they burned two other guys who belong to the Casanovas ... they divided into groups ... some of the guys they ran away into the bushes. Those who were caught, they were burned.” Hours later, six men had been killed, five of them by necklacing, a relic of the 1980s whereby a tire is placed around a suspect’s neck, filled with gasoline, and set alight. Thabo’s justification for the violence echoes Rhulani’s almost verbatim: “The police have failed us. What can we do? Let us take law in our own hands.”

In South Africa, vigilante violence is a common response to what township<sup>3</sup> residents perceive as rampant and uncontrolled crime and ineffective policing. Indeed, many townships are marked by extreme poverty, weak infrastructure, poor policing, and high rates of violent crime (Baker 2008). Policing in South Africa has historically been unequal. Initially deliberate under apartheid’s system of racial subjugation and segregation, current inequalities in policing are largely the result of apartheid’s lasting effects and entrenched racial, economic, and infrastructural inequalities. Post-apartheid South Africa also struggles with widespread corruption

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<sup>2</sup> A traditional healer or “witch doctor,” in this case accused of aiding the gang members.

<sup>3</sup> Generally, the term “township” refers to underdeveloped communities previously reserved for non-Whites under apartheid. In their contemporary form, although townships are no longer legally designated as non-White areas, they still tend to be highly segregated, impoverished, and often informal areas.

in the policing and criminal justice systems. Township residents commonly attribute vigilante violence to these problems with the police and the criminal justice system (Gross 2016). According to the most accurate estimates available, vigilante violence accounts for about 5% of all homicides in the country, which is equivalent to roughly two deaths a day, or about 750 deaths a year (Gould, Burger, and Newham 2012; SAPS 2012). Given the difficulty of accessing reliable data and because many incidents do not result in death, vigilante violence undoubtedly occurs with greater frequency than this statistic suggests.

### *Vigilante Violence*

What is popularly known as “vigilantism” manifests in many different ways and has occurred in nearly all societies at one point or another (Abrahams 1998; Kirsch and Gratz 2010; Pratten and Sen 2008). At the most basic level, vigilantism is a form of informal social control relying on alternative methods of deterring crime in the absence of a state monopoly on the legitimate use of violence (see Weber 1919). Although vigilantism remains a largely understudied area and academic definitions of vigilantism vary widely (see Abrahams 1998; Kirsch and Gratz 2010; Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1974; Senechal de la Roche 1996), recent efforts have been made in sociology and anthropology to sharpen conceptions of vigilantism that encompass the wide variety of activities that might be colloquially considered “vigilantism” or simply “taking the law into one’s own hands,” while also defining it in such a way that it is analytically useful (see author forthcoming ; Kirsch and Gratz 2010; Pratten and Sen 2008). While vigilantism can occur on an

individual level (i.e. interpersonal vengeance or punishment), it is typically understood as a group process, which is the type of vigilantism that is the focus of this study. Johnston (1996) provides what is now considered a classic definition of vigilantism as “a social movement giving rise to premeditated acts of force—or threatened force—by autonomous citizens. It arises as a reaction to the transgression of institutionalized norms by individuals or groups—or to their potential or imputed transgression. Such acts are focused upon crime control and/or social control and aim to offer assurances (or “guarantees”) of security both to participants and to other members of a given established order” (232).

The type of vigilantism discussed in this analysis is the most common form of vigilantism, “crime control vigilantism.” That is, vigilantism by private actors directed at “people believed to be committing acts proscribed by the formal legal system. Such acts harm private persons or property, but the perpetrators escape justice due to governmental inefficiency, corruption, or the leniency of the system of due process.” (Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1974: 548).

While in their typology of vigilantism, Rosenbaum and Sederberg consider lynching a form of vigilantism, albeit distinct from crime control vigilantism (in that it is done by private actors but aimed at social group control), Senechal de la Roche (1996) differentiates explicitly between vigilantism and lynching as distinct forms of collective violence. More recent work has further distinguished lynching in the US context as a form of racial terrorism aimed at racial control and domination, rather than vigilantism. Indeed, dissimilar from crime control

vigilantism, many victims of lynching were never accused of any crime (Equal Justice Initiative 2015).

As a result of the difficulty of obtaining reliable large-scale and quantitative data, research on vigilantism is typically limited to case studies and relatively small-scale qualitative work (Gross 2016; Cooper-Knock 2014; Burr 2006; Smith 2015; Super 2016; Smith 2004; Harnischfeger 2003; Baker 2002; Goldstein 2003; Haas, Keijser, and Bruinsma 2012; Gogoy 2004). Far less research has examined vigilantism from larger-scale and/or quantitative perspectives, and where it has been done, the work has tended to focus on perceptions of vigilantism rather than actual participation in, and events of, vigilantism (see Nivette 2016). Ultimately, there is a dearth of research on vigilantism (Abrahams 1998; Senechal de la Roche 1996; Godoy 2004; Kirsch and Gatz 2010; see Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1974). This dissertation is thus motivated by a desire to address some of the existing gaps in scholarship.

### *Vigilante Violence in South Africa*

Vigilante violence—or what is colloquially known as “mob justice” or “peoples’ justice,” wherein community members collectively attack a perceived perpetrator of crime—is widespread in South Africa and the country provides an ideal context in which to thoroughly analyze vigilante violence. As noted above, vigilante violence accounts for roughly 5% of daily homicides in the country (Gould, Burger, and Newham 2012; SAPS 2012) and so-called mob violence continues to regularly make national headlines (“Mob attacks would be Durban

hijackers,” *eNCA*, 9/15/16; “Two killed in mob justice after robberies in Walmer Township,” *News24*, 9/7/16; “Sanco slams mob justice after two men set alight,” *News24*, 7/2/16 ). Though this violence is quite common across the country, it is colloquially understood to be limited to South Africa’s townships.

Townships are characterized by dramatic racial and geographic inequalities in current and past infrastructural development, and lingering antagonism between non-white communities and the police for their violent role under apartheid. Consequently, many of South Africa’s townships remain vacuums of policing that are ripe for criminality, and vigilante violence (Bandeira and Higson-Smith 2011; Buur 2010). Under apartheid, the primary role of the police was to provide security for whites and to enforce apartheid’s racist policies (Pillay 2000). Black townships were “never policed in any detail from within, always at a distance, and mainly from without” (Hansen 2006:281). Indeed, some three-quarters of the country’s police stations were concentrated in white areas, leaving roughly one-quarter of the police force to police four-fifths of the population (Gastrow and Shaw 2001; Shaw 2002:11). Since the end of apartheid, South Africa, like much of sub-Saharan Africa, has experienced rapid urbanization, particularly in the growth of informal settlements on the outskirts of urban areas that lack basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and water. Many of these infrastructural elements like street lights, telephones, or roads for police vehicles to drive are directly linked to effective policing, and their absence increases the likelihood of crime” (Lemanski 2004; Singh 2005).



Furthermore, as a result of the apartheid state's violent policing of non-whites, and in particular the brutality and harsh oppression of the police force fresh in the collective memory, many blacks have developed a deeply entrenched mistrust of the police, (Buur 2006; Lemanski 2004; Gastrow and Shaw 2001; Steinberg 2008). This is coupled with a widespread view of the South African Police Service (SAPS) as incompetent. In 1996, two years after the fall of apartheid, only one-quarter of detectives had had any formal training and only one in ten had more than six years of experience serving in the SAPS (Shaw and Gastrow 2001). Not surprisingly, the police are often slow to respond, conduct poor detective work, and rarely follow-up on cases (Masiloane 2007). In fact, in 2003 it was estimated that only 6% of crimes resulted in conviction (Monaghan 2008:85). Community members also believe that the police force is riddled with corruption, which further compounds the existing mistrust and sense of incompetence (Gastrow and Shaw 2001). Transparency International shows that 84% of South Africans believe the SAPS to be corrupt and of the 74% who had come in contact with the police, 36% had paid a bribe (Pillay 2013). Together these factors create a situation in which the police are seen as corrupt, incompetent, and historically suspect, and as a result are largely unwelcome in many townships. Steinberg (2008) describes the resulting state in which many township communities do not give "consent" to be policed by the state.

When this tenuous police-community relationship is coupled with some of the world's highest crime rates (in 2012, South Africa had the 9<sup>th</sup> highest per capita homicide rate in the world at 30.7 and 7<sup>th</sup> highest rate of sexual violence at 127.5

(SAPS 2012; UNODC Statistics 2015), vigilantism becomes a more likely response. Indeed, a 1999 Eastern Cape survey showed that nearly half of all respondents and 75% of rural respondents supported alternative or traditional forms of justice and punishment, including vigilantism (Gastrow and Shaw 2001:261). More recently, nearly 80% of young South Africans said they feel that vigilante violence is an acceptable means of punishing alleged criminals (*News24* 2013). However, despite widespread support in public opinion and its ubiquitous nature, vigilante violence varies considerably across communities. Though commonly regarded as endemic to townships, rates of vigilante violence vary substantially between townships as well.

South African vigilante violence provides a particularly salient case for expanding upon extant research on and theoretical frameworks of the vigilante violence, collective violence, social control, policing, and contentious politics in the Global South and elsewhere. This dissertation is an effort to not only provide a thorough examination of vigilante violence in South Africa, but also to critique and expand theory underpinning the research on these sorts of violence. The following analysis is presented as three distinct but interconnected papers.

The first paper address critical theoretical issues surrounding the role of weak and failed states in fostering vigilantism. In this analysis, I use large-scale quantitative data from the Gauteng City-Region Observatory 2013 Quality of Life Survey and an independently compiled database of newspaper articles detailing incidents of vigilantism in Gauteng. I employ measures of perceptions of government performance and the provision of state security to test the relationship

between perceived state legitimacy and vigilante violence. I find that negative perceptions of government performance are actually associated with decreases in vigilante violence, while negative perceptions of state security are associated with increases.

The second paper utilizes the same quantitative data sources and uses the well-established social disorganization and neighborhood effects literature to examine the relationship between neighborhood cohesion, collective efficacy, and vigilante violence. I find that, in contrast to existing research, higher levels of neighborhood cohesion and collective efficacy actually result in *more* incidents of vigilante violence.

The third paper expands upon the micro-sociological perspective of violence developed by Collins (2008), “forward panic,” the process whereby the tension and fear marking most potentially violent situations is suddenly released, bringing about extraordinary acts of violence. Analysis of in-depth interviews shows that episodes of vigilante violence in townships are often clearly episodes of forward panic. Although the conception of forward panic focuses on individuals, I argue that if the pre-conditions that foster forward panics in individuals are structural, there is the potential for forward panic in entire groups or parts of communities.

# Chapter 1: Perceptions of state (il)legitimacy, the provision of security, and vigilante violence in South Africa

## Abstract

Traditionally, scholars have argued that vigilante violence is primarily the product of weak or failed states and their incapacity to control crime in their borders. This weak/failed state hypothesis has come under scrutiny, with scholars instead advancing theories of the geographically unequal distribution of state capacities for crime control, or what have been termed “frontier zones” or “brown areas.” In this paper, I use large-scale survey data that is representative at the ward-level and an independently compiled database of newspaper articles detailing incidents of vigilante violence in the province of Gauteng, South Africa (the country’s most populous province that includes the city of Johannesburg) to extend this body of research. I test the relationships between perceptions of state legitimacy and the provision of state security on incidents of vigilante violence in the South Africa, as well as mapping “frontier zones” or concentrations of state illegitimacy and incapacity. I find that while dissatisfaction with state security is associated with increases in vigilante violence, negative perceptions of government performance are actually associated with decreases.

## Introduction

Traditionally, scholars have regarded vigilante violence as a product of *weak* or *failed states*. When states are unable to maintain their monopoly on violence (see Weber 1919), vigilante violence often emerges to provide social control, and is viewed in some cases as an almost inevitable outcome (see Schuberth 2013). However, other work has documented and analyzed vigilantism in countries like Brazil, Mexico, Bolivia, England and Wales, the Netherlands, the United States, Nigeria, and South Africa, none of which resemble weak or failed states (Schuberth 2013; Nivette 2016; Goldstein 2003; Sharp, Atherton, and Williams 2008; Haas et al 2012; Baker 2002; Gross 2016; Jones 2008; Schaefer 2013; Masterson 2009; Winston 2016). A great deal of this scholarship has challenged the weak/failed state hypothesis and instead advanced more nuanced approaches to understanding the relationship between the state and vigilantism. For instance, Nivette (2016), in her comparative study on the relationship between perceptions of state illegitimacy and support for vigilantism throughout Latin America, found that perceptions of institutional illegitimacy were indeed a robust predictor of support for vigilantism. Critiquing the primacy of weak or failed states, Nivette (2016) instead argues that support for vigilantism is associated with “stateless locations,” geographic areas within states in which formal justice structures are weak or absent. While research like this has done a great deal to advance our understanding of vigilantism, little research has tested the relationship between state illegitimacy and actual incidents of vigilante violence (Nivette 2016; see Wesiburd 1988).

Furthermore, though vigilante violence in South Africa is typically regarded as endemic to townships, rates of vigilante violence vary substantially between and within townships. This study advances the existing literature by examining the relationship between state illegitimacy and incidents of vigilante violence spatially. A great deal of the literature on institutional and state ineffectiveness and legitimacy and vigilantism points to “stateless locations” (Cooney 1997), “frontier zones” (Abrahams 1998), or “brown areas” (O’Donnell 1993), areas in which formal security and justice institutions are weak or absent and illegitimate forms of violence are present. These approaches suggest that vigilante violence is not simply a product of weak or failed states on the whole, but rather that the state’s institutional ineffectiveness is unequally distributed across the geography of its jurisdiction, creating areas that are vacuums of state authority and control (i.e. areas of state weakness or failure). That these areas often exist in “strong” states, suggests that the weak/failed state hypothesis itself is insufficient, albeit a useful starting point (Schuberth 2013). In order to explore these spatial facets of state weakness/failure, I extend my analysis to include the spatial distributions of state legitimacy, the provision of state security, and vigilante violence. As a result, we are able to visualize and pinpoint these areas on the edges of the power and authority of the state, where illegitimate forms of violence are present and as a result vigilantism is able and likely to emerge.

This paper thus contributes to this body of scholarship in three key ways: 1) It extends the quantitative analysis of vigilantism to actual incidents of vigilante violence, as opposed to support for vigilantism; 2) it expands upon the weak/failed

state hypothesis to include the geographic unequal distribution of state authority and legitimacy; and 3) it maps these areas in efforts to visualize these “frontier zones” (Abrahams 1998). I use data from the 2013 Gauteng City-Region Observatory Quality of Life Survey (GCRO) and a database of newspaper articles on vigilante violence appearing in national, regional, and local newspapers from 2009-2013 to accomplish this. Consistent with previous findings on this topic, I hypothesize that negative perceptions of state legitimacy and the provision of state security will be associated with increases in vigilante violence. South Africa provides an ideal context in which to test this relationship, as it has a long history of vigilantism and the country continues to experience high rates of vigilante violence.

#### *Weak/Failed States and Frontier Zones*

Unsurprisingly, the relationship between vigilantism and the state is often antagonistic. According to Rosenbaum and Sederberg (1974), vigilantism arises in situations where discontent with the government’s formal goals and achievements is high and “the potential for vigilantism varies positively with the intensity and scope of belief that a regime is ineffective in dealing with the challenges to the prevailing sociopolitical order” (545). More specifically, crime control vigilantism arises where the government is perceived to be incompetent in protecting persons and property. Referring back to Weber’s monopoly on violence, discontent with the state is high when the state claims a monopoly on violence (goal) but is unable to enforce it or contain violence solely within its institutions (achievement).

Traditionally, this mismatch between the state's goal of crime control and the provision of security and its achievement of those goals has been attributed to state weakness or failure. Wyler (2008) defines state weakness as "the erosion of state capacity — a condition characterized by gradations of a regime's ability to govern effectively, which, in its most extreme form, results in the complete collapse of state power and function" (4). According to Rotberg (2003), *weak states* include a broad spectrum of states that are either inherently weak, due to geographical, physical, or fundamental economic constraints, or provisionally weak due to internal turmoil, corruption, or conflict (4). *Failed* states are weak states in their most extreme forms and "are tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and contested bitterly by warring factions" (Rotberg 2003: 5). Failed states are marked by violence, intercommunity or ethnic conflict, crumbling or non-existent infrastructure, hostile regimes, dysfunctional political systems, and economic collapse (Rotberg 2003). In contrast, strong or functional states have strong and growing national economies, developed infrastructure, functioning and democratic political systems, and are members of the international community (Acemoglu 2005).

Scholars of vigilantism have argued that these forms of state weakness and/or failure often foster vigilante violence. As states are unable or unwilling to control crime and violence within their borders, criminal violence grows largely unimpeded: "Criminal gangs take over the streets of the cities. Arms and drug trafficking become more common. Ordinary police forces become paralyzed... For protection, citizens naturally turn to warlords and other strong figures [who offer]



the possibility of security at a time when all else, and the state itself, is crumbling” (Rotberg 2003: 6). Unsurprisingly these “strong figures” often come in the form of vigilante groups, or criminal groups who perform vigilante-type functions (like the mafias in Italy and Russia). Scholars point to a variety examples as evidence of the relationship between state weakness/failure and vigilante violence: vigilante groups in the American West in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Stewart 1964; Abrahams 1998), the Bakassi Boys in Nigeria in the 1990s (Baker 2002; Reno 1995), People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) and Mapogo a Mathamanga in South Africa in the late 1990s into the present day, civilian security forces in Sierra Leone during its civil war in the 1990s (Ero 2000, Alie 2005; Jones 2008).

Yet in most of these oft-cited examples, the states in which this vigilante violence takes places were not, or are not, failed states per se, albeit weak in some cases (with the exception of Sierra Leone). For instance, at the time the San Francisco Committee of Vigilance and the Montana Vigilantes were operating in the American West, the US was a prosperous with a relatively strong state (Weiss 1992). In the 1990s, although experiences a great degree of violence and turmoil around the transition to democracy, South Africa’s economy was reasonably strong, especially compared to other countries in the region (World Bank 2016). Instead, it appears that these sorts of groups operated in distinct areas marked by eroding or yet-to-be established authority—geographic areas and pockets of state weakness or failure—in what would otherwise be characterized as strong states on the whole: the Western Frontier of the US, Black and Coloured townships in South Africa, the Anambra state in Nigeria.

It is clear that the weak/failed state hypothesis is insufficient in explaining the presence of vigilante violence. Schubert (2013) focuses on this hypothesis explicitly and uses Brazil and South Africa as examples of strong states that experience significant levels of vigilantism. Neither Brazil nor South Africa can be considered weak or failed states, as they are economically strong, have highly developed infrastructures, functioning and democratic political systems, and are economically dominant in their respective regions.

However, in otherwise functional or strong states, certain areas are still difficult or unable to be brought under the auspices of state authority. Schubert (2013) argues that the prevalence of vigilantism in these strong and modern states is the result of stark polarization and inequality, which results in the unequal provision of formal security structures whereby societal elites (generally the White upper class or a small but growing Black elite) reap the benefits of the strong state, and the Black and Brown lower classes are marginalized and intentionally neglected by state security structures. Geographically, the areas suffering the consequences of the unequal provision of security and other state goods have been referred to as "brown areas" (O'Donnell 1993), "stateless locations" (Cooney 1997; Nivette 2014; 2016), or "frontier zones" (Abrahams 1998). These are areas where people "are largely outside the state's legal system and hence are more likely to use aggressive tactics . . . to resolve their conflicts" (Cooney 1997: 393) because they cannot access formal and institutional methods of crime control and so "law is in essence unavailable" (Nivette 2016: 145).

## *Frontier Zones*

Abrahams (1998) focuses explicitly on how these areas foster vigilante violence. He argues that state inefficiencies in securing a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence result in ‘frontier zones,’ areas on the edges of the power and authority of the state, where illegitimate forms of violence are present (like crime) and as a result vigilantism is able and likely to emerge. In many cases frontier zones are the physical frontiers of states, such as state borders, unsettled areas, or contested borderlands as in the popular examples of the American West in the 19th century including San Francisco and Montana (Abrahams 1996), or the “minutemen” on the contemporary US-Mexico border (Chavez 2008): areas where the “government's formal apparatus of rule enforcement has not yet effectively extended” (Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1974: 549). In many other cases, however, frontier zones are areas well within the geographic boundaries of the state but “where the state is viewed as ineffective or corrupt, and [vigilantism] often constitutes a criticism of the failure of state machinery to meet the felt needs of those who resort to it” (Abrahams 1998:9).

Focusing on these ‘frontier zones’ maintains the key components of the weak/failed state hypothesis, that is state effectiveness in the provision of security and other goods, but is more nuanced, versatile, and refined, by incorporating the dimensions of inequality in the distribution of the state’s power, authority, monopoly on violence, and willingness to provide security and justice services. In locations and/or situations in which the state is proven or perceived to be unable to

satisfy demands for law, order, and safety, vigilantism becomes a predictable and even “natural,” response (Abrahams 1998:52).

### *The Case of South Africa*

South Africa provides an ideal context in which to test the relationships between perceptions of state illegitimacy, the provision of security, and vigilante violence. Although vigilante violence is prevalent throughout the country (Gross 2016, Super 2016, Cooper-Knock 2014, Buur and Jensen 2004), South Africa cannot legitimately be considered a “failed” or even a relatively “weak” state (Schubert 2013). South Africa has a GDP of \$724 billion, placing it as the 30<sup>th</sup> strongest economy in the world, and is categorized as an upper middle income country by the World Bank (World Bank 2015). According to the Human Development Index, South Africa is a “Medium Human Development” country with a HDI of .666 (substantially higher than the HDI of .518 for the region as a whole) (HDR 2015). South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, with extensive protections for human rights, and guarantees of access to basic necessities and services like food, water, housing, education, health care, social security, and safety (Klug 2004). Transparency International ranks South Africa 61<sup>st</sup> out of 167 countries in their Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International 2015) and the Heritage Foundation ranks South Africa as a “moderately free” country using their Index of Economic Freedom (The Heritage Foundation 2016). Even more specifically, the Fund for Peace ranks South Africa 113<sup>th</sup> out of 178 on their Index of Fragile States with a status of “low warning” (Fund for Peace 2016).

However, despite these characteristics indicating that South Africa is indeed a relatively strong state, or at the very least not a weak or failed state, South Africa suffers from extremely high levels of inequality on multiple dimensions. South Africa's Gini coefficient, a widely used measure of inequality, is .63 for income distribution and .76 for wealth distribution, placing it among the most unequal countries in the world (World Bank 2015). Additionally, South Africa continues to suffer from extremely high rates of residential segregation. Although more recent research on the topic is unavailable, Christopher (2001) showed that in the five years after the fall of apartheid, in 1996, indices of segregation between Blacks and Whites had changed little and remained incredibly high. The country's dissimilarity index declined only slightly from 91.5 in 1991 to 86.9 in 1996, an extremely high level of segregation by all standards (Massey and Denton 1993). The vast majority of South Africa's urban population continues to live in highly segregated communities and the black population remains substantially isolated (Christopher 2005; Seekings 2008; Durrheim and Dixon 2010). As Schubert (2013) notes: "It is in this context of strong but unequal states that pockets of state absence evolve within neglected areas where the marginalized and criminalized population turns to alternative systems of justice and security" (42-43).

The ubiquity of vigilantism in certain areas of South Africa is thus not caused solely by the state's inability to equally meet the security needs of its all its citizens, but more likely by the state's unwillingness to do so for certain areas or populations (Schubert 2013). Township residents are viewed by elites as

“undesirable elements... who act in a 'sub-human' way” (Baker 2002: 50), and are thus generally denied protection from the state.

In sum, although vigilante violence has traditionally been viewed as a product of weak or failed states, whereby private citizens and groups “take the law into their own” hands to provide security where the state cannot or will not, more recent scholarship has challenged this notion, arguing that vigilantism reflects not state capacity to provide security, but state willingness to provide security. As vigilante violence is found in nearly every society at one point or another, vigilante violence can be understood more as a product of stateless locations, brown areas, or frontier zones, areas in which the state does not provide adequate security provisions for certain citizens, typically Black, Brown, poor, or otherwise marginalized groups who are “deprived of formal security structures” (Schubert 2013: 50). The statistical analysis presented here is targeted at visualizing these areas, and testing the relationships between perceptions of state legitimacy, satisfaction with state security, and vigilante violence.

### Data

Gauteng is South Africa’s smallest province geographically, accounting for only 1.5% of the total land area of the country, but with 13.2 million people—or 25% of the total population of the country—it is the most populous province. Gauteng is home to the largest city in the country, Johannesburg, with nearly 1 million inhabitants, and the administrative capital, Pretoria, with a population of about 750,000. In addition to being home to the Constitutional Court, Johannesburg

is the economic and financial center of South Africa and one of the largest economies on the continent (Parilla, Trujillo, and Berube 2015; South African Census 2011). Gauteng is also the most unequal province in South Africa, with a gini coefficient of .65 (compared to .63 nationally), which is highly unequal by international standards (SERO 2015; World Bank 2015).

I use ward-level data from the 2013 Gauteng City-Region Observatory Quality of Life Survey (GCRO) and an independently compiled database of newspaper articles detailing incidents of vigilante violence in Gauteng. All of the data used in this analysis are at the ward-level. Local election wards were derived from the most recent Demarcation Board information from 2011. Wards boundaries are not based on population but are based on the number of seats on the municipal council (Municipal Demarcation Board 2016). In Gauteng there are 508 wards with an average population of 24,158. Detailed data from 2011 South African Census is also used to supplement the GCRO.

#### *Gauteng City-Region Observatory Quality of Life Survey*

The GCRO is a multi-year survey aimed at documenting and understanding Gauteng's changing urban context and the quality of life of Gauteng's residents. This study utilizes the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of the survey conducted in 2013, which consists of a representative sample of 27,490 respondents from Gauteng's 508 wards. Questions focus on quality of life indicators, living conditions, perceptions of crime, and neighborhood cohesion in communities throughout Gauteng (GCRO 2014).

Wards were used as the primary sampling unit. In addition to ward-level sampling, the 2013 GCRO also sampled within wards using the Small Area Level (SAL) geographic units of which there are 17,840, in order to maximize population spread across and within wards, and the overall representativeness of the sample. The first stage of sampling consisted of random samples from each ward based on population size, with a minimum number of 30 interviews set for each ward. For Metropolitan Municipalities this minimum required number of interviews was set to 60. The second stage of sampling applied the same parameters but instead used the SAL as the sampling unit, which resulted in extensive coverage of population types within and across wards. In the end, 27,490 interviews were completed across all of Gauteng's 508 wards, yielding a ward-level representative sample. The individual-level GCRO data were collapsed, using the weights provided by GCRO, to create a ward-level file containing all 508 wards. Because of the sampling strategy employed, this is the appropriate method of constructing ward-level indicators (GCRO 2014). Wards were used as proxies for neighborhoods, an approach that is consistent with similar neighborhood studies using census tracts or similar geographical units to approximate neighborhoods (Logan, Stults, and Farley 2004; Massey and Denton 1993; Villarreal and Silva 2006). With 27,490 total respondents, there are an average of 54.1 responses per ward, which is a higher number of respondents than found in similar neighborhood studies of crime in Chicago neighborhoods. For example, in their analysis Raudenbush and Sampson (1999) have an average of 23 respondents per neighborhood cluster in their study of collective efficacy on crime and violence in Chicago. In their study of the effect



of cohesion on crime in the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte, Villarreal and Silva (2006) used an average of 19.1 respondents per neighborhood.

### *Newspaper Database*

The most accurate data available on ‘public violence’ in South Africa, which includes vigilante violence, from the SAPS, currently does not distinguish between the different forms of public violence (protest, vigilantism, xenophobic violence, taxi violence, etc). Furthermore, crime statistics from the SAPS suffer from widespread underreporting (De Kock, Kriegler, and Shaw 2015). Therefore, determining the number of incidents of vigilante violence requires the collection of new data. Employing the well-established methodology of using newspaper articles to count collective action events (Earl et al 2004; McAdam 1999; Sampson 2013), I compiled a database of newspaper articles covering events of vigilante violence in Gauteng from 2009 through 2013 which includes counts of incidents of vigilante violence per ward.

Using LexisNexis, Factiva, and the online databases of all major newspapers circulating in Gauteng (including *City Press*, *The Daily Sun*, *The Mail & Guardian*, *Pretoria News*, *The Sowetan*, *The Star*, and *The Times*), I employed a variety of search terms - “vigilante violence,” “vigilante killing,” “vigilant\*,” and “community justice,” as well as colloquial terms such “mob violence,” “peoples’ justice,” and “taking the law into their/our own hands,” and additive terms derived from initial searches and analysis, including “residents beat”, “residents’ anger”, “community anger.” These search terms proved to be exhaustive, as no new articles

were returned before the end of the search term list was reached. In total these searches returned 194 unique incidents of vigilante violence from 15 separate news sources. The vast majority of these cases (71.6%) came from a single news source, *The Daily Sun*, which is a national tabloid newspaper that has skyrocketed in popularity since it was established in 2002 and is now South Africa's most widely circulated newspaper with a readership of 5.6 million (Media24 2015). It is aimed primarily at South Africa's black working class and township residents, a population that has typically been marginalized in mainstream media outlets. Many of the journalists are based in townships (Wasserman 2008). A noted South African journalism scholar, Anton Harber, has remarked that *The Daily Sun* has quickly "become an occasional must-read for anyone trying to understand this country" (Harber 2011).

Articles in the database contain varying levels of information on specific incidents of vigilante violence, ranging from date of the incident and a general location (place name, township, etc) to more details such as time of day of the incident, specific location details (township and extension number, street name, landmarks, etc), the number of alleged criminals (those attacked), a broad sense of the number of attackers or vigilantes ("many," "the community," etc), the motivation for the vigilante attack (robbery, assault, rape, etc), and often contain details about the weapons used (stones, traditional cattle whips known as sjamboks, etc), if the alleged criminals or vigilantes were arrested, and if anyone died or was burned to death. In situations where multiple articles covered the same incident,

information was crosschecked to the degree possible and merged to create a more detailed account of the incident.

#### *Dependent Variable: Incidents of Vigilante Violence*

Each unique incident of vigilante violence in the newspaper database was assigned GPS coordinates with the highest level of precision possible using all of the available information in the article. GPS center points from the South African 2011 Census geographies for main and sub place were used wherever possible. For instance, for an incident that a newspaper reports to have taken place in Soshanguve, Block G, the Census 2011 GPS center point of Soshanguve Block G was assigned. If the location details only specified Soshanguve, then the Census 2011 GPS center point of Soshanguve was used. In situations where it was not possible to accurately assign a center point from the Census 2011 geographies based on the location information in the article, manually estimated GPS points were assigned using Google Maps to the greatest degree of accuracy possible. Ward-level total counts of vigilante violence occurring between 2009 and 2013 were then computed by overlaying these GPS center points with a GIS shapefile containing the 2011 ward boundaries. Thus the ward-level counts of vigilante violence were linked with the GCRO data.

#### *Independent Variables*

The predictor variables for this study follow previous studies examining the role of perceptions of state illegitimacy on vigilante violence (Nivette 2016). The

key predictor variable is a composite index of *government performance* (or *state ineffectiveness* or *state legitimacy*), ( $\alpha = .72$ ) that captures respondents' perceptions of state ineffectiveness and satisfaction with the government. The index is comprised of six separate measures. These include three likert-type questions the level of satisfaction respondents felt toward the national, provincial, and local governments (1= Very satisfied, 2= Satisfied, 3=Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4=Dissatisfied, 5= Very dissatisfied), and a question asking which level of government, if any, has done the most to improve their quality of life (this question was coded dichotomously so that 1 = Any level of government and 0 = None of them). To capture perceptions of government effectiveness I included yes/no questions asking "In general, do you think most government officials are doing their best to service the people according to the principles of Batho Pele?" (Batho Pele means 'People First' and is an initiative to get public servants to be service orientated and strive for excellence in service delivery), "Your local council is meant to develop a plan for developing your area, called the Integrated Development Plan or IDP. Have you ever heard of IDPs before?", and "Your local council is also meant to develop a community based plan for your area. Have you ever heard of the Community Based Plan?"

An additional composite index, *security* ( $\alpha = .7$ ), is included to capture satisfaction with, and perceptions of, state security and crime prevention. It is comprised of four separate indicators: 1) "During the past year, has the crime situation during the past year improved, stayed the same or got worse?" (1=improved, 2=stayed the same, 3= Got worse); 2) "Perceptions of overall safety"

based on how safe respondents feel during the day, at night, and at home (1 = Very Safe, 2 = Fairly Safe, 3 = Neither safe nor unsafe, 4 = Bit unsafe, 5 = Very Unsafe). 3) “How satisfied are you with safety and security services provided by government where you live?” (1= Very satisfied, 2= Satisfied, 3=Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4=Dissatisfied, 5= Very dissatisfied) ; and 4) "The judiciary (courts, judges, etc.) is free from government influence" (1= Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4= Disagree, 5= Strongly disagree.)

Additional measures were included to further examine different aspects of perceptions of state ineffectiveness and legitimacy. *Fair election* is a likert-scale question: "The 2014 general election will be free and fair" (1= Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4= Disagree, 5= Strongly disagree) and is included to indicate perceptions of the health of South Africa’s democratic process (a fundamental aspect of state legitimacy in democratic societies). *Wrong direction* measures whether respondents perceive the country to be going in the wrong direction on a likert-scale.

Two additional indicators are included to account for “traditional” explanations of vigilantism that view it primarily as a product of unchecked criminal activity in a community. *Crime problem* is coded as 1 if respondents to the question “What is the biggest problem facing your community?” as “crime” and 0 if they responded with something else. *Crime victimization* records whether respondents report having been the victim of a crime in the last year.

Additional control variables that are consistent with the literature are also included. *Concentrated disadvantage*, captures concentrations of low income

residents and those that lack certain resources, and has been shown to impede the development of neighborhood cohesion and the capacity for informal social control (Armstrong et al 2015; Morenoff et al 2001; Sampson et al 1997). The composite index of *concentrated disadvantage* at the ward level is constructed as the first principal component of percent unemployed, the percent of households that have had to skip a meal in the last year because there was not enough money to buy food, and the percent of households that have ever not had enough money to feed the children in the household in the last year. These measure were used in place of a standard poverty measure as no official poverty measure exists in South Africa and the ability to purchase food is routinely used in the developing world as an indicator of poverty and food insecurity (Labadarios et al 2011). As has been the case in many previous studies, these variables are highly correlated thus necessitating the construction of this sort of index (Bruinsma et al 2013; Morenoff et al 2001; Sampson et al 1997).

*Socioeconomic status* ( $\alpha = .85$ ) is a composite index combining the respondents level of education (0=None, 1=Primary only, 2=Some secondary , 3=Matric, 4= Post secondary or higher), how satisfied they are with the amount of money they have available to them personally (1= Very satisfied, 2= Satisfied, 3=Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4=Dissatisfied, 5= Very dissatisfied), and if anyone in their house receives a social grant (1 = Yes, 0 = No).

### *Additional Controls*

The two neighboring wards that make up the township of Diepsloot were combined in all the analyses below. These two wards contain the highest numbers of incidents of vigilante violence with 32 incidents and 14 incidents, respectively. Among other things, merging these two wards is important because it reduces the level of spatial autocorrelation to non-significant levels in the regression models. The new ward comprising the township of Diepsloot is an outlier with 46 incidents of vigilante violence over the period from 2009-2013. Thus, a dummy variable, *Diepsloot township* was included as a predictor in the regression models.<sup>4</sup> A second dummy variable, *township*, was constructed to account for wards comprised primarily of townships. No clear definitions or data exist on what exactly constitutes a township in contemporary terms, the number of current townships in Gauteng, or where they are located within the province. I employ what I determined from my own fieldwork to be a reasonable, albeit imperfect, estimate of what constitutes a township given the available data. The variable *township* is equal to 1 if 80% or more of the housing in a ward is comprised of informal dwellings (as defined by the GCRO) or Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) housing—cheap government subsidized housing common throughout South Africa as part of a post-apartheid program to eliminate homelessness (Lodge 2003). For detailed descriptions of all the variables, see Table 1.

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**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Neighborhood-Level Variables**

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Ward Level (N=507)	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<i>Dependent Variable</i>				

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<sup>4</sup> Further tests were run excluding Diepsloot from the analysis. The results were consistent with those presented here.

Incidents of vigilante violence	.38	2.17	0	46
<i>Independent Variables</i>				
State Legitimacy	.00	.61	-1.86	1.78
Security	.00	.73	-2.24	2.35
Fair Election	2.54	.24	1.99	3.49
Wrong Direction	3.44	.29	2.15	4.27
Crime Problem	.29	.17	0	.78
Crime Victimization	.09	.09	0	.56
Concentrated disadvantage	.00	1.24	-2.51	4.03
Socioeconomic Status	.00	.88	-2.22	1.73
Adult population	16545.62	9094.65	737	60178
All townships	.06	.23	0	1
Diepsloot township	0	.04	0	1

### Methods

Following previous research on rare event counts, incidents of vigilante violence are analyzed using negative binomial regressions. A variation of the ordinary Poisson model, negative binomial models account for over dispersion of the dependent variable. The log adult population serves as the exposure variable. The equation for negative binomial regression is:

$$\ln(\lambda) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k$$

Where  $\lambda$  is  $E(Y)/n$ ,  $Y$  is the dependent variable, the  $\beta$ s are parameter estimates and the  $X$ s are the structural variables in question. Coefficients are presented as incidence rates ratios in all of the tables below.



## Results

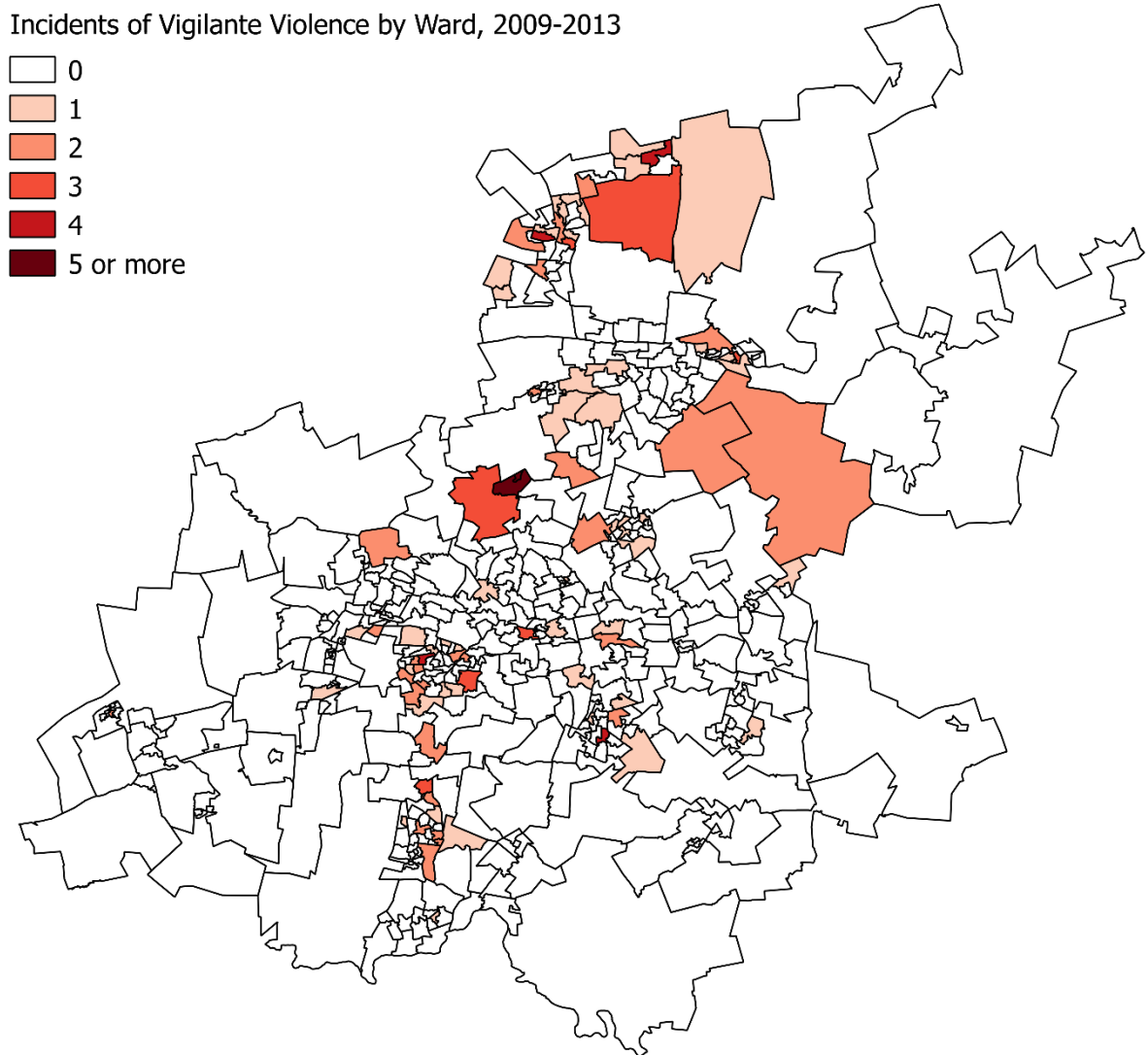
### *Descriptive Results*

The findings from the exploratory spatial analysis show that, similar to previous research on other rare violent events like homicide (Morenoff et al. 2001), vigilante violence is not randomly distributed across Gauteng but is geographically concentrated in certain wards. As shown in Table 2, 82.6% of wards did not experience any incidents of vigilante violence between 2009 and 2013. Of the 17.4% of wards that experienced at least one incident of vigilante violence, 9.3% experienced only one incident over the period, 5.5% had two, 1.4% had three, .8% had four, and .4% had five or more. Of those experiencing five or more incidents of vigilante violence, one ward had eight, while the ward making up the township of Diepsloot had 48 total incidents over the period, or nearly 10 incidents per year. This overdispersion of the incidents of vigilante violence justifies the use of the negative binomial regressions.

# of Incidents	# of wards
0	419 (82.6)
1	47 (9.3)
2	28 (5.5)
3	7 (1.4)
4	4 (.8)
8	1 (.2)
46	1 (.2)

While vigilante violence is clearly concentrated in certain wards, Table 2 and Figure 1 show that there is substantial variation in the distribution of vigilante violence across Gauteng. Figure 1 shows the spatial distribution of incidents of vigilante violence in Gauteng. While purely descriptive, this map clearly illustrates the spatial clustering of the incidents of vigilante violence. It also illustrates what is shown in Table 2, that the majority of the wards in Gauteng did not experience any incidents of vigilante violence between 2009 and 2013.

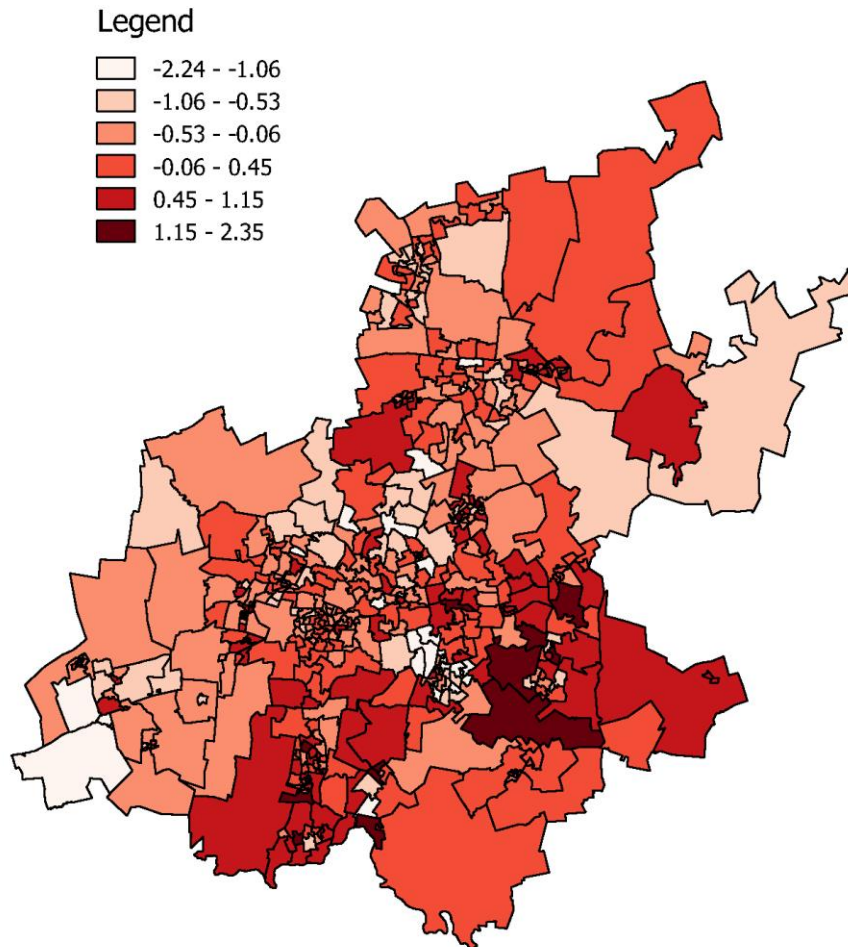
Figure 1. Incidents of Vigilante Violence in Gauteng from 2009-2013.



Figures 2 and 3 show the spatial distribution of the two key predictor variables, *government performance* and *security* in efforts to provide visual representation of the unequal geographic distribution of state legitimacy and the provision of security, or frontier zones. Figure 1 shows the distribution of *government performance* throughout Gauteng. Wards colored darker red are areas

in which perceptions of government performance are low, which indicate potential frontier zones as defined above.

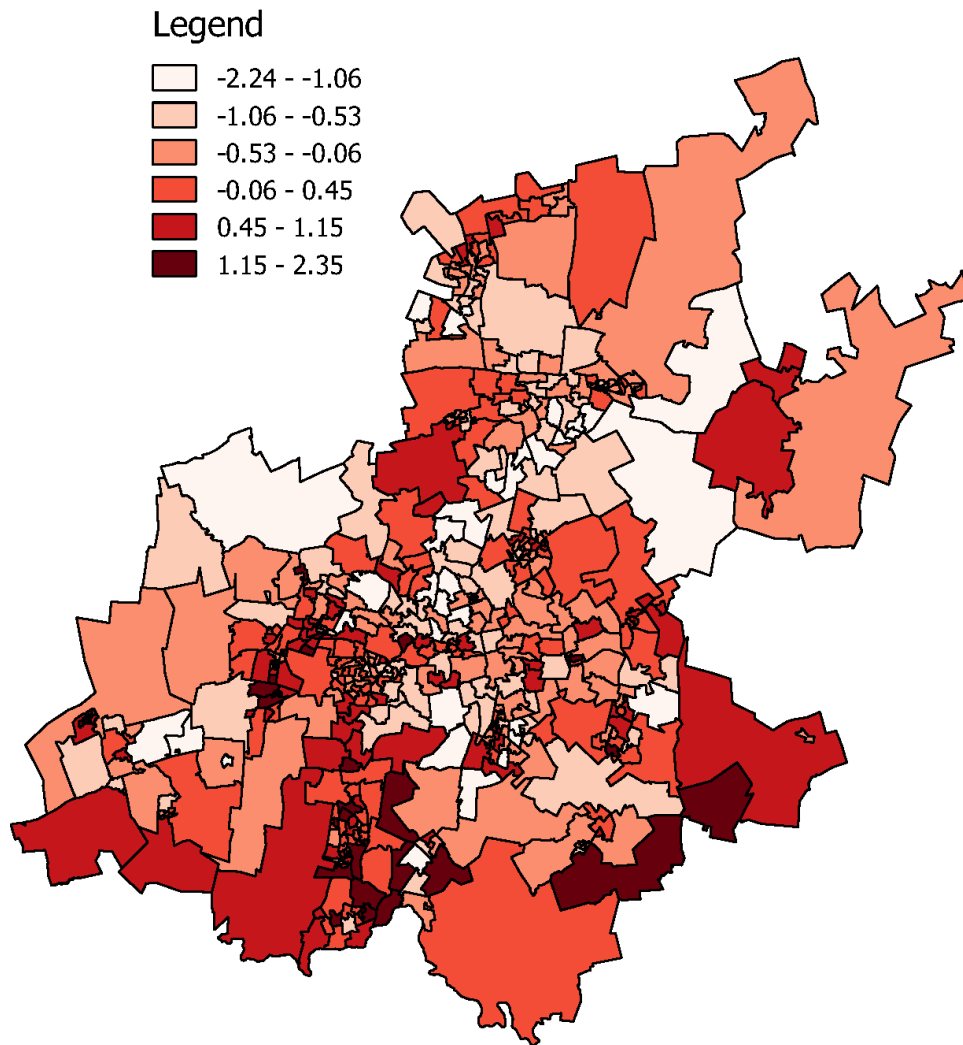
Figure 2. Government Performance by Ward



Similarly, Figure 3 presents the spatial distribution of *security*, with darker reds representing areas in which residents are increasingly dissatisfied with the state's provision of security, a key aspect of frontier zones. The variation in both *government performance* and *security* throughout Gauteng looks to be fairly substantial, although in certain areas, wards with similar levels of *government performance* and *security* appear to be somewhat clustered. While purely

descriptive, these maps advance the conceptualizations of frontier zones by visualizing some other their key components.

Figure 3. Satisfaction with State Security by Ward





## Regression Analysis

**Table 3: Incidence Rates Ratios from Negative Binomial Regressions for Government Performance and Security on Incidents of Vigilante Violence, 2009-2013**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Government performance		.59* (.155)	.49* (.137)	.50* (.139)	.49** (.134)	.46** (.122)
Security		2.15** (.460)	2.51** (.542)	2.18** (.559)	1.98** (.516)	1.77* (.440)
Fair election			.18** (.102)	.26* (.161)	.33 (.203)	.41 (.241)
Wrong direction			3.49* (1.994)	3.49* (1.966)	3.687* (2.055)	3.8* (2.012)
Crime problem	.38 (.386)	.19 (.199)	.07* (.077)	.17 (.208)	.11 (.144)	.05* (.067)
Crime victimization	31.55* (45.630)	11.68 (17.351)	3.64 (5.383)	4.04 (5.900)	5.42 (7.886)	3.76 (5.117)
Concentrated disadvantage				.78 (.149)	.81 (.156)	.85 (.154)
Socioeconomic status				1.87* (.528)	1.71 (.486)	1.67 (.443)
Diepsloot						45.94* (79.730)
Township					2.17 (1.031)	
Intercept	.000 (.00)**	.000 (.00)**	.000 (.00)**	.000 (.00)**	.000 (.00)**	.000 (.00)**
Log likelihood	-341.07	-334.63	-328.16	-325.7	-324.31	-318.55
Chi-square	6.05	18.93	31.88	36.78	39.57	51.09
AIC	690.14	681.26	672.31	671.41	670.62	659.10
N	507	507	507	507	507	507

Table 3 displays the results from negative binomial regression models that investigate the relationship between *perceptions of government performance, security,* and the incidence of vigilante violence. Model 1 is tests a basic colloquial or “common sense” explanation for vigilante violence, that is, the relationship between perceptions of crime in one’s community, criminal victimization, and vigilante violence. While the coefficient for viewing crime as a problem is not statistically significant (and actually negatively associated with vigilante violence), the coefficient for having been a victim of crime in the last year is statistically significant and is very strongly associated with higher of incidence of vigilante violence (IRR=31.55,  $p < .05$ ). These findings lend partial support to notion that communities suffering from higher levels of crime will experience more vigilantism.

In Model 2, I introduce the primary predictor variables, *government performance* and *security*. Surprisingly, *government performance* is negatively associated with incidence of vigilante violence and statistically significant (IRR=.59,  $p < .05$ ), meaning that as respondents’ perceptions of state effectiveness and satisfaction with the government *decrease*, so does vigilante violence. This relationship is opposite of what existing theories of vigilantism and previous research would suggest. The relationship between *security* and *incidence of vigilante violence*, however, is in the expected direction and is also statistically significant (IRR=2.15,  $p < .001$ ), meaning that decreases in the satisfaction with government security are associated with higher incidence of vigilante violence. Furthermore, the introduction of *government performance* and *security*, causes the coefficients for perceptions of crime in one’s community and criminal victimization to lose statistical significance.



Model 3 introduces the additional controls *fair election*, a measure of if respondents felt that the 2014 general election would be free and fair, and *wrong direction*, which measures whether respondents perceive the country to be going in the wrong direction. With the introduction of these two variables into the models, the negative and statistically significant relationship between *government performance* and *incidence of vigilante violence* is strengthened (IRR=.49,  $p < .05$ ), as is the positive and statistically significant relationship between *security* and vigilante violence (IRR=2.51,  $p < .001$ ). Both *fair election* and *wrong direction* are statistically significant predictors of vigilante violence. *Fair election* is moderately negatively associated with vigilante violence, meaning that as perceptions that the 2014 general election would be fair and free decrease, so does vigilante violence. Perceptions that the country is moving in the wrong direction is strongly associated with increases in vigilante violence (IRR 3.49,  $p < .05$ ). *Crime problem* gains statistical significance in this model, although the its relationship with vigilante violence is very weak. In relation to the notion that perceptions of state illegitimacy will increase vigilante violence, the results from Model 3 are mixed.

The control variables *concentrated disadvantage* and *socioeconomic status* are included in Model 4 to assess the role of traditional structural controls on incidence of vigilante violence. *Socioeconomic status* is significant and positively associated with incidence of vigilante violence.

In order to test whether vigilante violence in South Africa is primarily, if not entirely, confined to townships, Model 5 introduces the *township* dummy as a predictor. Consistent with popular perceptions, townships do have a higher incidence of vigilante

violence than non-townships but the relationship is not significant. Furthermore, controlling for townships does not alter the main findings regarding the effects of the primary indicators.

The township of Diepsloot accounts for 46 (24%) incidents of vigilante violence over the period from 2009-2013. In Model 6 the dummy variable, *Diepsloot township*, is included to control for the effect of Diepsloot on the relationship between the various indicators and the incidence of vigilante violence. As expected, Diepsloot has a significantly higher incidence of vigilante violence when other factors are controlled (IRR=45.94,  $p < .05$ ). Despite the inclusion of the Diepsloot dummy variable, the statistical significance and relationship between *government performance* and vigilante violence remain the same (IRR=.46,  $p < .001$ ). The positive relationship between *security* and vigilante violence is diminished only slightly, and it continues to be statistically significant (IRR=1.77,  $p < .05$ ). The statistically significant and strongly positive direction of *wrong direction* also holds in Model 6. These results suggest that despite a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between *Diepsloot township* and the incidence of vigilante violence, the relationships the primary indicators and the incidence of vigilante violence in Gauteng is not driven by this one case.

Taken together, the results presented here offer mixed support of the hypothesis that negative perceptions of state legitimacy and the state provision of security will be associated with increases in vigilante violence. While dissatisfaction with the state provision of security are consistently associated with increases in vigilante violence, as

expected, perceptions of government performance are consistently negatively associated with vigilante violence.

### *Discussion and Conclusion*

The descriptive results from this paper, namely the mapping of some of the key components of frontier zones, is a step forward in understanding these concepts more empirically, and visualizing some of the key distinctions between weak and failed states, and the uneven geographic distribution of state legitimacy and security. Future work can build upon this to more critically analyze the idea that these geographic inequalities are not in fact a matter of state weakness, but societal polarizations and policies that ultimately allow for the state to neglect certain areas or populations in terms of security and governance at the expense of some groups and to the benefit of others.

While the regression results presented here offer mixed support for the main hypothesis, there are a number of important conclusions and implications that can be drawn in regards to the study of vigilante violence. The fact that crime victimization and viewing crime as the number one problem in your community were not reliable indicators increases in vigilante violence suggests that there are a lot of other factors influencing vigilante activity. Crime and perceptions of crime alone are not a sufficient driver of vigilantism.

It is clear from the regression analysis that discontent with the state's provision of security is an important predictor of vigilante violence. This is consistent with theories of vigilante violence that suggest that it arises when the state cannot or does

not provide adequate security for its citizens. It also supports the conceptions of frontier zones and the idea that there are geographic inequalities in the provision of state security that give way to vigilante violence.

The finding that negative perceptions of government performance were associated with decreases with vigilante violence, while contradictory to what would be expected based on the literature, perhaps sheds light on how private citizens might require some base level of perceived state or institutional support to engage in high risk informal social control. Drakulich and Crutchfield (2013) argue that informal social control is more likely to occur in more affluent neighborhoods and where faith in institutions of state security is high. This is in part because residents see the benefits of participation in informal social control as outweighing the costs. Where police are perceived to be willing to support and engage with informal social control efforts, the costs for participation are reduced via reducing the perceived risk of retaliation or further victimization. The benefits are also increased through increased effectiveness of the informal social control activity via police support. So while dissatisfaction with the state security might increase vigilante activity, it might be that residents require at least some level of perceived government performance to engage in these high risk activities. If residents feel that they cannot adequately rely on any level of government (not just security structures), they may perceive the risks of participation in vigilante violence as outweighing the potential benefits.

This complicated relationship between state legitimacy, the provision of security, and vigilante violence also bring up some important questions in regards to contentious politics. While vigilante violence can clearly be conceptualized as a

reaction to the state's unwillingness or inability to provide security in certain areas or for certain populations, it might also be conceptualized as a contentious political response that antagonizes the state, (further) calls into question its legitimacy, and makes claims on the state in regards to how certain communities understand the state's role in policing. For instance, in South Africa, it has been suggested that vigilante violence offers direct challenge to the state's increasingly human rights based approach to justice (Smith 2015). Whereby those engaged in vigilante violence believe "criminals are afforded too many rights by the state – rights which perpetuate insecurity and upend justice by allowing criminals to go unpunished" (Smith 2015: 345). Vigilante violence thus "challeng[es] the basic terms on which the state protect[s] its citizens by attacking the strong legal rights afforded to suspected criminals" (Smith 2015: 348). Future research on vigilante violence would do well to pick up on this vein of investigation.

## Chapter 2: Neighborhood cohesion, collective efficacy, and vigilante violence in South Africa

### Abstract

While the role of neighborhood cohesion and collective efficacy in reducing crime and violence is understood to be a result of a community's capacity to engage in informal social control, this body of research assumes informal social control to be non-violent. This assumption may hold in settings where communities have access to institutional avenues and supports through which they can translate cohesion into non-violent informal social control. However, in contexts in which those institutional avenues are absent or inaccessible, the capacity for informal social control that neighborhood cohesion generates may be the capacity for *violent* informal social control. In this paper, I examine the effects of neighborhood cohesion and collective efficacy on incidents of vigilante violence in the South African province of Gauteng, the country's most populous province that includes the city of Johannesburg. I use large-scale survey data that is representative at the ward-level and an independently compiled database of newspaper articles detailing incidents of vigilante violence in Gauteng. I find that higher levels of neighborhood cohesion and collective efficacy result in *more* incidents of vigilante violence, even when controlling for concentrated disadvantage, the percent of owner occupied homes, and the percent foreign-born.

## Introduction

A large body of research has indicated the importance of community organization, and particularly cohesion among local residents, in explaining variations in levels of crime and violence in communities. However, this research focuses exclusively on violent crime such as assault, intimate partner violence, and homicide (Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush 2001; Sampson et al. 1997). No work to the author's knowledge has examined the role of neighborhood cohesion on collective forms of violence, such as political violence, protest violence, civil war, terrorism, or vigilante violence.<sup>5</sup> Vigilante violence should be of particular interest to scholars of neighborhood cohesion. A core assumption underlying much of the research on this topic is that higher levels of neighborhood cohesion yield less crime and violence via residents' ability to enforce social norms through *non-violent* informal social control. By definition, vigilante violence is a *violent* form of informal social control by which community members can enforce social norms (Johnston 1996), and possibly a violent manifestation of neighborhood cohesion.

Further motivating this work is the fact that little empirical research on the role of cohesion on violence and crime has been conducted outside of the US (Bruinsma et al. 2013). While the relationship between cohesion, crime, and violence has been tested outside of the US context (for example see Bruinsma, et al. 2013; Eisner and Wikström 1999; Mazerolle et al. 2010; Pauwels et al. 2010; Sampson and Groves 1989; Sampson

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<sup>5</sup> While a number of scholars have focused on various forms of cohesion, namely *group* cohesion, and these forms of violence (for examples see Bakke, Gallagher, and Seymour 2012; Pearlman 2014; Staniland 2014), no research to the author's knowledge have focused explicitly on the relationship between *neighborhood* cohesion and these violent outcomes.

and Wikström 2008; Steenbeek and Hipp 2011; Wikström 1991; Wikström and Dolmén 2001), the vast majority of studies have been conducted only in Western contexts, thus calling into question the generalizability of their findings (Armstrong et al. 2010). South Africa provides an ideal context to examine these relationships because vigilante violence and “community justice” have a long and storied history in the country, beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and are typically at the forefront of discussions around South Africa’s high rate of violent crime (Bandeira and Higson-Smith 2011; Sekhonyane and Louw 2002).

Using vigilante violence as the outcome variable, this paper tests the relationship between neighborhood cohesion and vigilante violence in Gauteng, South Africa, the country’s most populous province, which includes the largest city in the country, Johannesburg, as well as the administrative capital, Pretoria. I use data from the 2013 Gauteng City-Region Observatory Quality of Life Survey (GCRO) and a database of newspaper articles on vigilante violence appearing in national, regional, and local newspapers from 2009-2013. This study departs from previous research on neighborhood cohesion by focusing on vigilante violence, a form of informal social control, rather than crime as the outcome measure.

### *Neighborhood Cohesion, Collective Efficacy, and Informal Social Control*

A central thread within the broad research on neighborhood cohesion has focused in particular on crime and violence (Morenoff et al. 2001; Sampson 2013; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997; Villarreal & Silva 2006). Existing theories emphasize the role that community characteristics like poverty, ethnic heterogeneity,



and residential mobility play in impeding the creation and utility of social ties among residents (Shaw and McKay 1942). When and where communities lack social ties, residents' ability and willingness to engage in collective social control actions addressing problems in their community is limited, thus making criminal activity more possible. Scholars argue that neighborhood cohesion reduces violence through residents' ability and willingness to intervene for the common good via informal social control and is a "critical means by which urban neighborhoods inhibit the occurrence of personal violence" (Sampson et al. 1997: 919). Overall the level of neighborhood cohesion has been found to be an important predictor of the rate of crime and violence in various urban settings (Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Drakulich & Crutchfield 2013; Janowitz 1975; Kornhauser 1978; Sampson and Groves 1989; Sampson et al. 1997; Shaw and McKay 1942).

In their now classic work, Sampson et al. (1997) elaborate on the theories of neighborhood cohesion and argue that neighborhood cohesion alone is not enough for residents to engage in informal social control to reduce violence. Instead, they underscore the importance of 'collective efficacy,' or "neighborhood cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good" (Sampson et al. 1997: 918). Using data from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), they find that collective efficacy is negatively associated with violence in communities and mediates the association between concentrated disadvantage and residential instability in determining levels of crime. Further research focusing on collective efficacy has found similar relationships between collective efficacy and violence (Morenoff et al. 2001).

However, a fundamental assumption in this body of literature is that these informal social control interventions are non-violent. Since the cohesion literature points to a lack of community capacity to engage in informal social control as being conducive to higher levels of crime and violence, it is wholly unclear where vigilante violence, a violent form of informal social control, fits in this framework. Focusing explicitly on vigilante violence forces us to reconsider the established theories of neighborhood cohesion and violence. Because vigilante violence may be more likely to occur in neighborhoods characterized by stronger ties among community residents, violence (in the form of vigilantism) may actually be *more* common in neighborhoods with higher levels of neighborhood cohesion or collective efficacy. Contradicting the established literature on cohesion, collective efficacy, and violence, I hypothesize that higher levels of neighborhood cohesion and collective efficacy will result in *more* incidents of vigilante violence. Existing theories suggest that higher levels of cohesion reduce crime directly and indirectly through informal social control activities. Since vigilantism is a form of informal social control, higher levels of cohesion could lead to a greater community capacity to engage in violent informal social control.

### *Informal Social Control and Vigilante Violence*

Weak social ties among neighborhood residents limits their ability and willingness to engage in informal social control activities, such as identifying common problems (like crime, violence, and/or disorder) and acting collectively for the common good (Drakulich & Crutchfield 2013; Sampson et al. 1997). While Sampson et al. (1997) and others have found a strong negative association between collective efficacy

and violence, Kingston et al. (2009) found that in Denver, willingness to intervene (based on measures similar to those used by Sampson et al.) was not associated with levels of property or violent crime but neighborhood cohesion lowered levels of property offending. Using a modified measure of Sampson et al.'s collective efficacy in Georgia and Iowa, Simons et al. (2005) found that collective efficacy was negatively associated with delinquency. Together this body of research demonstrates that communities with strong social ties and cohesion have lower levels of crime and violence, yet the variability across settings underscores the need to further test these concepts in new contexts. Moreover, these studies focus exclusively on common crime and ignore a host of other criminal and violent outcomes. Vigilante violence in particular—though illegal—is a mechanism of informal social control by which communities enforce social norms and attempt to control criminal violence.

Informal social control generally refers to the ability of a group to recognize common problems and act collectively to address them. Drakulich and Crutchfield (2013) argue that informal social control is more likely to occur in more affluent neighborhoods, neighborhoods with a higher degree of residential stability, and where trust in the police is high. This is in part because residents see the benefits of participation in informal social control as outweighing the costs. Where police are perceived to be willing to support and engage with informal social control efforts, the costs for participation are reduced via reducing the perceived risk of retaliation or further victimization. The benefits are also increased through increased effectiveness of the informal social control activity via police support. Following these findings, the capacity for informal social control in South African townships may be expected to be

low, as these communities are typically marked by high poverty, racial segregation and isolation, low perceptions of police efficacy, and very high levels of distrust in police (author forthcoming; Baker 2008). If lack of faith in the police in particular “inhibits informal social control activities, and in fact explains lower capacities for informal social control in minority communities” (Drakulich and Crutchfield 2013:403), why then do we see such a high prevalence of informal social control, in the form of vigilante violence, in many townships?

Although it is generally accepted that neighborhood cohesion increases the capacity for informal social control and the role it plays in reducing crime, less research has examined the dynamics of that resulting social control (Bursik 1999). Attempts to explicate how neighborhood cohesion and informal social control make areas less conducive to crime focus solely on non-violent forms of informal social control. As Drakulich and Crutchfield (2013) argue, participation in informal social control is predicated on a participant’s assessment of the potential risks and benefits. The backing of formal social controls (like the police) makes participation in informal social control more appealing by making it less risky and more beneficial. If the backing of formal social controls is weak, the participation is made less likely by “increase[ing] perceived vulnerabilities to [the] potential costs associated with participating in informal social control” (Drakulich & Crutchfield 2013: 385).

Fundamental within this body of literature is the assumption that residents of cohesive neighborhoods are actually able to translate that cohesion into informal social control, typically through accessing institutional means of *formal* social control, like the police and court systems. Based on his work in disadvantaged areas of Chicago,

Wilson (1996) suggests that although many poor neighborhoods are actually characterized by strong networks, those networks do not result in the production of social control (pp. 63-64). It is entirely possible that despite high levels of neighborhood cohesion, poor communities lack the resources and institutional capacity to translate cohesion into social control (Hunter 1985). Thus, while higher levels of neighborhood cohesion increase the likelihood that community members are willing to respond collectively to a perceived problem (crime, for instance), if that community also lacks the resources to channel their actions through legal and/or legitimate avenues (like the police or criminal justice system), it is possible that the collective action could take on illegal and violent means. Just as in poor urban communities in the US, it is possible that South African townships are characterized by strong networks but lack the resources and institutional capacity that facilitate the link between cohesion and non-violent informal social control. Violent informal social control such as vigilante violence, on the other hand, typically does not rely on any institutional backing. Indeed, it is predicated in the absence of institutional grounding (which may explain why vigilante violence does not occur more frequently in poor urban communities in the US).

While the relationship between neighborhood cohesion, collective efficacy, crime, and violence is understood to be a result of a community's capacity and ability to exert informal social control, this body of literature assumes informal social control to be non-violent. Though this assumption may hold in contexts in which communities have access to institutional avenues and supports through which they can translate cohesion into non-violent informal social control, in contexts in which those

institutional avenues and supports do not exist or are not accessible, it is entirely possible that the capacity for informal social control that neighborhood cohesion generates will be the capacity for violent informal social control. In the rest of the paper, I test the hypothesis that in South Africa, higher levels of neighborhood cohesion and collective efficacy will result in *more* incidents of vigilante violence.

### Data

See Chapter 1, *Data and Methods section: Gauteng City-Region Observatory Quality of Life Survey, Newspaper Database, Dependent Variable: Incidents of Vigilante Violence, Additional Controls.*

### *Independent Variables*

The predictor variables for this study are based in previous studies examining the role of cohesion and violence at the neighborhood level (Morenoff et al. 2001; Sampson et al. 1997; Villarreal & Silva 2006). The primary predictive variable is an index of *neighborhood cohesion* ( $\alpha = .86$ ) that captures the level of individual and household participation in local civic activities and organizations in the last year. This index is comprised of 15 separate measures including individual and household participation in ward meetings, street committee or resident's association meetings, community development forum meetings, Mayoral imbizo meetings (open meetings between communities and local politicians), Integrated Development Plan meetings, school governing body meetings, community policing forum meetings, and community and social groups including neighborhood watches, political parties, student

organizations, street or block committees, tribal or clan associations, or any other non-governmental or community based organizations.

An additional measure of *trust* is used as a separate predictor because it was found to be more weakly related to the other items included in the index neighborhood cohesion. Including this measure reduced Cronbach's alpha to .69 from .86. The measure of *trust* is based on the question in the GCRO survey asking respondents: "Generally speaking, do you think that most people in your community can be trusted or that you need to be very careful when dealing with people in your community?" Those answering "Most people can be trusted" to the question were coded as 1, those answering "you need to be very careful" were coded as 0. While *trust* is used as a separate indicator from *neighborhood cohesion*, an additional index of *collective efficacy* consistent with the existing literature was also constructed. Collective efficacy is typically defined as the "linkage of trust and cohesion with shared expectations for control" (Morenoff et al. 2001: 520). Thus an index of *collective efficacy* was constructed by combining *neighborhood cohesion* and *trust*.

Additional control variables that are consistent with the literature are also included. Concentrated disadvantage, captures concentrations of low income residents and those that lack certain resources, and has been shown to impede the development of neighborhood cohesion and the capacity for informal social control (Armstrong et al. 2015; Morenoff et al. 2001; Sampson et al. 1997). The composite index of *concentrated disadvantage* at the ward level is constructed as the first principal component of percent unemployed, the percent of households that have had to skip a meal in the last year because there was not enough money to buy food, and the percent

of households that have ever not had enough money to feed the children in the household in the last year. These measure were used in place of a standard poverty measure as no official poverty measure exists in South Africa and the ability to purchase food is routinely used in the developing world as an indicator of poverty and food insecurity (Labadarios et al. 2011). As has been the case in many previous studies, these variables are highly correlated thus necessitating the construction of a composite index (Bruinsma et al. 2013; Morenoff et al. 2001; Sampson et al. 1997).

Residential stability, in the form of high levels of home ownership and low levels of residential mobility, has been posited to increase levels of cohesion and informal social control, as longer-term and more stable residents are thought to be more invested in the well-being of their community (Sampson et al. 1997). The *percentage of owner-occupied housing* is used as a measure of residential stability. This includes those who either own and have paid off their houses and those who are currently paying off their houses. The *percent foreign-born* is used as a measure of ethnic heterogeneity, which has been posited to decrease the development of neighborhood cohesion. In South Africa, outbreaks of xenophobic violence have occurred in recent years, notably in May of 2008 when 62 people were killed. Many similar but smaller episodes of xenophobic violence have occurred since, most recently in January 2015 (Pattel and Essa 2015). Perceptions of policing efficacy have been shown to be positively associated with informal social control (Drakulich & Crutchfield 2013). To account for the effect of perceptions of police efficacy on vigilante violence, I introduce *perception of safety* as a predictor in the regression models. Since a direct indicator of perceptions of policing efficacy is not available in the data, *perception of safety* is used as a proxy.



This variable is derived from the likert-style question “How safe do you feel at home?”: 1 = “Very Safe,” 2 = “Fairly Safe,” 3 = “Neither safe nor unsafe,” 4 = “Bit unsafe,” 5 = “Very Unsafe.” South Africa, and in particular Johannesburg, has been noted for its “fortress” mentality, with high, thick concrete walls, electric fencing, barred windows and doors, and home security systems which are commonplace for those who can afford them as protection from the outside community or intruders into the community (Landman and Schonteich 2002; Lipman and Harris 1999). Thus, feelings of safety at home was chosen as the measurement for how vulnerable people feel in their communities. For variable descriptions see Table 4.

<b>Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Neighborhood-Level Variables</b>				
Ward Level (N=507)	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<i>Dependent Variable</i>				
Incidents of vigilante violence	.38	2.17	0	46
<i>Independent Variables</i>				
Neighborhood cohesion	.00	.94	-1.98	2.17
Trust	.2	.13	0	.73
Collective efficacy	.00	.079	-2.4	1.73
Concentrated disadvantage	.00	1.24	-2.51	4.03
Percent home ownership	.29	.17	0	.78
Percent foreign-born	.09	.09	0	.56
Perception of safety	2.01	.32	1.15	3.06
Adult population	16545.62	9094.65	737	60178
Township	.06	.23	0	1
Diepsloot township	0	.04	0	1

### Methods

The first set of models test the relationship between *neighborhood cohesion* and *trust* and the incidence of vigilante violence in Gauteng. In the second set, *collective efficacy* is used as the primary predictor. Following previous research on rare event

counts, incidents of vigilante violence are analyzed using negative binomial regressions. A variation of the ordinary Poisson model, negative binomial models account for over dispersion of the dependent variable.<sup>6</sup> The log adult population of the ward serves as the exposure variable. The equation for negative binomial regression is:

$$\ln(\lambda) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k$$

Where  $\lambda$  is  $E(Y)/n$ ,  $Y$  is the dependent variable, the  $\beta$ s are parameter estimates and the  $X$ s are the structural variables in question. Coefficients are presented as incidence rates ratios in all of the tables below.

## Results

### *Descriptive Results*

The findings from the exploratory spatial analysis show that, similar to previous research on other rare violent events like homicide (Morenoff et al. 2001), vigilante violence is not randomly distributed across Gauteng but is geographically concentrated in certain wards. As shown in Table 2 (Chapter 1), 82.6% of wards did not experience any incidents of vigilante violence between 2009 and 2013. Of the 17.4% of wards that experienced at least one incident of vigilante violence, 9.3% experienced only one

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<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, statistical routines for testing negative binomial regressions that account for spatial autocorrelation are not currently available. In order to examine whether the estimates of the models presented in Tables 3 and 4 are biased due to spatial correlation, I examined the spatial correlation of the error terms by estimating Moran's I for the residuals of the full models (Table 3, Model 5 and Table 4, Model 5). Moran's I measures the degree of linear correlation between a variable at a given location and the weighted average of that variable at neighboring locations and is typically used as a diagnostic tool (Chi and Zhu 2008). Once the two neighboring wards that constitute the township of Diepsloot were merged, values for Moran's I were very low and not statistically significant (-.01,  $p > .05$  for both of the full models) indicating no evidence of spatial correlation among the error terms.

incident over the period, 5.5% had two, 1.4% had three, .8% had four, and .4% had five or more. Of those experiencing five or more incidents of vigilante violence, one ward had eight, while the ward making up the township of Diepsloot had 48 total incidents over the period, or nearly 10 incidents per year. This overdispersion of the incidents of vigilante violence justifies the use of the negative binomial regressions.

While vigilante violence is clearly concentrated in certain wards, Table 2 and Figure 1 (Chapter 1) show that there is substantial variation in the distribution of vigilante violence across Gauteng. Figure 1 shows the spatial distribution of incidents of vigilante violence in Gauteng. While purely descriptive, this map clearly illustrates the spatial clustering of the incidents of vigilante violence. It also illustrates what is shown in Table 1, that the majority of the wards in Gauteng did not experience any incidents of vigilante violence between 2009 and 2013. Figures 4 and 5 show the distribution of *neighborhood cohesion* and *collective efficacy* by ward, respectively. Unsurprisingly, areas that have high concentrations of *neighborhood cohesion* also have high concentrations of *collective efficacy*. The variation in both *neighborhood cohesion* and *collective efficacy* throughout Gauteng is fairly substantial, although in certain areas, wards with similar levels of *neighborhood cohesion* and *collective efficacy* appear to be somewhat clustered.

Figure 4. Neighborhood Cohesion by Ward

Neighborhood Cohesion by Ward

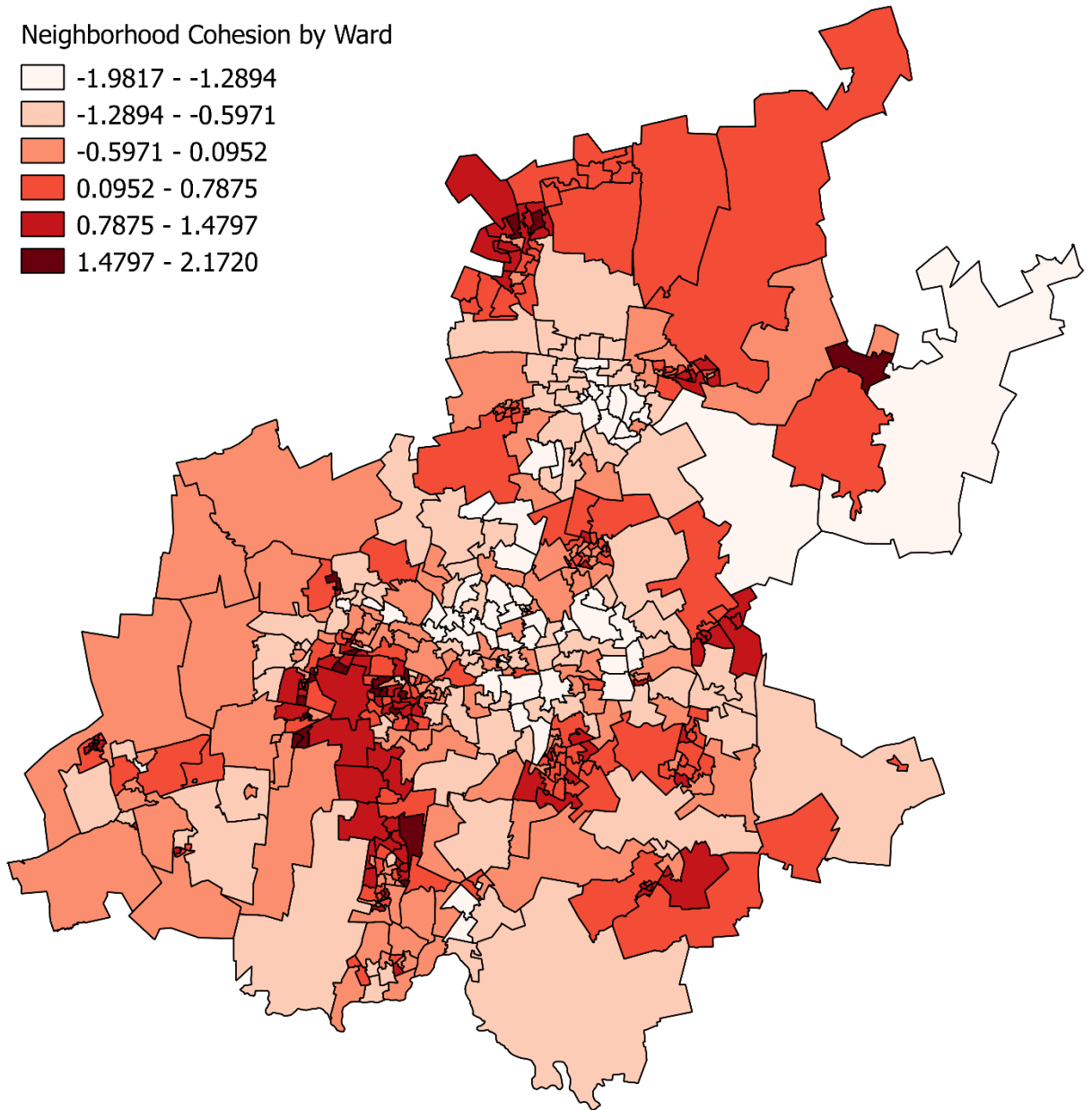
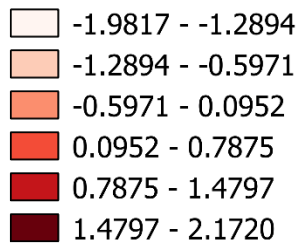
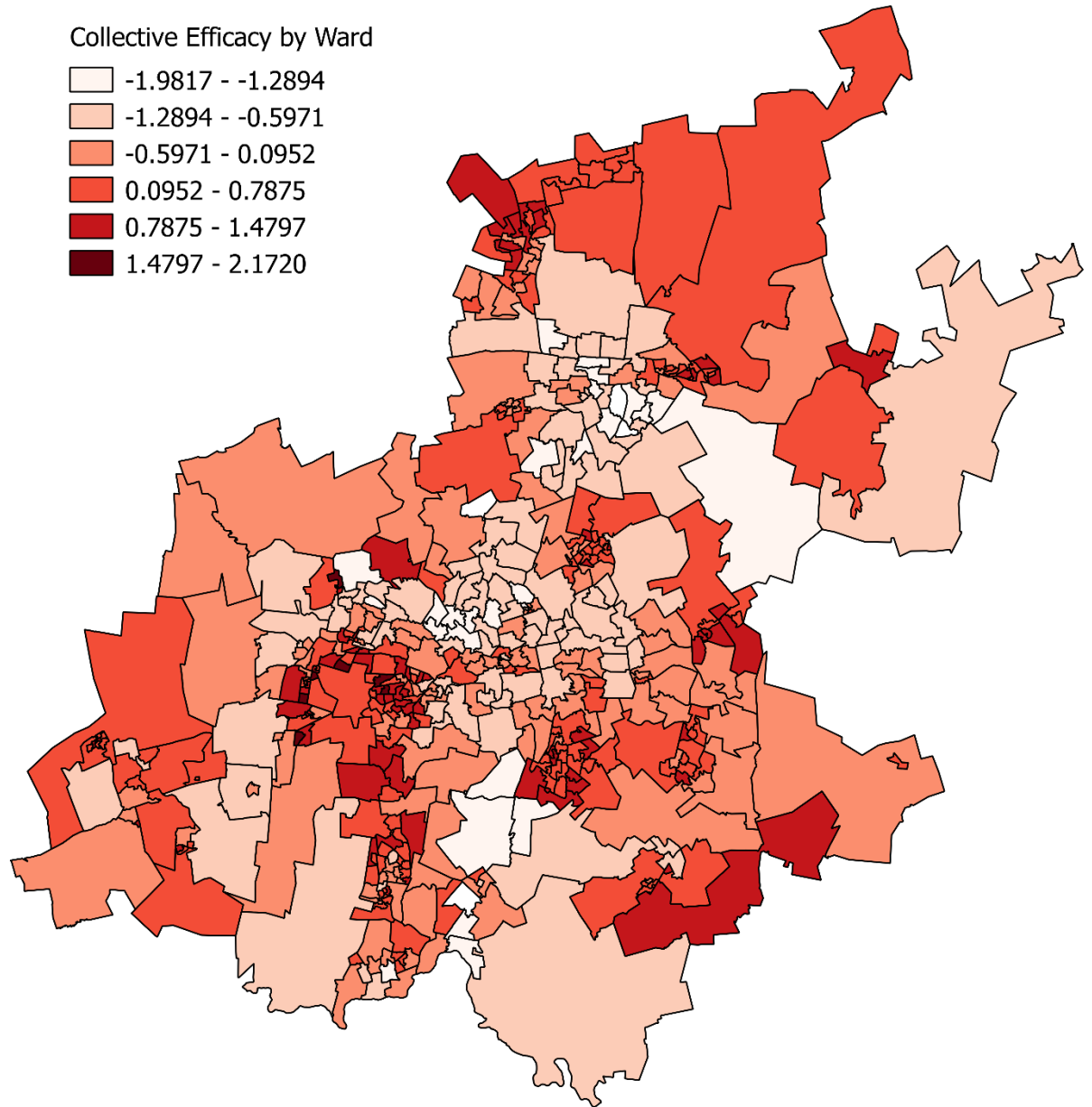


Figure 5. Collective Efficacy by Ward



*Regression Analysis*

Table 5 displays the results from the negative binomial regression models that investigate the relationship between *neighborhood cohesion, trust*, and the incidence

of vigilante violence. Model 1 is the baseline model and includes only *neighborhood cohesion* and *trust* as the predictors. From this model we see that *neighborhood cohesion* is statistically significant and is associated with a *higher* of incidence of vigilante violence (IRR=1.9,  $p < .001$ ). These findings diverge from the results of studies showing that community cohesion reduces crime and violence within communities in other national contexts. Rather than preventing violence, neighborhood cohesion appears to encourage collective violence against perceived perpetrators.

**Table 5. Incidence Rates Ratios from Negative Binomial Regressions for Neighborhood Cohesion and Trust on Incidents of Vigilante Violence, 2009-2013**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Neighborhood cohesion	1.90** (.290)	1.90** (.377)	1.89** (.365)	1.77** (.320)	1.76** (.335)
Trust	.57 (.588)	.72 (.810)	4.38 (5.152)	3.55 (3.843)	3.74 (4.304)
Concentrated disadvantage		1.11 (.169)	.95 (.145)	1.02 (.145)	.96 (.144)
Percent home ownership		3.12 (2.536)	5.39* (4.295)	7.52 (5.557)	11.54** (9.572)
Percent foreign-born		7.45 (13.924)	2.13 (3.987)	.45 (.834)	1.02 (1.932)
Perception of safety			4.29 (1.730)	1.61 (.729)	2.93* (1.259)
Diepsloot township				79.94** (134.518)	
Township					3.90** (1.953)
Intercept	.00** (.000)	.00** (.000)	.00** (.000)	.00** (.000)	.00** (.000)
Log Likelihood	-334.44	-333.37	-326.81	-318.17	-323.02
Chi squared	19.31	21.44	34.56	51.85	42.16
AIC	676.88	680.75	669.63	654.34	664.03
N	507	507	507	507	507

Model 2 introduces the traditional structural controls discussed in the previous section, including *concentrated disadvantage*, *percent home ownership*, and *percent foreign-born*. Greater neighborhood cohesion continues to be associated with significantly *higher* incidence of vigilante violence despite the addition of these controls (IRR=1.9,  $p < .001$ ). While *concentrated disadvantage* is associated with a higher incidence of vigilante violence when *neighborhood cohesion* and *trust* are not included in the model (results not shown), when they are included the coefficient for *concentrated disadvantage* loses statistical significance. This suggests that the level of *neighborhood cohesion* and *trust* in disadvantaged neighborhoods accounts for their higher incidence of vigilante violence. Furthermore, neither the percentage of homeowners nor the percentage of foreign-born residents is associated with greater levels of vigilante violence. This is in some ways consistent with the literature on cohesion which argues that the pathways through which these structural characteristics influence crime and violence is through disrupting the formation and functioning of social ties and networks. *Trust* was also negatively associated with vigilante violence but was not significant (IRR=.72,  $p > .05$ ). This finding challenges the research that emphasizes trust as a predictor of a community's capacity for informal social control, and its subsequent role in reducing crime and violence. In the case of vigilante violence, as opposed to ordinary crime, trust among community members does not appear to significantly affect their ability to engage in informal social control. This finding supports the hypothesis that higher levels of neighborhood cohesion actually result in more incidents of vigilante violence in Gauteng net of all other factors.



Model 3 introduces *perceptions of safety* as a proxy for policing efficacy. As noted earlier, vigilante violence may at least be in part the result of residents feeling unsafe or unprotected by the police. When they feel unsafe, residents may be more likely to engage in vigilante violence in an attempt to provide for their own safety. However, in Model 3, *perceptions of safety* is not a significant predictor (although positive) of incidence vigilante violence. Despite the introduction of *perceptions of safety*, the relationship between *neighborhood cohesion* and incidence of vigilante violence changes little, and it remains a significant and positive predictor. However, the introduction of *perceptions of safety* results in a significant and strongly positive relationship between *percent of owner occupied homes* and the incidence of vigilante violence (IRR=5.39,  $p < .05$ ). This finding is particularly interesting as theories of cohesion would predict that increases in home ownership would decrease the level of violence in a community, as has been found elsewhere (Sampson et al. 1997). However, as vigilante violence is distinct from criminal violence and a form of informal social control, it is less surprising that the direction of the relationship would be the opposite of what would be assumed elsewhere. That is, as homeowners are thought to be more actively invested in the well-being of their communities and may therefore more readily engage in informal social control. In the South African context such informal social control appears to often take on a violent form.

The township of Diepsloot accounts for 46 (24%) incidents of vigilante violence over the period from 2009-2013. In Model 4 the dummy variable, *Diepsloot township*, is included to control for the effect of Diepsloot on the relationship between the various structural indicators and the incidence of vigilante violence. As expected, Diepsloot

has a significantly higher incidence of vigilante violence when other factors are controlled (IRR=79.94,  $p < .001$ ). While introducing *Diepsloot township*, results in *percent of owner occupied homes* becoming non-significant—*neighborhood cohesion* remains statistical significance and the magnitude of the relationship between it and vigilante violence is reduced only slightly. This suggests that despite a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between *Diepsloot township* and the incidence of vigilante violence, the relationship between the level of *neighborhood cohesion* and the incidence of vigilante violence in Gauteng is not driven by this one case. Indeed, when Diepsloot is excluded from the analysis altogether the results are consistent with those presented here.

In order to test whether vigilante violence in South Africa is primarily, if not entirely, confined to townships, Model 5 introduces the *township* dummy as a predictor. Consistent with popular perceptions, townships indeed have a higher incidence of vigilante violence than non-townships. However, controlling for townships does not alter the main findings regarding the effect of neighborhood cohesion.

*Collective efficacy* is introduced in Table 6 as the primary predictor, replacing the separate indicators of *neighborhood cohesion* and *trust* and making the models more comparable to those used by scholars examining violent crime (Sampson et al. 1997; Morenoff et al. 2001). In Model 1 we see that by itself, *collective efficacy* is both statistically significant and associated with increases in vigilante violence (IRR=2.14,  $p < .001$ ). Indeed, across Models 1 through 4, *collective efficacy* is found to be a consistent and statistically significant positive predictor of vigilante violence. Diverging from the results of studies showing that collective efficacy reduces crime

and violence within communities, as *collective efficacy* in a neighborhood increases, the incidence of vigilante violence also increases. Only in Model 5, with the introduction of the *township* control, does *collective efficacy* become non-significant (although the direction and magnitude remain generally the same).

Diverging from the bulk of existing research that shows that cohesion and collective efficacy generally mitigate violence in communities, the results from Tables 5 and 6 demonstrate that in South Africa greater levels of neighborhood cohesion and collective efficacy result in *higher* incidence of vigilante violence.

**Table 6. Incidence Rates Ratios from Negative Binomial Regressions for Collective Efficacy on Incidents of Vigilante Violence, 2009-2013**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Collective Efficacy	2.14** (.401)	1.96** (.446)	1.62* (.375)	1.53* (.326)	1.52 (.342)
Concentrated disadvantage		1.13 (.172)	1.02 (.157)	1.09 (.154)	1.03 (.153)
Percent home ownership		3.12 (2.552)	4.58 (3.686)	6.64* (4.978)	10.71** (8.962)
Percent foreign-born		2.28 (3.924)	.42 (.763)	.10 (.182)	.23 (.421)
Perception of safety			3.00** (1.149)	1.13 (.487)	2.05 (.835)
Diepsloot township				91.47** (147.945)	
Township					4.44** (2.259)
Intercept	.00** (.000)	.00** (.000)	.00** (.000)	.00** (.000)	.00** (.000)
Log Likelihood	-335.7	-334.53	-330.4	-321.36	-325.96
Chi squared	16.8	19.13	27.39	45.47	36.28
AIC	677.39	681.06	674.8	658.72	667.91
N	507	507	507	507	507

### Discussion and Conclusion

The findings presented here support the main hypothesis that in South Africa, higher levels of neighborhood cohesion and collective efficacy will result in *higher* incidents of vigilante violence, net of all other factors. These findings suggest that cohesion and collective efficacy operate differently in South Africa than has been theorized in Western contexts. While neighborhood cohesion and collective efficacy certainly encourage informal social control in South Africa, it is informal social control that manifests as collective violence against alleged criminals, rather than the non-violent informal social control activities that are typically considered in this body of research.

These findings provide three critical challenges to the established sociological literature on neighborhood cohesion, collective efficacy, and violence which finds that higher levels of cohesion and collective efficacy reduce the level of violence in a community. First, this literature has focused solely on criminal violence, namely assault, intimate partner violence, and homicide, ignoring a host of other salient forms of violence that communities experience, in particular forms of collective violence, like political violence, protest violence, civil war, terrorism, and vigilante violence. Second, the literature has largely argued that informal social control is the mechanism by which neighborhood cohesion translates into lower levels of crime and violence, has employed a limited view of informal social control, assuming that informal social control is non-violent. While this may be true in contexts in which communities have access to institutional avenues and supports through which they can translate cohesion into non-violent informal social control, this is certainly not universally the case,

particularly in marginalized communities. It has been argued throughout this paper that vigilante violence, a violent form of informal social control, complicates theories of the role of neighborhood cohesion and informal social control in determining levels of violence and crime, as it is at once criminal, violent, and a form of informal social control explicitly aimed at deterring and punishing criminals. This paper has shown that contrary to what theories of neighborhood cohesion and violence might expect, higher levels of neighborhood cohesion actually result in higher levels of vigilante violence. Third, the findings presented here also illustrate the need to continually test theory and findings in new, and in particular, non-Western contexts, as the bulk of the literature on neighborhood cohesion has been conducted in the West, particularly in Chicago. The findings presented here suggest that applying theories of cohesion and violence to non-Western contexts forces us to reexamine existing assumptions in ways that will advance our theoretical understandings of how neighborhood contexts matter in the face of rapid and unplanned urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa and other non-Western contexts.

It has been posited here, and indeed the findings lend partial support to the notion that while many neighborhoods, particularly in the Western context, are able to translate greater cohesion and the resulting increased capacities for informal social control into non-violent social control, via the police and court systems. However, where communities are marked by pronounced marginalization and a lack of resources, the capacity for social control might not always be expressed through non-violent, legitimate, or legal avenues. Further research should focus on the institutional

capacities that facilitate or inhibit the link between cohesion and non-violent informal social control.

Future research would also do well to examine the relationships between neighborhood cohesion and other forms of collective violence like political violence, protest violence, civil war, and terrorism. Additional scholarship could also expand upon the topic presented here by examining the effect that vigilante violence has on local crime levels in communities. By looking at rates of vigilante violence and crime in communities, we would be able to assess how effective vigilante violence is in deterring crime (if at all). A very provocative, albeit quite difficult, vein of research could compare the efficacy of violent and non-violent forms of informal social control in deterring crime across communities.

## Chapter 3: Vigilante violence and forward panic in Johannesburg's townships

### Abstract

Vigilante violence tends to take place in areas or situations in which the state is unable or unwilling to provide for the safety of certain groups. Vigilantism can be understood as an alternative means of controlling crime and providing security where the state does not. The violent punishment inherent in vigilante activity is with the ultimate goal of providing safety and security, and thus should theoretically “fit the crime” and not be excessive. However, in many acts of vigilante violence this is not the case, and vigilantism takes on an extraordinarily violent character. This paper examines vigilante violence in three South African townships through the micro-sociological perspective of violence developed by Randall Collins (2008), ‘forward panic.’ Forward panic is a process whereby the tension and fear marking most potentially violent conflict situations is suddenly released, bringing about extraordinary acts of violence. Based on data from 18 interviews gathered from the Johannesburg townships of Diepsloot, Freedom Park, and Protea South, I analyze respondents’ accounts and experiences with vigilante violence using the framework of forward panic. The data confirms that many acts of vigilante violence in South Africa’s townships can be clearly categorized as episodes of forward panic and that although Collins’ conception of forward panic focuses on the individual, the conditions which create the emotional potential for forward panic in an individual can be structural, and thus create the potential for forward panic in entire groups or parts of communities.



## Introduction

According to Weber, “the modern state can only be defined sociologically in terms of a specific means which is peculiar to the state, as it is to all other political associations, namely physical violence” (Weber 1919:310). In other words, the defining attribute of the state is that it its sole authority in exercising violence legitimately, typically through institutions like the military. Additionally, non-state entities can also exercise legitimate violence, although their source of legitimacy is the state (Weber 1919). Examples of such non-state entities include private security organizations, and even armed private citizens, who are sanctioned by the state to operate and employ violence within the bounds of the laws of the state, at least in theory (Kleck 1988; see Pinker 2011; Shearing and Stenning 1983). Under Weber’s conception, if violence is not sanctioned by the state it is necessarily illegitimate. The illegitimate use of violence is manifested primarily through violent criminal activities like muggings, rape, and murder (Pinker 2011; Weber 1919). This distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence, however, assumes that the state has the ability to consolidate legitimate violence within its institutions. Hypothetically, institutions that employ legitimate violence are subject to control though political processes. However, in many situations, this is not the case: South America and Africa offer numerous examples of militaries breaking free from the regulation of the political process and the state. Typically, when the state does not have control of its institutions that are meant to maintain social control and formal methods of social control erode, the legitimacy

of the state is under question, as in the conditions of revolution (Goldstone 1991; see Malesevic 2010; Skocpol 1979).

To be perceived as legitimate, a state must also be able to limit the use of illegitimate violence within its boundaries. Typically this occurs through processes of deterrence via threat of punishment by the state, i.e. corporal or capital punishment (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009). If the state is unable to properly deter or punish those employing illegitimate violence, its own monopoly on violence is undermined. The inability to prevent illegitimate violence theoretically results in a deterioration of social control, increases in crime, as the typical deterrence to such activity is largely absent through formal systems (Kreager, Lyons, and Hayes 2011). In situations where states are unable to contain violence within their institutions and illegitimate violence in the form of crime is widespread, new methods of informal social control and deterring crime may become possible and necessary.

This article explores the use of vigilante violence as a method of informal social control and crime deterrence in the absence of fully functioning police systems in townships around Johannesburg, South Africa. Drawing on interview data collected from individuals involved in vigilantism or informal policing, I utilize Collins' (2008) micro-sociological theory of violence and his concept of 'forward panic' to understand particularly violent episodes of vigilante violence. This article thus advances forward panic as a tool to examine and understand particular episodes of gratuitous violence and also contributes to more generally to the knowledge on informal social control, particularly in situations where informal social control methods are violent. Additionally, research in the South African context can shed light on how informal

social control is employed in other settings experiencing substantial political, economic, and/or social transitions.

### *Vigilantism and the State*

Classic and popular examples of alternative methods of deterring crime in the absence of a state monopoly on the legitimate use of violence can be found in the different manifestations of what is popularly known as ‘vigilantism’ that have occurred in nearly all societies at one point or another (Abrahams 1998; Kirsch and Gratz 2010; Pratten and Sen 2008). Vigilantism remains a largely understudied area and academic definitions of ‘vigilantism’ have varied widely (Abrahams 1998; de la Roche 1996; Godoy 2004; Kirsch and Gratz 2010; see Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1974). Johnston (1996) provides what is now considered a classic definition of vigilantism as “a social movement giving rise to premeditated acts of force—or threatened force—by autonomous citizens. It arises as a reaction to the transgression of institutionalized norms by individuals or groups—or to their potential or imputed transgression. Such acts are focused upon crime control and/or social control and aim to offer assurances (or ‘guarantees’) of security both to participants and to other members of a given established order (232).

Not surprisingly, the relationship between vigilantism and the state is primarily an antagonistic one. According to Rosenbaum and Sederberg (1974), vigilantism arises in situations where discontent with the government’s formal goals and achievements is high and “the potential for vigilantism varies positively with the intensity and scope of belief that a regime is ineffective in dealing with the challenges to the prevailing

sociopolitical order” (1974:545). Referring back to Weber’s monopoly on violence, discontent with the state is high when the state claims a monopoly on violence (goal) but is unable to enforce it or contain violence solely within its institutions (achievement).

As discussed in Chapter 1, Abrahams (1998) more critically focuses on the relationship between the state and vigilantism. He argues that state inefficiencies in securing a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence result in ‘frontier zones,’ areas on the edges of the power and authority of the state, where illegitimate forms of violence are present and as a result vigilantism is able and likely to emerge. In many cases frontier zones are the physical frontiers of states, such as state borders, unsettled areas, or contested borderlands as in the popular examples of the American West in the 19th century including San Francisco and Montana (Abrahams 1996), or the “minutemen” on the contemporary US-Mexico border (Chavez 2008). In many other cases, however, frontier zones are areas well within the geographic boundaries of the state but “where the state is viewed as ineffective or corrupt, and [vigilantism] often constitutes a criticism of the failure of state machinery to meet the felt needs of those who resort to it” (Abrahams 1998:9). In locations and/or situations in which the state is proven or perceived to be unable to satisfy demands for law, order, and safety, vigilantism becomes a predictable and even “natural,” response (Abrahams 1998:52).

Operating in frontier zones where the state’s monopoly on violence is unclear, the primary goal of vigilantism according to Rosenbaum and Sederberg is “deterrence: their tactics consist of threats and sanctions... The range of vigilante activities seems to extend from subtle and restrained used of force to acts of brutal compulsion and

retribution. Violent force may not be used on all occasions, but its future utilization is always implied” (1974:27-28). Thus according to this conception, violence is central to vigilante activity even if, seemingly paradoxically, the ultimate motivation of vigilantism is a desire for law, order, and safety (Abrahams 1998). To stress the centrality of violence in vigilantism is not to imply that any and all forms of violence are employed and/or acceptable. Just as state sanctioned forms of punishment should hypothetically be in proportion to the crime committed, in order to be considered just (Felson 2009), so too should violent vigilante punishment (Harris 2001; Zimring 2004). Vigilante actions that are either “too weak” or “too harsh” can both be deemed illegitimate and thus be rendered ineffective as a means of achieving their goal of controlling crime and/or providing order and safety (Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1974). Regarding effective forms of punishment, Durkheim asserts that punishment however must not be “a gratuitous act of cruelty” and the “criminal should suffer in proportion to his crime” (Durkheim 1893:63; see also Pinker 2011). Herein lies the primary social control potential of vigilante activity and social control violence more generally (de la Roche 1996; Kreuzer 2008). Since the ultimate goal of vigilante violence is to provide or restore order in the absence of state mechanisms to do so, vigilante violence, in theory, should be calculated and controlled. Yet, vigilante actions frequently become extremely violent and gratuitous (see Abrahams 1998; Kirsch and Gratz 2010; Pratten and Sen 2008). If the motivations and goals of vigilante violence are undermined by excessive violence, why then do some instances of vigilante action take on incredibly violent and brutal forms?

*Forward Panic and a Micro-Sociological Perspective on Violence*

Collins' (2008) theory of violence, in which he focuses on micro-sociological factors, rather than structural conditions, provides one plausible explanation for why vigilante violence often becomes excessively and gratuitously violent, which potentially undermines the ultimate social control goals of the activity. Collins argues that contrary to what most macro explanations assume, violence is not easy and if a situation is to result in violence it must overcome the "emotional field" of tension and fear surrounding all potentially violent situations and if that tension and fear is not overcome, then violence will not result (2008). Although different pathways exist to circumvent or overcome the tension/fear surrounding confrontational and potentially violent situations, 'forward panic' is particularly useful for understanding vigilante violence as it is frequently involved in instances of crowd/collective violence. According to Collins, forward panic "starts with tension and fear in a conflict situation. [Where] the tension is prolonged and built up ... [and is] striving toward a climax" (Collins 2008:85). In situations marked by forward panic, when the opportunity comes to overcome the tension/fear, emotions and actions erupt forcefully, overpowering the actors, "carrying them on to actions that they would normally not approve of" (Collins 2008:85). Furthermore, violent conflicts in which forward panic occurs often result in actors entering an "emotional tunnel of violent attack" and a "moral holiday," in which behavior that is not normally socially acceptable is possible and permissible (Collins 2008:87). These situations often result in unstoppable frenzies centered on rage, in which incredibly violent acts and 'overkill' -- the carry over of violent acts well past the point of victory -- occur frequently. When this occurs, violent acts like vigilantism

tend to spiral out of control and resemble atrocities more associated with lynchings-- rather than targeted and calculated instances of punishment or justice. In these situations violence is taken above and beyond what is “necessary,” and the potential of these acts of vigilante violence in providing law, order, and peace, which is their ultimate goal, is likely undermined (Kreuzer 2008; Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1972).

Studies employing Collins’ micro-sociological theoretical perspective of violence are limited and those focusing explicitly on forward panic are limited even further (Klusemann 2010; Levine, Taylor, Best 2011; Mazur 2009). Klusemann (2010) engages Collins’ micro-sociological approach to violence in his study of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre in which over 7,000 Bosnian-Muslim men were killed by the Bosnian Serb Army. Using a range of data Kluseman argues that although macro conditions may motivate a massacre, emotional dynamics are critical to understanding where and why extreme atrocities occur and that micro interactions and emotional momentum are necessary for the situational turning points that ultimately lead to atrocities. While Kluseman utilizes Collins’ broader micro-sociological theory, he does not explore the concept of forward panic directly.

Given that Collins’ theory straddles the sometimes-blurry lines between social, psychological, and even biological, it has drawn substantial criticisms from both the social and the “hard sciences.” From within sociology, Felson (2009) contends that Collins’ theory is unconformable, relies too heavily on “anecdotes” and ignores the more relevant quantitative literature. Additional heavily critical reviews were published in *Nature* and *Science* immediately following the publication of Collins’ (2008) work. Laitin (2008) and Wilson and Daly (2008) criticize Collins’ theory as being vague,

relying too heavily on metaphors, ultimately being too informal and unmeasurable, and thus not really explanatory.

The only study (to my knowledge) that focuses directly on forward panic does not interrogate the concept from a sociological perspective, but in efforts to address the criticisms outlined above, centers on a “hormonal interpretation” of forward panic, replacing “Collins’ metaphors with tangible and measurable hormonal mechanisms” (435). In his study, Mazur documents the “*real* behavioral mechanisms...based on the hormones testosterone and cortisol” [emphasis mine] underlying forward panic, concluding that forward panic is the result of the changes in hormones that occur during confrontation situations.

To address the criticisms outlined above I first provide a clear sociological definition and operationalizing of forward panic based on Collins’ work (2008; 2009; 2012). I then apply this operationalization to vigilante violence in South African townships to understand why episodes of vigilante violence are often marked by extreme and gratuitous violence. Furthermore, I contribute to the ongoing discussion of micro and macro causes of violence, arguing that the micro-level processes of forward panic described by Collins can occur on a larger scale if the pre-conditions for forward panic pervade the macro-level processes and structures of a community. Whereas others have argued for shifting Collins’ micro-sociological theory to the psychological or biological (Laitin 2008; Mazur 2009; Wilson and Daly 2008), I offer a purely sociological operationalization of forward panic. I then link the literature on vigilante violence and forward panic by presenting a brief discussion regarding the social control potential of vigilantism in cases of forward panic.



### *The Stages of Forward Panic*

To provide a more clear and precise understanding of forward panic as a sociological process, it is helpful to break the concept into stages, as it is typically a sequential process. The first stage, the build up of tension and/or fear is a period of tense standoff between two sides threatening violence; this could include actual fighting, violent confrontations, and threats (perceived or actual) of violence. Nearly all potentially violent confrontations require some level of tension or fear as a necessary precursor to the violence. In forward panic, however, this tension or fear is prolonged over a period of time, building so as to eventually erupt in an emotional rush. This period of tension/fear typically occurs in the events immediately before a violent episode, for instance in a police chase before an act of police brutality against the driver of the automobile (Collins 2008). However, in his discussion of crowd violence and ethnic riots, Collins argues that this tension/fear can be the result “*structural* conditions in the background, more long-term in nature, which affect whether ethnic groups have an antagonistic relationship” [emphasis mine] (Collins 2008:115). In reference to tension/fear specifically between ethnic groups, it is fair to assume that structural conditions could thus create antagonistic relationships between other groups as well (i.e. police and citizens, criminals and victims, etc).

The second stage in the sequence is the sudden resolution in favor of one side in which the built up tension/fear in stage one is suddenly resolved or overcome in favor of one side, with one side gaining control. This process often occurs because one side has displayed a sudden weakness or vulnerability, for instance when one side runs

away, has been caught, handcuffed, fallen down, or been isolated from support, etc. Both the “build up of tension/fear” and the “sudden resolution in favor of one side” refer to events and processes that occur prior to an outbreak of violence. The third stage, the rapid increase in numerical superiority of one side over the other, or “piling on,” is the process occurring immediately after a sudden resolution in favor of one side and consists of the numerical, physical, and emotional domination of one group over the other. This occurs immediately after the sudden resolution in favor of one side, whereby through the sudden display of vulnerability or weakness, participation by those who were previously bystanders is easier (i.e. one side has been caught or fallen down) and less risky (i.e. one side has been hand-cuffed), often increasing the ferocity of the dominating group. The fourth stage, the prolonged attacking of the weaker side even after the conflict is over and won, or “overkill,” refers to excessively violent or brutal attacks on defenseless individuals and attacks that go far beyond what is required for victory, as in the attacking or mutilating of dead bodies. According to Collins, those involved in overkill “fire more bullets than they need; they not only kill but destroy everything in sight; they throw more punches and kicks; they attack dead bodies” (Collins 2008:94).

The stages of forward panic as it was originally conceptualized take place on an individual-level. In this paper however, as has been touched on above, forward panic and its specific stages will be conceptualized as potentially occurring in groups or communities that are subjected to the same micro-level process on the aggregate that spur forward panic in individuals.

### Data and Methods

The data for this research was collected in three townships just outside of the city of Johannesburg (Diepsloot, Freedom Park, and Protea South). These townships provide an ideal context to examine the issues surrounding crime, policing, and vigilante justice. Diepsloot, Freedom Park, and Protea South all include a mixture of formal and informal settlements and are nearly homogenously black and impoverished to varying degrees, typical of many townships throughout the country. All three communities have incredibly high rates of crime and limited access to policing or private security. When policing services are available they are often seen as ineffective in controlling crime through inefficiencies in the criminal justice system or corruption. As a result, many township residents do not always rely on the police to deal with criminal activity. By Abraham's definition, all three of these communities could be considered frontier zones, which are ripe for vigilantism (1998).

According to Lofland and Lofland (1995), semi-structured interviewing is used to "achieve analyses that 1) are attuned to aspects of human group life, 2) depict aspects of that life, and 3) provide perspectives on that life that are simply not available to or prompted by other methods of research" (5). The data for this analysis consists of semi-structured interviews with township residents who were intimately familiar with vigilante activity or mob violence, broadly defined. In order to gain initial access to interviewees I employed a research assistant from Freedom Park to act as an entry point and arrange initial interviews. From my initial contacts I employed snowball sampling techniques for the subsequent interviews, a convenience sampling technique whereby initial interviewees suggest new ones. Given the sensitive nature of the research, I never

attempted to contact interviewees without an introduction, thus snowball sampling was the most effective sampling technique available to me. This strategy is widely employed in the study of high-risk activities (Kalyvas 2006; Viterna 2006). During July and August 2011 I conducted 18 interviews with 17 people (one participant was interviewed initially, and then again a day after a vigilante/mob violence incident with which he was involved), at which point I met theoretical saturation (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006). My research assistant was present for 17 of the 18 interviews. Some of the interviewees were more comfortable expressing themselves in Zulu and in these cases my research assistant translated interviewees for me as necessary.

All 17 interviewees were with Black South Africans. 14 were male and three were female. The ages of the interviewees ranged from late 20s to early 50s. Interviewees were spread across a variety of low-wage or informal occupations or were unemployed. Five of the interviewees were from the township of Diepsloot, four were from Freedom Park, and eight were from Protea South. Two of the interviewees in the sample were free-lance journalists. Both live and work in Diepsloot and primarily cover “mob violence” stories for a national tabloid newspaper. Interview topics covered issues related to crime, policing, and vigilante justice. The interview questions focused specifically on the interviewee’s experiences with and views of the SAPS, Community Policing Forums (organizations instituted by the state after apartheid to control crime by addressing the contentious relationship between the SAPS and township communities), and the criminal justice system in the country, experiences with and views of informal policing/mob justice, xenophobic attacks, and the violence that often

accompanies informal policing and mob justice. Interviews ranged in length from 23 minutes to 2 hours and 33 minutes, with an average interview length of 56 minutes.

I transcribed the interviews verbatim, only omitting repeated phrases such as “um,” “you know,” and “what what” (a common South African colloquialism), etc. The interviews that contained Zulu portions were transcribed by my research assistant under the same guidelines. When necessary, excerpts from transcripts used in this paper have been edited for readability while maintaining the interviewee’s original meaning. Additionally, pseudonyms have been used throughout this paper to protect the identity of the interviewees. Data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software, NVIVO9. Initial analysis consisted of open coding to allow for unanticipated themes to emerge, after which these codes were grouped and patterns were established across cases.

I operationalize forward panic into codes corresponding with the sequence of events in a forward panic situation as defined by Collins (2008): “Build up of Tension/Fear,” “Sudden Resolution in favor of one side,” “Piling on,” and “Overkill.” These codes are derived from the different stages of forward panic outlined above. “Build up of Tension/Fear” is operationalized as a period of tense standoff between two sides threatening violence; this could include actual fighting, violent confrontations, and threats (perceived or actual) of violence. “Sudden Resolution in favor of one side” is operationalized as situations in which the built up tension/fear is suddenly resolved or overcome in favor of one side, with one side gaining control. The third code, “Piling on,” is the process occurring immediately after a sudden resolution in favor of one side and is operationalized as the numerical, physical, and emotional

domination of one group over the other, which primarily includes references to the number of people involved, as well as the weapons and ferocity employed by the dominating group. “Overkill” is the prolonged beating or attacking even when the conflict is over and won. It is operationalized as excessively violent or brutal attacks on defenseless individuals, attacks far beyond what is required for victory as in the attacking or mutilating of dead bodies. “Piling on” and “Overkill” refer to situations and actions occurring during an episode of forward panic.

### Results

Although forward panic was developed as a micro-sociological approach to understanding violence by focusing primarily on individual emotions leading up to, and during, violent episodes, this paper argues that the conditions and processes of forward panic can take place on a much broader, potentially macro, level. This argument is based on the notion that the individual-level conditions of forward panic, particularly the build up of tension/fear, can be experienced by a large number of individuals within a certain area and over an extended period of time. In his discussion of crowd violence and ethnic riots, Collins very quickly touches on the possibility of multiple actors experiencing the pre-conditions of forward panic simultaneously and for an extended period of time. Collins’ discussion of these processes is very brief. While other attempts to validate or test forward panic have focused more on the micro (even biological) (see Mazur 2009), I instead focus on the more firmly sociological processes, linking micro and macro-level processes as they contribute to violence.

### *Build up of Tension/Fear*

Build up of Tension/Fear was mentioned regularly throughout all 18 of the interviews. In the interviews, the tension/fear between the community and police was most often expressed as the result of failure of the police to deal with crime, thus serving to exacerbate the tension/fear between the communities and criminals. 'Discontent with police' was mentioned by all interviewees. Although forward panic against the police does sometimes occur, more often than not that tension/fear is built up and expressed towards criminals. References to tension/fear as related to criminals also appeared in all of the interviews. There is, however, substantial overlap between tension/fear resulting from discontent with police and tension/fear as a result of issues with criminals.

### *Build up of Tension/Fear: police misconduct*

All interviewees expressed complaints against the police for misconduct in the form of the police treating victims poorly or with hostility, not arresting criminals, releasing criminals once arrested, and/or taking bribes. One of the most common themes in the discussion of police misconduct was that the police did not detain criminals in the desired manner or for the proper/desired amount of time. Many interviewees complained of negligence, bribery and even collusion between the police and criminals. In regards to police misconduct, particularly around the issue of bribery, it is rather difficult to parse out what were simply the interviewees' perceptions of police accepting bribes and when bribery had actually occurred. However, given the high level of police corruption in South Africa (Pillay 2013; Singh 2005), it is safe to

assume that many of the allegations of bribery were based in reality. Regardless of whether the police conduct referenced is real or perceived, the consequences are identical.

This perspective can be seen in the case of a man whom I call Dumu, the chairperson of the public safety/domestic abuse prevention organization Men as Safety Promoters (MASP) in the township of Freedom Park. As the chairperson of MASP, Dumu is heavily involved in community affairs, regularly attends community meetings, and patrols the streets on foot as part of his position. He is also a particularly outspoken critic of the police and African National Congress (ANC) (South Africa's ruling party since the first democratic elections) and did not shy away from vocalizing his potentially controversial opinions and assertions about either body. In his interview Dumu repeatedly claimed that the police themselves engage in criminal activity while on duty. Recounting a recent incident of police misconduct, Dumu said, "I can attest last week Wednesday at around 10:30 in the evening, I witnessed four police officers, all of them they were smoking heroin, nyopi (a local drug), they smoked it from ten in the evening to two in the morning... on the same day we heard that two men were raped." Situations like these, which appear to be rather common, create tension/fear in the community through the aggravation as a result of the blatant misconduct of the police but also in that the misconduct can oftentimes lead to, or be perceived as leading to, more crime (specifically in this case the rape of two men).

The misconduct of the police also creates tension/fear when community members widely see criminals as facing little or no punishment for their crimes even when arrested by the police. This is most commonly perceived as being the result of



bribery, whereby suspects are able to buy their release from the police. Highlighting the frequency with which this occurs, a phrase occurring nearly universally throughout the interviews was that if the “police arrest him today, tomorrow he’ll be free.” While it is sometimes unclear if suspects are actually bribing the police or being let out legitimately on bail, the frequency with which people alleged this misconduct suggests that bribery occurs with regularity. Jabulani, a CPF chairperson from Diepsloot who is a supporter and participant of mob violence describes a case where a police captain in Diepsloot was actually arrested for accepting bribery:

The police rob our community. They are taking bribery from the community. When we complain to the police they say ‘No, its just allegation.’ But through the help of the police outside Diepsloot, if the captain of the station here has been arrested fro bribery. He went down here at the tavern checking their permits and their license and said ‘You’re license is expired. So now you must pay R1500 [about \$150].’ They’ve been doing that all along. Until we finally raised it with the Station Commissioner to say he needs to do something about it. It’s his policemen who are robbing the community. He said he would put the police in check. They arrested that same policeman... They arrested their captain there at the station. We told the Station Commissioner, ‘No bail for that policeman. No bail, he must stay there.’

In addition to illustrating the difficulty of dealing with the issue of bribery even for a CPF chairperson, Jabulani also touches on a general dissatisfaction with the bail system. Since bribery is perceived to be so rampant, it is often difficult or impossible

for community members to distinguish between situations where suspects have bribed the police or have been released on bail.

Whether a suspect actually bribes the police or is released on bail (and is perhaps perceived to have bribed the police), the consequences in regards to creating tension/fear in the community are the same whether the police misconduct is real or perceived. Lindsey, a wiry young and enthusiastic local activist in Protea South and a vocal supporter of mob violence notes the seeming futility of turning over a suspected criminal to the police and the anger it causes: “When we give [the suspect] to the police, I wont get my stuff back. Tomorrow I’ll see him walking free, so whats the use? I bought those things with hard earned cash, and then they get stolen by someone who I’ll see tomorrow. That thing it eats my heart out. So its better to take them out.” Lindsey highlights how the release of criminals--whether through bribery or bail—leaves these criminals free to continue committing crime, creating anguish for victims. Furthermore, this form of police misconduct also creates tension/fear between the specific perpetrators and their victims.

In Protea South, Lungile, the chairperson of the local chapter of Landless Peoples’ Movement (LPM), a social movement organization that advocates for squatters and informal settlement dwellers, illustrates how police misconduct can in some cases threaten the lives of the victims of crime: “Some of the criminals are the police department’s friends or the friends of the police, and maybe they used this bribery to get out of the police station. And when the criminals come out, the person who opened the case... their life is in danger.” This sentiment was echoed by Thabo, a young former CPF member in Protea South:

The Protea Glen police station doesn't know how to manage crime here, because they get lost in every thing, because today we get the criminal, tomorrow is coming back again and that criminal is not coming back again to say 'I am going to change the things that I was doing.' He is coming back to the place where he was caught and he will say 'You can't do anything to me, I am back again and I will do it again.' You see that thing make the community of Protea South to get angry and to say there is nothing that can be done by the police.

He later goes on to talk about how this police misconduct and its consequences caused him to quit his work with the CPF: "I was working for the CPF and we arrested two guys with stolen property and the police don't do anything on that thing. I had to resign from community patrol because at the end, I'm going to be killed. And I left my community stranded with nothing... We help the police but the police doesn't help us." Regardless of whether these claims are accurate (although the frequency to which they are made would suggest that many are) the mere perception that the police are letting criminals off, free to threaten or attack their victims again, is enough to cultivate tension/fear in the community and generate very real consequences in these communities.

The tension/fear due to the perception and/or reality of widespread police misconduct creates a situation where members of the community are dissatisfied with the police in their response to crime. This process creates antagonism between the community and the police as well as the community and criminals, as criminals are

perceived to be free to terrorize the community as they please. Furthermore, the repeated references to the police releasing criminals for bribes (or otherwise) creates tension and fear because the community not only perceives criminals as frequently going unpunished for their crimes, but there are situations in which they actually are.

*Build up of Tension/Fear: police response time*

Another frequently cited complaint against the police was their response time to emergency calls. All interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with how long it took the police to respond to calls and crimes in progress. This view was shared by both those who worked very closely with the police, like Community Policing Forum (CPF) chairpersons, as well as those who have had very little formal interaction with the police. Although problems with infrastructure are a substantial issue in townships and many townships do not have their own police stations (Gastrow and Shaw 2001; Shaw 2002:11), even people in those areas with active police stations cited regular experiences with unreasonably long and frustrating delays in police response time. Of those who were interviewed in areas without an active police station, the delay in police response was far greater than could be accounted for in travel time. Dumi, the chairperson of MASP mentioned above, briefly explains this vast disparity in the distance of the police station from Freedom Park and response time of the police: “from here to the Eldorado Park police station, its about three minutes, but all the time when we’ll report a crime the police will come after two hours or three hours,” far longer than could be accounted for in driving time.

Thabo, the former CPF member in Protea South who resigned as a result of a lack of support from the police, claims that police are blatantly ignoring calls: “We called the police and say ‘There is another guy who had been shot. Come and help.’... The police say ‘We are coming now,’ but we wait and wait and they are going to say ‘There is no van at the police station... there is no police person... wait for another to come and we are going to come to you.’ When you go to the police station you are going to find a van there.” Bheka, a rather serious and dedicated CPF chairperson from the township of Diepsloot who regularly interacts with the police as central part of his job, echoes this frustration when he recounts the situation of tension/fear when he would apprehend criminals and the closest police station was roughly 40 kilometers away:

We operated for a long time without the police station, and people apprehend [a criminal] or maybe they do a citizen’s arrest and it takes for two, three, five hours, waiting for the police. So somewhere somehow they get emotional, you understand and that’s where it started. We’re not saying it’s right but that’s where it started. Once the police don’t come then they take the law into their own hands.

As someone with an invested commitment in working with the police and dealing through legal means, it is readily apparent to Bheka how the context of struggling with slow police response times can create a tense emotional and dangerous situation where vigilante violence is understandable, if not sometimes inevitable, even among CPF members (who have a formal relationship with the police).

In certain situations, the entire community might experience this tension/fear at the same time. Sam, a resident of Diepsloot and free-lance journalist who photographs vigilante justice in his community, describes a particularly violent night where the lack of a police response was felt on a larger scale due to the widespread violence of the evening:

We had something like eleven murders Friday night and people were angry with the situation. Because others even tried to phone the police at the time they were being robbed, the police never came... A lot of people were shot. I went to a tavern where three people were gunned down... So people were angry and when somebody came up and said no, I know where these criminals are living.

People stood up and said “where are they, these people are killing us.”

Sam recounts a situation where many people are *simultaneously* experiencing the tension/fear from police non-response in the form of a violent crime spree. The residents then become angry and decide to respond themselves while the crimes are still taking place. The heightened tension/fear in this situation is such that people are willing to risk their lives in pursuit of these criminals.

As a precursor to forward panic, the failure (or perception thereof) of the police to deal with or respond to crime contributes to forward panic in two important ways: 1) by exacerbating the existing tension/fear associated with crime and 2) by firmly establishing these areas as frontier zones in which the next processes of forward panic can take place with little fear of interruption or repercussion by state authorities like the police.

### *Sudden Resolution of Tension in Favor of One Side*

The next stage in a forward panic that Collins' discusses is the sudden resolution of tension/fear in favor of one side, which is often the result of something that brings widespread attention to a situation and tends to happen during a crime or shortly after a crime has been committed, when a numerically or physically superior group apprehends a criminal. Many of the interviewees mentioned that if people see someone struggling with another person, hear someone screaming or making a commotion, they will come out to see what is happening and often try to help the victim. The crowded nature of many townships further contributes to this process, as witnesses are likely to be more prevalent and able to respond more quickly than in other contexts. Sam, the free-lance journalist mentioned above, said that "once a person screams in this community, you say he is in trouble, the community comes... you can't scream a small thing, the people come running." The scream alerts many people at once to a situation, and once they arrive, the tension/fear is resolved in the community's favor. He also notes that screaming is taken seriously enough by the community, that you should not scream unless it is a serious matter. The serious nature of screaming further highlights the build up of tension/fear in these communities and its relationship with the sudden resolution of tension in favor of one side in that a high level of tension/fear needs to exist for a scream to trigger such a response from a community.

### *Sudden Resolution of Tension in Favor of One Side: Whistling*

The importance of alerting many people at once to a crime or disruption (like through a scream) has taken on a more institutionalized form than a simple scream, with many communities employing whistles as an alert system. The fact that many

communities employ whistles for this purpose points to the fact that there is a certain level of latent tension/fear that exists within the entire community at all times. Lindsey discusses how institutionalized and widespread the whistle is in her community:

We discussed it in a meeting here in Zone 3, we have our own strategy of how to defend ourselves at night, the whistle is the first point that we are going to use if somebody is attacking a family. This plan that we have, even other zones they do the same. Also we don't allow children to play with the whistles because we know the whistles is saying something, if the children are playing with the whistles then we have to talk to their parents and tell them that they must not allow to their children to play with the whistles.

Again here, the seriousness of the alert system is referenced. It is important that the effectiveness of this tool not be undermined through abuse. Lungile describes how the whistle system works, you blow the whistle to "call your neighbor and that neighbor calls another neighbor, so when we hear it, all of the neighbors come out." Again, the density of townships contributes to both the effectiveness of the alert system in disseminating that a crime is in progress and the ability for people to respond to that crime rapidly.

An additional way the whistle serves to resolve tension/fear in favor of the community is to call people out from their houses to attack or hunt a suspect once he or she has already been caught. Given the congested nature of many townships, using the whistle to alert others creates a situation in which large numbers of people can gather in a matter of minutes, aware of a transgression and ready to respond. Jabulani explains how important the whistle is and how quickly it can resolve tension/fear in



favor of the community: “Once they blow the whistle, you must just surrender. You are dead.” Here Jabulani illustrates the common idea that the whistle is such an effective and institutionalized strategy that even criminals acknowledge its efficiency. Rather than attempting to run away, criminals who hear the whistle will often simply surrender rather than attempt to escape.

*Sudden Resolution of Tension in Favor of One Side: Sudden Weakness or Vulnerability*

In addition to the whistle, another process by which tension/fear is resolved in favor of one side is when a small group of community members or a body like the Community Policing Forum will apprehend a criminal on their own, and once the community sees what is happening, they gather and attack the now vulnerable criminal. The tension/fear here is suddenly resolved by the fact that the criminal is in some sort of custody and thus particularly vulnerable. In describing an event in which the CPF apprehended three notorious criminals only to have them killed and burned by the community, Mandla, a scrappy young activist and former member of the CPF in Protea South who remains deeply involved in community issues, describes how a frustrated community quickly took advantage of the situation: “We tied them there... we tied their hands together with their legs, sitting down but the community started to see the agitation...People started to be angry (making a clapping noise)...There are some groups discussions and people are saying, “No, no why should we ask those people some questions? Why can’t we kill these people? They are butchers.”” Here, the apprehended criminals were incredibly vulnerable, as they were tied by their hands and feet and were completely defenseless against the community, even with the CPF trying to ward off an attack.

Many of these situations in which the tension/fear is suddenly resolved or overcome are due to a prolonged build up of tension/fear and also the result of the fact that most of these townships are often highly congested. This situation results in many people at once being alerted to a situation through a noise like a scream or whistle, or by visibly witnessing a confrontation. It also creates a situation where many people are capable of reaching the location of a confrontation in a very short period of time, as many people are necessarily already close by. Indeed, in many situations, the sudden resolution of tension/fear also takes the form of Piling On, in that a rapid increase in the numerical superiority of one group resolves the tension/fear in favor of one side and allows an “emotional rush” of violence to surge forth.

### *Piling On*

The third stage in a forward panic situation is piling on and the theme came up in all of the interviews. It is the rapid increase in numerical superiority of one side over another, occurring simultaneously with or immediately after, the sudden resolution of tension/fear. Piling On allows one side to physically and emotionally dominate the other, who in most cases is defenseless or has given up. Through this process, violent aggression is made less risky and thus relatively easy. In most situations a criminal might be stronger than a victim, attack them when they are off guard, or have a weapon. In situations marked by Piling On, the victims suddenly gain the upper hand in the situation and the tension/fear bursts forth violently. Additionally, Piling On creates an intense emotional atmosphere that is particularly conducive to violence, as people’s anger and intense emotional state feed off of one another.

In these townships, Piling On is fueled by the collective tension/fear, as well as the congestion that makes it easy to become aware of a confrontation and quickly become involved. Sometimes piling on occurs when people are called to the scene (occurring simultaneously with the sudden resolution of tension/fear), as Phila, another former CPF member and political activist in Protea South, describes, “immediately when someone is caught a lot of people scream, ‘Here is the thug!... And he was caught stealing this and that...’ and then people will come and he will be beaten by the community.”

The built up tension/fear in the community is highlighted by peoples’ willingness to participate in the violence: in many situations community members need only to see others responding to an incidence. As a result, many join in without any knowledge the crime that occurred or the events leading up to the confrontation. Sbu, another journalist from Diepsloot who primarily covers mob violence in his community for a *The Daily Sun*, a tabloid newspaper and also the most popular newspaper in the country, describes how this process takes place, “there are people who just come out of nowhere who would not even ask “What’s going on?”, they would just help and beat that person.”

Often people are so eager to take part that even in situations where a few people have captured a criminal and do not want others involved, they are unable to stop them. Mandla describes how quickly the community can respond and completely take over a situation, even overpowering the CPF:

The answer of the community is to kill. There is no other thing. If you grab someone... I could catch someone here and... I wont even reach another zone.

The minute I go from here to the clinic (about 40 feet away)... the crowd is here, out at the clinic, they say, 'Whats going on?' They start and say, 'No, no, no. Why you taking this man there to the station?' They say 'No, let's beat this man up... they are killing you.'

Once the tension/fear has been resolved or overcome through piling on, people are, in many situations, ready and fervent perpetrators in the violence.

The nature of piling on, with many people joining in and attacking one side in very short period of time, makes it so that these outbursts of violence often occur incredibly quickly. Many people all at once are punching, kicking, beating with sjamboks (a cattle whip), throwing stones or bricks, or using whatever else they can find to attack a criminal. The journalist Sbu describes how quickly the process of piling on can result in death, "It only takes three minutes... he's gone. Three minutes and he's gone. The multitude of people of attacking one person with different weapons. Yeah, it takes only three minutes."

### *Overkill*

The last stage in a forward panic is overkill, which was talked about in all of the interviews. Overkill is the process whereby people are caught up in the intense and collective emotional atmosphere or "tunnel" of forward panic and cannot stop their momentum. Many interviewees spoke of situations of piling on with phrases like, "you can't stop the community," where the community is "unstoppable" or "uncontrollable" to describe the rapid and unified emotional and violent escalation. When asked, "Who participates?," most responded with "The whole community," that is to say the

“community” is acting as a collective group in the violence. The “community” is often so immersed in the emotional atmosphere that people who do try to intervene or prevent the violence in any way are attacked as well. Whether it be people questioning the guilt of the suspect, defending the suspect, or even interventions by CPFs or the police, anyone seen as voicing transgressions are then at risk of attack because they are seen as “siding with the suspect.”

The emotional atmosphere is so intense and widespread that simply asking if the criminal is actually guilty can put one’s life at risk. Sbu, describes the risk of trying to stop or even question the community once they are in this state:

[You] can never do that. You become a victim. They never stop the mob. You can see your brother there but you can’t do anything. They will kill you as well. You will die with him... they have these preconceived ideas. And it is uncontrollable. When the mob is beating someone you can never come and say something...you’ll be killed... They will say “No, you are doing it with him, thats why you support him.” So you will also get killed.

This solidarity in emotional frenzy, which is free from opposition or even skepticism, creates an environment where people are feeding off of and reinforcing one another’s intense emotions. The group acts to amplify the emotions of individuals and often creates a ‘moral holiday’, where traditional moral constraints are ignored and individuals support and encourage one another in activities normally forbidden (Collins 2008:98, 243). In these situations the atmosphere is often marked by elation, exhilaration or celebration. Numerous references were made to the jovial mood of

community members during these incredibly violent episodes, where people were singing and dancing while a suspect was being beaten to death.

*Overkill: Burning*

The burning of victims was referenced in the majority of the interviews. Although far from occurring in the majority of instances of vigilante violence, the burning of victims or their dead bodies illustrates how incredibly violent forward panic can get during situations of overkill. In a violent situation free from physical opposition or expressed moral disagreement, no one can question the group if it decides that it wants to escalate the violence to the point of burning a victim, something that would be morally reprehensible and unthinkable in nearly any other situation. Burning is undoubtedly overkill as it is hardly the most efficient way of killing a person, happens well past the point of the victory of the group, and in many cases happens after the person is already dead; there is much more violence than necessary even in the context of the already very violent situation. Sbu describes the mood of people just before the burning of someone alive:

It is just for the fun of it. I think it is just for the fun of it. Because you find people laughing you know... others are excited when they look at it. They are excited by what is happening. That person is naked, they are excited, they are laughing, they are chanting around that particular person. You see while others are soaking him [in paraffin]... yeah I think it is just for the fun of it.

As Sbu describes, the burning of alleged criminal alive is not functional violence in the way that beating or stoning might be perceived in the context of the violent episode: it is well beyond what might be deemed “necessary” to punish or even to kill the alleged

criminal. Instead, within the context of forward panic and the subsequent moral holiday, the burning of an alleged criminal borders on recreational.

However, once the moral holiday is over the brutality of such acts becomes clear. Jabulani, who despite his language was visibly excited in relaying this event, reflects back on one such horrific situation:

Sometimes it disgusts me when the community wants... after stoning they want to burn the person... It doesn't... I started to shiver. You see...I have seen two criminals from Mozambique, they were tied like this (with their hands together) and their legs. They took the plastics... the plastic bags and threw them on top of them and then they light. They were crying. They were crying until that fire come up...everything eaten by fire.

All of the components of a forward panic situation work together to create these incredible episodes of violence. Indeed, forward panic often takes on the characteristics of what Collins calls an “atrocious”, “it is patently unfair: the strong against the weak; the armed against the unarmed (or the disarmed); the crowd against the individual... [it] is a very ugly-looking event” (Collins 2008:94).

### *Discussion and Conclusion*

This research yields a number of important findings and contributions to the theoretical development of forward panic. First, the operationalization of forward panic in purely sociological terms through clearly defining the sequential processes and providing a coding scheme for forward panic should address many of the concerns leveled by critics of this theoretical perspective on violence. A clear operationalization should assuage Laitin's (2008) concerns regarding coding schemes and theory

confirmation. Furthermore, this operationalization places forward panic firmly within the body of sociology. Where Mazur (2009) attempted to address the “tangibility” of this theory by focusing on biological process, this paper has shown that such a complete shift in focus is unnecessary as the processes of forward panic are already readily apparent and tangible within the sociological.

Secondly, the processes of forward panic can occur at the group and/or community level. It is clear from this research that the micro-sociological pre-conditions for forward panic can occur simultaneously in many people at once and can occur over a longer period of time than described in Collins’ original work. Specifically, the build up of tension or fear that is a necessary pre-cursor for forward panic situations can effect entire communities if they are subject to the same processes that might incur those same emotions at the individual-level. When these processes are structural, as in high levels of crime and corrupt and/or inefficient policing in a community, it becomes even more apparent that “micro and macro theories cannot be entirely distinct, since macro always contains micro within it” (Collins 2009).

The findings from this paper have important implications for future research using micro and macro approaches to understanding violence, research using forward panic in particular, and the study of informal social control and vigilantism. Returning to some of the concepts around vigilantism outlined earlier, it is clear that many of Johannesburg’s townships resemble Abrahams’ frontier zones and are areas where Weber’s state’s monopoly on violence is often non-existent, or at best severely fragmented. The lack of a state monopoly on the legitimate use of violence creates an environment marked by incredibly high levels of crime as well as a need, in absence of



the police, to control crime in the community by other means. These other means are usually various forms of vigilante justice, or the community “taking the law into its own hands.” Yet, the seemingly lawless context found in many townships and the build up of tension/fear as a result, lends itself to forward panic *rather* than the targeted and precise acts of violent punishment that would best serve the ultimate goals of vigilantism. Once forward panic is established, it bursts forth into levels of violence that move far beyond what could be considered an effective level of punishment to create social control. Instead, it could be argued the process of forward panic potentially undermines the social control potential of vigilante justice in Johannesburg's townships, turning them from situations in which the community takes the “law into their own hands” and finds solidarity in collective punishment, into very violent instances of collective violence and brutality that often more closely resemble atrocities like lynchings than the efforts of a concerned community trying to take back control and protect themselves.

Additionally, while I've argued that a more macro (i.e. group level or community level) approach to understanding forward panic is useful, focusing on the micro processes remains fundamental. Understanding gratuitous vigilante violence or mob justice via the micro-sociological approach of forward panic then, provides an optimistic take on an inherently negative social phenomenon (Kluseman 2009). If we are aware of the processes and pre-conditions of forward panics in South African townships, perhaps focusing efforts on disrupting these processes could result in reductions or preventions of mob violence. Research on effective interventions is then

likely to be increasingly fruitful and could have important impacts in reducing the instances of mob violence in townships.

In regards to the capacity for informal social control in communities, Drakulich and Crutchfield (2013) argue that informal social control is more likely to occur in more affluent neighborhoods, neighborhoods with a higher degree of residential stability, and where trust in the police is high. This is in part because residents see the benefits of participation in informal social control as outweighing the costs. Where police are perceived to be willing to support and engage with informal social control efforts, the costs for participation are reduced via reducing the perceived risk of retaliation or further victimization, and the benefits are increased through increased effectiveness. Following these findings one would assume that the capacity for informal social control in South African townships would be very low as these communities are typically marked by high poverty, racial segregation and isolation, low perceptions of police efficacy, and very high levels of distrust in police. If lack of faith in the police in particular “inhibits informal social control activities, and in fact explains lower capacities for informal social control in minority communities” (Drakulich and Crutchfield 2013:403), why then do we see such a high prevalence of vigilante violence in townships? Research on this might look to the perceptions of the costs and benefits of participating in informal social control. While the benefits are likely low due to poor police support, the costs might also be very low as the police may be unlikely or unable to punish those who participate in vigilante violence.

In addition to the capacity for informal social control in communities, this work also points to potential new research on the effectiveness of informal social control,

particularly violent social control. Given that the ultimate goal of vigilante violence is to restore law, order, and safety, and the use of violence or threat there of is primarily a means of punishment and/or deterrence to support this goal, it should follow that vigilante violence would be then be calculated and very deliberately directed at perpetrators or other symbolic targets. The data show that as a result of forward panic vigilante violence in townships is often poorly directed and very frequently goes well beyond what could be considered a calculated use of violence as punishment to restore law and order. Theoretically this should undermine the social control potential of vigilante violence but further research is necessary to determine the effectiveness of these forms of violent informal social control.

If the state remains unwilling or unable to effectively police and to provide formal social control in townships, the residents of these communities will continually resort to informal methods of social control. In contexts in which the specific micro-sociological processes found in forward panic are experienced collectively, as in many townships communities, the result will likely be acts of collective violence often bordering on atrocity.

## Conclusion

The three papers constituting this dissertation were motivated by a dearth of social scientific information on vigilante violence, specifically vigilante violence in South Africa, although the findings presented here will certainly be applicable in a variety of contexts. In addition to the study of vigilante violence, these papers shed light on a number of other relevant sociological questions surrounding violence, social control, policing, and contentious politics in the Global South.

The first paper of this dissertation addresses fundamental questions regarding the role of the state, specifically state (il)legitimacy, and vigilante violence. Theories of vigilante violence tend to emphasize the inability or incapacity of the state to provide security and safety for its citizens as a fundamental motivation and precursor for vigilantism. Central in many of these theories has been the notion that vigilantism is primarily a product of weak and/or failed states, whereby private citizens “take the law into their own hands” to provide for their own safety, and the safety of their community as the state is unable to maintain its monopoly on violence. Building upon this foundation, scholars have advanced the idea that vigilante violence is not limited to weak or failed states on the whole, as many states that cannot be designated as weak or failing experience vigilantism. More accurately, it is the unequal distribution of state capacity or willingness to provide safety and security for its citizens, whereby societal elites benefit from the strength of the state, and marginalized groups and areas suffer from state neglect. Geographically, these areas have been termed “brown areas” (O’Donnell 1993), “stateless locations” (Cooney 1997; Nivette 2014; 2016), or “frontier zones” (Abrahams 1998).

The first paper builds upon this foundation and tests the role of perceptions of state legitimacy and satisfaction with state security in either increasing or decreasing vigilante violence in South Africa. While I find that dissatisfaction with government security is positively related to vigilante violence, perceptions of state illegitimacy are actually negatively associated with vigilante violence, which is the opposite direction expected. These results are consistent across multiple models. Another fundamental contribution of this paper is the mapping of these frontier zones, allowing for us to visualize these inequalities in the state's power and legitimacy and its capacity and willingness to provide adequate security for its citizens.

While the first paper focuses explicitly on the state, and residents' relation and perception of it, the second chapter focuses on the role that community characteristics play in vigilante violence. Neighborhood cohesion and collective efficacy have long been shown to reduce levels of crime and violence in communities. These reductions in crime and violence are understood to be the result of the role that neighborhood cohesion and collective efficacy play in increasing a community's capacity to engage in informal social control. However, this informal social control is generally assumed to be non-violent. In the South African context, and in many others, informal social control often takes on violent forms, as in the case of vigilante violence. Testing the relationship between neighborhood cohesion, collective efficacy, and vigilante violence, I find that in South Africa, these community characteristics are positively associated with vigilante violence. That is, higher levels of neighborhood cohesion and collective efficacy result in more incidence of vigilante violence, contrary to what has been found elsewhere. Thus, the results from this paper offer important challenges to

the existing theories of cohesion and violence and illustrate the need to continually test theory in new and non-Western contexts.

While the third paper in this dissertation continues with the theme of theoretical development and is motivated by testing theory in non-Western contexts, it departs from the previous two, in that it is qualitative. In this paper, I use semi-structured in-depth interview data and Randall Collins' concept of forward panic to understand how and why incidents of vigilantism can become superfluously violent, whereby alleged criminals are brutally executed, and in many cases, burned alive. According to Collins, in order for a situation to result in violence it must overcome an emotional field of tension and fear that surrounds all potentially violent situations. If that tension and fear is not overcome, then violence will not result. Forward panic is a process by which that emotional field is abruptly overcome, and the tension and fear surrounding the situation erupts and results in extraordinary acts of violence. In this paper, I operationalize forward panic into its sequential stages: the "Build up of Tension/Fear," the "Sudden Resolution in favor of one side," "Piling on," and "Overkill." I find that many of vigilante violence in Gauteng can indeed be categorized as forward panics, and that although Collins's conception of forward panic focuses on the individual, the conditions that create the emotional potential for forward panic in an individual can be structural and thus create the potential for forward panic in entire groups or parts of communities.

Although there are clear limitations in some of the analyses in this dissertation, taken together, the analyses presented here provide some fundamental empirical and theoretical advances in the study of vigilante violence, as well as offering important

insights into the study of collective violence, social control, policing, and contentious politics in the Global South.

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