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## Introduktion: Retorik utan gränser

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**Laurie E. Gries**

## Rhetorical Data Studies: A Methodology for doing Scholarly Activism through Data Advocacy

This article by Laurie Gries extends a keynote talk given at the 2022 Nordic Conference on Research in Rhetoric. In this piece, Gries describes a data advocacy project called The Swastika Counter Project that she has been working on for five years to help account for the swastika's contemporary circulation and consequentiality in the United States. In addition to discussing the digital research method called iconographic tracking that she adapted for this research, Gries introduces a methodology she calls rhetorical data studies, which, she suggests, can be useful for negotiating the rhetorical politics of accountability that are always involved in doing data advocacy work in ethical and just ways. Gries ultimately challenges rhetoricians across both sides of the Atlantic to take up rhetorical data studies to confront the intensification of discrimination, harassment, and intimidation currently being felt within and across local, national, and transnational borders.

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**Jon Viklund**

## Ritualisering i svensk politik. En retorisk studie av sociala dramer och politiska gemenskapsritualer

Artikeln undersöker ritualisering i svensk politik. Den politiska rapporteringen är till en inte oväsentlig del upptagen med politikers symboliska handlingar, ofta strategiskt iscensatta av aktörerna själva: politiker visar upp sig deltagande i gemensamma måltider, ute på resa, i naturen. Symboliska handlingar får även en betydande roll i samband med kriser och skandaler, som i regel resulterar i dramer med upprepade handlingsmönster. Studien syftar till att demonstrera sådana mönster och peka på bakomliggande motiv. Den inleds med en diskussion av ritualbegreppet och presenterar termer som socialt drama, liminalitet och mimetiskt begär. Den avslutas med en diskussion om de legitimerande ritualer som präglar konstitutionen av politiska koalitioner i Sverige under de senaste åren.

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**Patrik Mehrens**

## Borgfreden – ett socialt drama med rituella inslag

En återkommande företeelse i svensk politik är den så kallade borgfreden, när de politiska partierna mot bakgrund av en kris – till exempel ett krig, en pandemi eller ett mord på en politiker – tillfälligt avvecklar de politiska stridigheterna och ställer sig bakom en till synes enad front. Borgfreden är retoriskt intressant eftersom den tvingar politikerna att iklä sig nya roller och delvis omdefinierar spelreglerna för den politiska kommunikationen, samtidigt som konflikterna lever kvar under ytan. Genom kombinationen av politisk samförståndskultur, rolltagande och latent konflikt kan borgfreden betraktas som ett socialt drama med rituella inslag, där politikernas sätt att språkligt navigera blir särskilt intressant. I

följande artikel ges några exempel på hur svensk politisk retorik tagit sig uttryck under perioder av borgfred från första världskriget fram till idag. En slutsats är att borgfreden fungerar som en övergångsritual där en av funktionerna är att upprätthålla den politiska kulturens konfliktdimension.
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**Iben Brinch**

## Etos i skrift, sak og sjel – tanker om skriving som karakterskaping

Lange, drøye skriveprosesser åpner ikke bare en mulighet for å forme og finpusse etos med tanke på et endelig mål om å vinne frem med et budskap, prosessene gir også anledning til å utvikle karakteren til forfatteren. Skriving overskrider grensene mellom etos forstått som bevismiddel og etos forstått som den bakenforliggende karakteren til den som skriver. Grenseoverskridelsen skjer fordi skriving utvider det kairotiske rommet for retorisk ytring, slik at estetiske utprøvinger og etiske overveielser får plass. Naturligvis ligger en helt vesentlig del av kraften i etos i valget av saken du skriver om, og innholdet i teksten. Enhver sak vil smitte av på og sette rammer for den enkeltes sjel, mens prosessen med å forme den retoriske diskurs vil skjerpe den og gi den et uttrykk. Å forme etos tekstuelt er å transformere etos, og teksten som står igjen, etterlater spor etter forfatteren og demonstrerer skrivingens mulige utviklingsrom for leseren.
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Laurie E. Gries:

# Rhetorical Data Studies

## A Methodology for doing Scholarly Activism through Data Advocacy

This article by Laurie Gries extends a keynote talk given at the 2022 Nordic Conference on Research in Rhetoric. In this piece, Gries describes a data advocacy project called The Swastika Counter Project that she has been working on for five years to help account for the swastika's contemporary circulation and consequentiality in the United States. In addition to discussing the digital research method called iconographic tracking that she adapted for this research, Gries introduces a methodology she calls rhetorical data studies, which, she suggests, can be useful for negotiating the rhetorical politics of accountability that are always involved in doing data advocacy work in ethical and just ways. Gries ultimately challenges rhetoricians across both sides of the Atlantic to take up rhetorical data studies to confront the intensification of discrimination, harassment, and intimidation currently being felt within and across local, national, and transnational borders.

According to a few pieces written in the last couple of years by Jens E. Kjeldsen and Kristian Bjørkdahl, many rhetoricians in the United States seem to do scholarship in service of politics quite differently than Europeans and Scandinavians. In fact, according to Kjeldsen (2020), many U.S. Americans actually do what many Scandinavians were explicitly taught *not* to do (p.137). What many on both sides of the Atlantic seem to share is a sense of *rhetorical obligation*—"*a desire to be in touch with the world*" (Kjeldsen, 2021, 108) and a desire "to give back to society" (Bjørkdahl, 2020, p.132) and to "help people become active agents in their own lives, contribute to create better public debates, improve discussion and reasoning in policymaking" (Kjeldsen, 2021, p.108). But where American rhetoricians and Scandinavians seem to depart, according to Kjeldsen and Bjørkdahl, is how to go about doing such work in the service of politics.

Such differentiation, according to these scholars, seems to come down to two moves: one having to do with style, the other with framing, focus, and knowledge-making. On the one hand, according to Kjeldsen (2020), many Scandinavian rhetoricians see it as their public duty to translate their research for and communicate it to the wider public—a duty that is so ubiquitously felt and practiced that there apparently is even a word for this: "formidling" (p. 138). U.S. American scholars tend to be excessively theoretical in their writing rather than communicate in a way that is "relevant, understandable, and of value to the general public" (p. 137). The second major difference noted by Kjeldsen and Bjørkdahl has to do with the political nature of rhetorical research. Apparently, from a Scandinavian point of view, rather than be concerned with studying "objects of rhetoric in their own right" (Kjeldsen, 2020, p. 137), many U.S. American rhetoric scholars appear to be "predominantly occupied with political engagement" (p. 137) and "openly activist, politicized, and acting on behalf of groups" considered marginalized and disenfranchised (137). Indeed, as Bjørkdahl (2020) reports, based on several interviews with European scholars who attended the 2020 Rhetoric of Society Conference in the U.S, "From the vantage point of the European tradition, one could accuse some American rhetoric scholars with a penchant for intervention and activist scholarship of substituting scientific inquiry and knowledge production with political advocacy" (qtd. on p. 132). One interviewee even said that they chose not to attend certain panels because they "expected them to be more about displaying 'solidarity' than about inquiry into the matter at hand" (qtd. on p. 132). In Bjørkdahl's words, one way to think about this is that "American rhetoric scholarship is more branded by identity politics than is its European equivalent" (p. 133).

Now, based on my conversations with many Scandinavian scholars at the 2022 Nordic Conference on Research in Rhetoric, as well as my observations of a few panels presented there in English, I am not convinced that such differences between Scandinavian and U.S. American rhetorical scholarship are actually as cemented as Kjeldsen's and Bjørkdahl's work make it seem. But for the sake of argument, I would quickly say that while I am reluctant to buy into gross generalizations, I would not be surprised if there is quite a difference in style and audience among some Scandinavian and U.S. American rhetorical scholarship if "formidling" is indeed a common Scandinavian practice. In the United States, after all, few rhetoricians are officially trained to write for a public or are even expected to write for a public. Instead, at least from my experience, most rhetoricians are pressed to ask what theory, method, or pedagogy they can offer the field and are trained to write for other scholars in top-tier academic journals. This might be one of many reasons I can think of that so much U.S. American rhetorical scholarship is crafted in such a theory-driven style.

But more importantly, for the sake of this article, I want to take up the second differentiation between Scandinavian and U.S. American scholarship that Kjeldsen and Bjorkdahl identify, as these perspectives about solidarity, identity, and political advocacy press scholars on both sides of the Atlantic to ask: *what is the role of activism in rhetorical studies, how should scholarship in the service of politics be enacted, and for whom should such work be undertaken*? I believe this tri-part question is incredibly important in the context of this special issue of *Rhetorica Scandinavica* devoted to the 2022 Nordic Conference on Research in Rhetoric. The CFP for that conference pushed scholars to contemplate rhetoric without borders—to recognize that the contexts in which we live and the crises we currently face push us to reconsider the boundaries within and around our discipline that we often seek to uphold, to perhaps even let go of our disciplinary expectations, and ponder what unexpected things we might do to meet today's public challenges. From my perspective as an associate professor of visual rhetoric, there are no right or singular answers to the tri-part question I pose above about the intersection of political activism and rhetorical studies. But I do think that we all need to carefully consider how, in the words of Catherine Squires, our responses may, even if unintentionally, "serve to police the boundaries" and bodies of many rhetoricians, especially of color (Hester and Squires, 2018, p. 345).  I also believe we are living in times when social, economic, political and environmental matters are more pressing than disciplinary relevance, traditions, and expectations. I want us to be less concerned with what we are doing that is untraditional and more concerned with how we can collaborate across the Atlantic to survive as species and to confront our local, national, and transnational problems. I especially want us, as Kjeldson (2020) suggests, to pay close attention to the perspectives and methods and practices we each have to offer, so that we can "evolve together" (p. 142) to confront some of our most pressing shared public matters.

In this very spirit of evolving together through shared perspectives, methods, and practices, I will make four moves in this article, the latter of which may seem quite atypical. First, because the rhetorical situation of our research always matters, I share the personal, cultural, and disciplinary exigence for a public data advocacy project called *The Swastika Counter* that I have been working on for the last five years. Second, because the practices and affordances of our research matter, I briefly describe the project's goals and methods, and then third, share a few of our descriptive research findings. Fourth, because I do strongly believe that our research should contribute back to rhetorical study, I dive into theory in order to offer a methodology I call *rhetorical data studies* for doing data advocacy in a context of intensifying antisemitism, far-right populism, and white nationalism. While I realize that such phenomena are differentially situated and enacted in U.S. American and European contexts, I believe many U.S. Americans and Scandinavians share overlapping concerns with such socio-cultural intensifications. I am aware, for instance, that the recent electoral gains by the Sweden Democrat Party are creating much concern, not only due to its historical ties to Nazism and neo-Nazism but also its contemporary deployment far right populist rhetorics. I also have also recently read in a press release by the Swedish Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Employment (2022) that the Swedish government has adopted five new action plans to "combat afrophobia, antisemitism, antigypsyism, islamophobia and racism against the Sami people" in effort to extend a national plan developed in 2016 to "combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime" (n.p.). For those Scandinavian rhetoricians who may share similar civic aims but do not have a method or methodology at their disposal to combat antisemitism, racism, and/or hate through data advocacy work, I especially hope this research narrative and methodology of rhetorical data studies may prove both inspiring and useful. Is my public advocacy project openly activist, interventional, and politicized? Surely. But what I hope to model is how such "service in the name of politics" does not have to be at odds or undermine the quality of rhetorical knowledge production. On both sides of the Atlantic, we can simultaneously be overtly political, openly activist, *and* theoretically constructive meaning-makers in contemporary rhetorical studies.

## The Swastika Counter Project – Overview and Exigence

The Swastika Counter is a public advocacy project that aims to provide reliable data about how and to what consequences the swastika is currently circulating and functioning in public space during a time of intensifying hate incidents in the United States. For the first 10 years of my academic career, I worked on developing a digital research method called *iconographic tracking*, which was designed to track the circulation, transformation, uptake, and consequentiality of images across time and space. For *Still Life with Rhetoric*, I (2015) used this method to trace the now iconic Obama Hope image across the world to see what we could learn about how images go viral in a digital age as they transform across media, genre, form, and function. The methodology I generated for that project—called new materialist rhetorics—was specifically developed to study the image "in its own right"—to investigate how, through an image's diverse interactions with people, organizations, technologies, etc, agency emerges as they circulate and get taken up for all kinds of diverse causes. For the Swastika Counter Project, I wanted to know what more the method could do—what public service it may lend. I specifically began to wonder how iconographic tracking might be adapted to function as a useful tool for political advocacy and activism within and beyond U.S. borders. I also began to ask what other methodology might be better suited to undergird this rhetorical activism work.

As I have explained in a previous article about this project (Gries 2018), this public service was especially important because at that time, in 2016, Donald Trump and his right-wing populist rhetoric was just beginning to make its mark on the political scene in the United States. At the same time, murder maps were making undeniable just how many Black Americans were being killed at the hands of the police, and students of color, women, and religious figures were increasingly reporting about threating assaults. In days and weeks after Trump's inauguration, the United States especially began to experience a rise in incidents of hate and bias—from the increase of threats against Jewish community centers to the increase in personally-mediated attacks against Muslim, Latino, and gay students. In late 2016, in fact, The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) reported that nearly 900 cases of hateful harassment or intimidation occurred in the United States in the ten days after the November 8 election, and, in many of these cases, Donald Trump's name was invoked, "making it clear that the outbreak of hate stemmed in large part from his electoral success" (n.p.).

Due to such increased violence, a number of organizations, such as the Southern Poverty Law Center, ProPublica, Think Progress, and New American Media, began to document incidents of hate and bias in order to help account for this troubling phenomenon. The Southern Poverty Law Center, for instance, generated an interactive digital map that documents hate groups currently operating in the United States while Think Progress designed a map documenting hate incidents against Black, Jewish, LGBTQ, LatinX, and other historically marginalized communities in the U.S. Such data activism is necessary, ProPublica explained, because as of early 2017, "there [was] simply no reliable national data on hate crimes. And no governmental agency documents lower-level incidents of harassment and intimidation" (n.p.) As such, ProPublica argued, we need to generate "new, more creative approaches" to document and understand both high-level and low-level incidents of hate—"from hate-inspired murders to anti-Semitic graffiti to racist online trolling" (n.p.).

In early 2017, I decided to take up ProPublica's call by adapting iconographic tracking to document the troubling wave of swastikas that was sweeping across the United States. While certainly not new to the U.S. context, the swastika's recent proliferation was drawing intense concern, as news reports were emerging almost daily to report various sightings. In January of 2017 alone, for instance, a sticker with swastika and the word "bomb" appeared on the bathroom wall of the Jewish Community Center of Staten Island. One day earlier in Toledo, Ohio, a Muslim family from Lebanese arrived home to find a swastika with the words "F*ck Arabs" spray painted on their garage door. And just weeks later, a swastika surfaced on the Mexican Consulate in Las Vegas, Nevada. Early data collection for The Swastika Counter Project confirmed that swastika incidents were targeting a wide range of historically marginalized peoples and communities, often going so far as to make explicit, violent threats when delivered with accompanying text. Simultaneously, swastikas were surfacing in relation to Donald Trump, sometimes to show support, and other times to critique his widely-acknowledged appeals to white nationalism. Considering such diverse functions, The Swastika Counter Project began with three interrelated research questions:

- How do we keep track and make sense of the swastika's unfolding role in the U.S.' current socio-political climate?
- Where are swastikas landing on the streets of the United States, in what media are they surfacing, who is distributing them, and who are they targeting?
- How are swastikas impacting people and communities in an era of intensifying antisemitism and white nationalism? (Gries, 2018, n.p.)

To help address these questions, I have spent the last five years working with Kelly Wheeler and a small team of faculty and students to account for swastikas that erupted “on the streets” of America from January 1, 2016 — January 20, 2021—a process that includes tracking, tagging, coding, double coding, mapping, and analyzing over 1300 swastika incidents that occurred between the time Trump came onto the political scene during the 2016 presidential primaries through his last day in the oval office (see more on research method below). In an era in which antisemitic, white supremacist, and white nationalist rhetoric is circulating loudly and transparently across the United States, our hope with The Swastika Counter Project is to provide reliable descriptive data that various stakeholders (educators, activists, administrators, etc.) can use to address the material consequences of such rhetoric in their local communities. This research also has scholarly goals in that it aims to contribute to long standing interdisciplinary efforts to understand the swastika’s diverse rhetorical functions across time and culture.

It is important to note that much interdisciplinary research has illustrated that throughout history, swastikas have circulated and continue to circulate across within and across cultural and national borders as a symbol of benevolence and good will. As articulated by Pro-Swastika (n.d.), “The word swastika comes from the Sanskrit svastika. Su meaning well, asti meaning ‘to be,’ and ka as a suffix. The swastika literally means ‘to be well.’” As such, much historical research has explored how the swastika has circulated and functioned as a religious, spiritual, and benevolent symbol. The swastika, of course, is a body multiple, a term I borrow from Annemarie Mol (2002) to describe how images are able to simultaneously exist in multiple forms with diverse rhetorical functions yet still retain an identifiable identity. Thus, other studies have investigated how the swastika has also functioned as, among other things, a symbol of the Aryan race historically in Europe; as an emblem of and propaganda vehicle for the Nazi party in Germany; as a commercial design element across the world (see Wilson, 2014; Quinn, 1994; Heller, 2020), and as a branding device for more contemporary Aryan-identifying Americans (Simi and Futrell, 2015).

We do not have a nuanced grasp, however, as to how the swastika is currently circulating and functioning in mainstream public space in the United States, particularly in relation to what I and Phil Bratta (2019) call *the racial politics of circulation*. With this term, we refer to the ways in which discourse, bodies, media, and race are wrapped up in a reciprocal feedback loop of (re)production and (re)circulation. Drawing on the work of Iris D. Ruiz (2016), race, here is understood to be a historically constructed enterprise that is invented through logics and rhetorics undergirding disciplinary and communal knowledges and sustained through emerging technologies, intersectional cultural practices, social apparatus, and institutional structures of inequality. In our current day and age, visual rhetoric especially plays a significant role in circulating racialized logics and perpetuating effects and affects of racism that support unequal power dynamics. As a visual rhetoric scholar, my colleagues and I thus seek with this project to trace and elucidate how the swastika—while banned from rhetorical use in many countries— currently and intensely embroiled in the interlocking racial politics of antisemitism, white supremacy, and white nationalism operating within the United States.

## Iconographic Tracking

As mentioned earlier, The Swastika Counter Project adapts iconographic tracking to search for swastika incidents that occurred between January 1, 2016 to January 20, 2021, the time period between Donald Trump's entry into the 2016 Republican presidential primary and Joe Biden's 2021 inauguration. As I (2013; 2015; 2017) have described in detail elsewhere, iconographic tracking is a recursive process that draws on diverse digital research strategies to collect as much data as possible about a single, multiple image; to code data to identify patterns, trends, and relationships; and to deploy rhetorical analysis in conjunction with variety of digital-visual techniques, such as mapping and data visualizations, to zoom in on and make sense of such data. While the method of iconographic tracking draws heavily on quantitative strategies, it also relies on qualitative strategies to triangulate data, gain deeper insights about peoples' encounters with an image, and in the case of the Swastika Counter Project, learn more about the consequences that swastikas have had in the communities in which they have become embroiled.

In terms of data collection for this project, iconographic tracking relied heavily on manual (copy and paste) web scraping to retrieve and assemble public data about swastika incidents from the World Wide Web. Using the search term "swastika," data was collected one month at a time via Google's image and text-based search engines. Google Search engines were chosen for their ability to quickly crawl through millions of pages on the World Wide Web and to cull information from various media types (video, photographs, print texts) and source types (newspapers, magazines, social media, institutional websites, etc.). This broad access was necessary as many swastika incidents are only reported in community or hyperlocal online news sites, student run online magazines, and/or social media sites. Of course, we know that filter bubbles limit the kind of data one is exposed to via Google Search. To account for restricted information, researchers thus searched through 10-15 pages of Google findings for each swastika incident. Researchers also used strategies such as burning cookies, erasing web history, using incognito functions, and diversifying the computers on which we did research. In sum, researchers discovered over 1300 swastika incidents that took place on the streets of the United States during the chosen time period.

In collecting this data, we were specifically interested to learn where these swastikas were documented, in what media they surfaced, who swastikas were targeting, and how communities were responding. Researchers thus spent five years collecting, tagging, coding, double coding, and analyzing the reported 1300+ swastika incidents. To decipher this information, we read through thousands of reports published in national and local newspapers, magazines, religious publications, student newspapers, organization websites, social media sites, etc. To ensure reliability, all incidents were cross checked across multiple reporting sources. Working in a Google Spreadsheet, data analysis occurred through a rigorous practice of tagging and coding according to a set of distinct categories we developed to inform our research. For the purposes of this project, tagging refers to labeling information by a matter of fact whereas coding refers to labeling information that requires some level of interpretation. So, for example, we tagged the following information in relation to each swastika incident: city and state where swastikas were found; date when swastikas were noticed; genre of reporting source; accompanying words and symbols; type of place in city where swastikas surfaced; media in which swastikas surfaced; culprits, when identifiable. When made explicit, all of this data could be easily identified in the reporting sources. Coding, on the other hand, came into play when some interpretative gesture was needed such as identifying targets. Each swastika incident was double tagged and coded to help ensure reliability of data, which ultimately, included the following information:

- geographical location (city, state),
- date (day, month, year),
- reported activity (vandalism, graffiti, symbol of hate, racist message, etc.),
- accompanying text ("Trump," "Heil Hitler," etc.),
- accompanying pictorial elements (iron cross, Star of David, etc.),
- media (spray paint, marker, pinecones, etc),
- place (public space, local business, college, etc.),
- structure (bathroom stall, urban wall, automobile, etc.),
- target (race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, etc.),
- perpetrator (identified by gender and race/ethnicity),
- community response (identified by actor (police, school administrator, parents, etc.) and rhetorical move (arrest, statement, vigil, etc.).

## Descriptive Findings

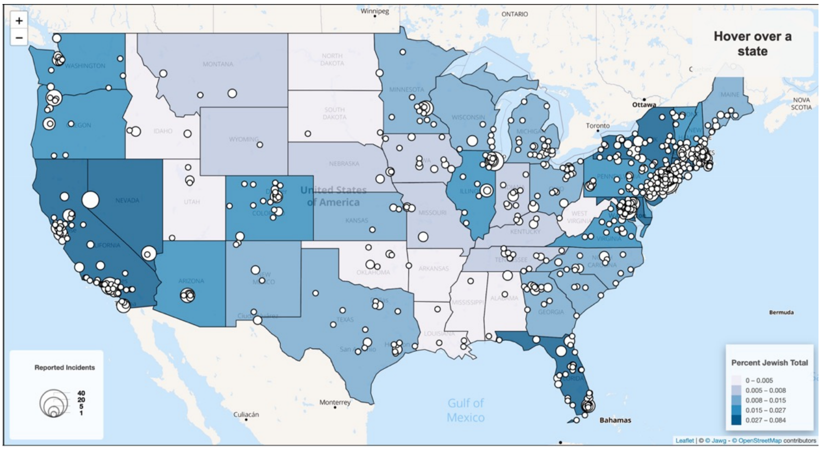
In what follows, I share 8 descriptive points of interest that have thus far emerged from our data findings. Important to note is that our data findings are tentative, as our analysis is still undergoing. Eventually, our final findings will be published alongside a set of accompanying data visualizations, maps, and other information on a data advocacy website called *The Swastika Counter* that will be made publicly available upon completion of ongoing user-centered studies. I share the findings tersely here so that rhetoric scholars can gain a sense of the affordances for rhetorical activism made possible by not only the method of iconographic tracking but also the methodology of rhetorical data studies, the latter of which I describe below.

*Content Warning: These descriptive findings include disturbing details of swastika incidents that may activate highly emotional and distressing experiences for readers. Please proceed with care and take necessary steps for your emotional safety.*

### 1. Geographical Locations

Swastika incidents proliferated in both private and public places between January

2016 and January 2021 in all 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia. Figure 1 illustrates where swastikas incidents occurred in the United States during this time period, with swastikas incidents being documented most in New York (208), California (136), and Massachusetts (122).


+
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Hover over a state
Winnipeg
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CALIFORNIA
ARIZONA
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MISSISSIPPI
ALABAMA
GEORGIA
TEXAS
LOUISIANA
Ciudad Juárez
San Antonio
Monterrey
Culiacán
Gulf of Mexico
Bahamas
Bermuda
Reported Incidents
40
20
5
1
Percent Jewish Total
0 – 0.005
0.005 – 0.008
0.008 – 0.015
0.015 – 0.027
0.027 – 0.084
Leaflet | © © Jawg - © OpenStreetMap contributors

Figure 1: Screenshot of Swastika Incidents that surfaced in the United States between January 2016 and January 2021.

Over 18% of the documented incidents in our data set occurred on private property such as businesses, homes, and automobiles. Approximately 20% of incidents occurred in public spaces such as urban walls, public parks, and public facilities. Jewish institutions such as synagogues, Chabad houses, and Jewish community centers were often targeted, as were Jewish businesses and homes. Higher education institutions and K-12 schools, however, were the most frequently targeted locations. K-12 schools, colleges, and universities across America, in fact, experienced 42% of the documented swastika incidents, triggering alarm in many educational contexts.

## 2. Targets of Swastikas

In ~68% of incidents in our data sample, specific targets of swastikas were not identifiable. However, demographic information about the geographic locations (such as city, community, neighborhood) and local places in which swastikas landed (such as private property, businesses, religious institutions, etc.) helped to identify intended targets. In addition, accompanying text and visual symbols also often made clear who was being targeted. According to the data we tagged and coded that disclosed swastika targets, members of the Jewish community were explicitly targeted in nearly 44% of documented swastika incidents. Jewish community members were often targeted in school settings, religious institutions, and community centers. On several occasions, swastikas surfaced on the exterior windows or doors of Jewish owned businesses, homes, and automobiles. In colleges across the United States, swastikas landed on the dorm doors of Jewish students as well in more public places within dorms such as elevators and bathrooms.

Black Americans were targeted in 19% of the documented swastika documents. Locations of swastika incidents varied, with Black Americans targeted 26 times on school campuses and 28 times on private property with less frequent targeting occurring at Black owned businesses and in public spaces such as parks. In the most extreme case, one Black American couple's home was tagged with swastikas and later burned down. Members of LGBTQIA+, LatinX, Muslim, American Indian, and Asian American communities were also targeted, with some swastikas targeting multiple historically marginalized communities all at once and others more vaguely but clearly targeting non-White people.

## 3. Dates of Swastika Incidents

Swastika incidents persisted unevenly between January 2016 and January 2021 rose near Jewish High Holidays and escalated around the 2016 presidential election and Donald Trump's inauguration as well as the 2017 Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, NC. Important to particularly note is that over 70 swastika incidents were documented around the 2016 presidential election in which Donald Trump won the Electoral College, with over 40 swastika incidents occurring the month of his inauguration in January 2017. This evidence may be unsurprising, considering that around that same time, the FBI, anti-hate organizations, and various news sources were reporting that Donald Trump's rhetoric was directly related to increased incidents of hate, bias, and violence happening around the country. In the 20 swastika incidents that occurred within 10 days after the Unite the Right Rally in August 2017, Trump was referenced in 8 of those incidents with expressions of support such as "Go-Trump."

## 4. Media in Which Swastikas Surfaced

Swastikas were documented in various media in private and public spaces. Spray paint was most commonly used to mark structures such as urban walls, sidewalks, and garage doors with swastikas; however, media ranged from unidentifiable chemical fluids to natural elements such as snow and even human feces. Swastikas carved out of metal commonly appeared on surfaces such as bathroom stalls, elevator walls, street signs, and playground equipment. Many of these incidents did not take place in broad daylight, discovered only the next day by local residents. However, swastikas were also commonly sighted out in the open on clothing, banners at various rallies, and flags displayed in residential yards. Swastikas also commonly sighted were either tattooed or drawn on human bodies. In some cases, groups of people (typically teens) assembled themselves into human sculptures of swastikas or assembled plastic cups into swastikas in made-up drinking games such as "Swastika Pong," also referred to as "Holocaust Pong" or "Alcoholocaust."

## 5. Accompanying Text and Imagery

Analysis of accompanying text and imagery indicate that swastikas communicated a wide variety of messaging between January 2016 and January 2021. Swastikas often expressed opposition or support for politicians. While Jewish politicians were often targeted, Donald Trump, by far, was most often affiliated with the swastika. In some instances, it is unclear whether swastikas were expressing pro or anti-Trump sentiment. However, in many cases, the text accompanying swastikas communicates clear support for Trump and, often, due to his perceived support of white nationalist efforts. Common appeals to white supremacy and white nationalism that accompanied swastika and the word "Trump" include popular slogans such as "White Power," "Make America White Again, " as well as phrases such as "The-white-man-is-back-in-power-White-is-Right" and numbers such as 14, which, as the ADL explains, refers to 14 Words,"—a reference to the popular white supremacist slogan: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children."

Swastikas spray painted onto urban walls and other places often included offensive words and phrases that reveal not only racist attitudes but also homophobic, transphobic, and Islamaphobic ones. In addition to many implicit threats such as "We are Everywhere," explicit threats using well-known derogatory names and slurs such were commonly directed to not only members of Jewish communities but many historically marginalized communities (Black American, LGBTQIA+, and Immigrant). For instance, alongside swastikas, threatening phrases such as "______ Die" or "Kill ______" often surfaced on private property of historically marginalized people (cars, garage doors, etc.), as did more specific phrases such as "Gas the ____." When immigrants were targeted, swastikas were often accompanied by phrases such as "Build the Wall" and "Go Home."

Images accompanied swastikas less frequently than text, but when they did surface, they often depicted male genitalia and Jewish symbols, such as the Star of David. In over 140 documented incidents, Nazi references and Nazi imagery such as SS lightning bolt accompanied swastikas. Many images that showed up in swastikas incidents were accompanied by Nazi or neo-Nazi phrases such as "Heil Trump" or 88, which stands for "Heil Hitler." Recruitment fliers for white supremacist groups often deployed both image and text in addition to the swastikas, often times for recruitment efforts. In the text corpus, the following words were most popular: Trump (77); White (58); N***** (55); Jew(s) 35); Power (29); KKK (27).

## 6. Perpetrators of Swastika Incidents

Information about perpetrators of swastika incidents is limited due to lack of eye witnesses, reporting practices, and other factors. Locations of swastika incidents, such as schools, suggest that many perpetrators may be quite young. Data does indicate that in the incidents for which demographic details are available, offenders are most often male and white. Only 14% of sources explicitly identified the race, gender, and other demographic details of individuals who were held responsible for swastika incidents that occurred between February 2016 and January 2021. However, according to those few sources, approximately 80% of total perpetrators were reported to be male, and nearly 40% were identified as white. Students comprised 15% of the reported perpetrators. Ten percent of reported perpetrators self-identified with white supremacist or nationalist ideologies and/or organizations.

### 7. Community Responses

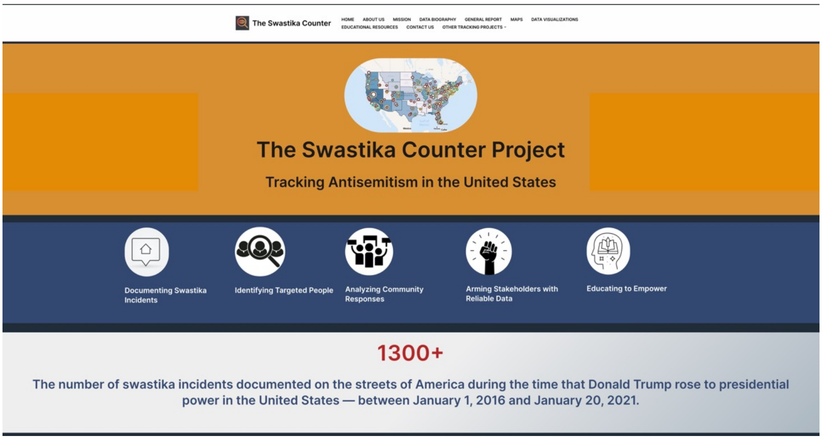
In addition to their documentations in public outlets, swastika incidents sparked a variety of responses from individuals, organizations, and communities. Yet, research findings indicate that there is no consistent protocol for responses to swastika incidents across educational institutions, government organizations, and communities in the United States. Clean up by city or school officials or everyday citizens was documented in 396 of the documentations, with many efforts to completely erase the swastika's visible trace or transform the swastika into more benign and beautifying images. Alongside Rabbis and Holocaust scholars (5%), the Anti-defamation league was called upon to guide responsive action (3%). Other common community responses included public statements, new committee formations, and acts of public support such as vigils, demonstrations, and protest. Less often, schools carried out disciplinary action (10%) and introduced policy changes (10%). While police investigation and reports were common, and the police were involved in some way in over half of the responses, arrest was rare and far between. In fact, communities responded with criminal charges in only ~6% of all documented cases. Actionable embodied victim support for swastika incidents was rarely reported.

### 8. Reporting Practices

Swastika incidents that occurred between February 2016 and January 2021 were documented by multiple online sources including local, national, educational, and religious sources, and occasionally on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. The names used to identify these incidents varied from "bias incidents" to "symbols of hate" to "Nazi symbols," among others. Over 60% of the time, swastika incidents were identified simply as "vandalism" or "graffiti" or sources simply noted that there was a swastika and/or an incident had occurred. Swastika incidents were identified as racist and antisemitic in less than 20% of all documentations in our data set.

## Rhetorical Data Studies

Thus far, our time and labor has largely focused on producing our data advocacy website (see Figure 2) where members of the public will be able to not only learn about such descriptive findings in an extensive general report but also interact with data visualizations and maps to learn more about the occurrence and consequentiality of swastika incidents. Among other features, visitors will be able to freely access a selection of our data while educators will be able to generate different ideas for how to integrate this data and website into social justice lesson plans for middle school, high school, and college classrooms. At the very least, we hope that visitors will realize that while often relegated to a historical past, the swastika is still very much alive — circulating occasionally as a benevolent symbol, but far more often as a rhetorical mark that spreads multidirectional hate and triggers a multiplicity of devastating consequences for Jewish and other racialized and minoritized people and communities across the United States. We also and especially hope various stakeholders (teachers, administrators, social justice workers, etc.) will be able to deploy the findings, maps, visualizations, and educational resources as tools to fight for social change in their own communities.


The Swastika Counter
HOME
ABOUT US
MISSION
DATA BIOGRAPHY
GENERAL REPORT
MAPS
DATA VISUALIZATIONS
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
CONTACT US
OTHER TRACKING PROJECTS
Documenting Swastika Incidents
Identifying Targeted People
Analyzing Community Responses
Arming Stakeholders with Reliable Data
Educating to Empower

The Swastika Counter Project

Tracking Antisemitism in the United States

1300+

The number of swastika incidents documented on the streets of America during the time that Donald Trump rose to presidential power in the United States — between January 1, 2016 and January 20, 2021.

Figure 2: Screenshot of The Swastika Counter Project Website

Because of the time-consuming, intensive labor required to produce such public facing content, we have yet to fully identify the affordances of this research for rhetoric scholars, even as we see much promise for theories about the visual rhetoric of the swastika, in rhetorics of intersectional injustices, and/or in reporting practices of antisemitism, racism, and white supremacy. I have thus chosen not to focus on those emerging theories here. But this project has pushed us to think deeply about the ethics of doing data advocacy and what methodology might be best suited for guiding ethical data advocacy research and communication. To be clear, I define method as a constellation of research strategies that one uses to systematically collect, organize, and analyze data, while I lean on Clay Spinuzzi (2003) to define methodology, as “the theory, philosophy, heuristics, aims, and values that underlie, motivate, and guide” one’s research strategies (7). Data advocacy especially entails the grappling with what I call *the rhetorical politics of accountability*, a term by which I mean the struggle over how to ethically deploy visual and other sensory data to account for ongoing injustices in attempt to fight for social change. What methodology, I have been wondering, can best prepare us for such grappling as we embark on data advocacy projects in the name of public good? While I am still working on developing this methodology, I want to spend the remainder of this article fleshing it out a bit with the hope that rhetoricians in Scandinavia, and beyond, may find it useful for doing data advocacy in the service of politics around issues of hate, discrimination, and racism. I call this methodology *rhetorical data studies.*

Rhetorical data studies, as I have thus far imagined it, is a praxis that puts theories and practices from rhetorical studies into conversation with data feminism, critical data studies, and the black digital humanities to identify, interrogate, and communicate the intersectional dimensions of data, rhetoric, and power. By praxis, I mean to signify the nexus of *thinking*, *making*, and *doing* that is constitutive of any rhetorical action in public life but especially data advocacy if we understand it to be an integrative practice of analysis, design, and communication in which insights from a dataset are effectively conveyed to raise public awareness and drive social change. I am also thinking about Paulo Friere (1972) who pushes us to think of praxis as action plus reflection that makes possible transformation (p. 52). As Friere teaches us, critical reflection is especially important in that it helps to align our theories, values, and practices so that we are better equipped to work for change in ethical and just ways. Still further, I am thinking of feminist and decolonial notions of praxis, which push us to constantly question not only the assumptions and perspectives and technologies through which we come to understand and know but also how our own practices may be reproducing and/or upholding the very systems of domination that we may seek to dismantle. This is especially important in that, as Jennifer Sano-Franchini (2017) has noted, meaning-making, through whatever means we deploy, often "takes place through gendered [and racialized] interactions" that are "culturally-contingent, historically and discursively codified, and with implications for power and privilege" (p. 84). Thinking of rhetorical data studies as praxis, then, is a means to recognize that any kind of data advocacy we deploy must always be cemented in deeply reflective, critical, and transparent accountable actions. A rhetorical data studies approach to data advocacy especially pushes us to interrogate *how we account*—who and/or what gets and does not get counted, whose accounts are typically seen, heard, and legitimized, how such accounts are designed, produced, displayed, and distributed, and to what consequences such accounts contribute?

In a data-driven society, in which data visualization is reconfiguring how we take measure, produce policy, acquire control, and participate in public life, such questions about *how we account* have everything to do with how we both conceive of and deploy data to do advocacy work. From a rhetorical data studies perspective, data is understood to be a multifaceted rhetorical action that is always embroiled in and constitutive of social relations of power. As a rhetorical action, data is both a form of representation *and* a persuasive act with mediating power to effect change on local, national, and transnational scales. As such, in one rhetorical sense, data is thought about in terms of inclusive forms; as Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein (2020) note, data commonly comes in the form of numbers but data can also "consist of words or stories, colors or sounds, or any type of information that is systematically collected, organized, and analyzed" (p. 14). But more importantly, data is also understood to be an epistemic act of abstraction that is intensely entangled in diverse power relations. As Scott Graham (2020) leans on Henri Bergson to note, abstraction can be understood as the "process of distilling intuitive insights into formalized representations so as to better support future situated action" (p. 144). Intuition here, Graham emphasizes, should not be equated with the instinctual or noncognitive, but rather, in a methodological sense, with the experience of *choosing* a constellation of strategies and rhetorical practices that a researcher suspects will best enable them to "abstract patterns from our engagement with [a] series of recurrent rhetorical situations" (p. 144). As Craig Dalton and Jim Thatcher (2014) note, "in both its production and interpretation, all data – 'big' included – is always the result of contingent and contested social practices that afford and obfuscate specific understandings of the world" (n.p.). Such practices not only impact data's format and content, which are always shaped and created for a purpose in a certain context, but also the construction of data sets, which are always, as Dalton and Thatcher draw on Lisa Gitelman to note, "limited representation of the world that must be imagined as such to produce the meaning they purport to show" (n.p.). In this epistemic sense, then, we might lean on Graham to recognize data as rhetorical choices of abstraction, representation, and rendering that function, in Burkean terms, as terministic screens, as they simultaneously select, deflect, and reject reality.

As we all know, intuitions and selections can often get us in trouble, and thus from a rhetorical data studies perspective, it is as equally important to think about data's rhetorical and constitutive nature—-its ability to yes, disrupt, challenge, and reimagine but also, and sometimes simultaneously, to reify, reinforce, and magnify obfuscations that often lead to harm. As such, data is also recognized to be a pharmakon, as a phenomenon that has potential to be a "benefit and harm through a power that is not quite understood" (McCarthy-Neilson, 2016, p. 153). The thing about pharmakons, as we learn about late in Plato's Phaedrus, and through Derrida's interpretation of it[1], is that a pharmakon is plagued with seductive ambivalence; bearing oppositional possibilities within itself, it is yet to be determined what the consequences of a pharmakon will become until it is engaged in rhetorical action. Knowing this about data places great responsibility on rhetorical practioners to always keep in mind that the data we deploy with intent to function as a benefit—for liberation, empowerment—can very well turn into a poison—for further reification, marginalization, harm, etc. (McCarthy-Nielson, 2016, p. 155). As Christelle Kamaliza (2020) notes, "Without [data[, decision makers are unable to effectively invest, improve, streamline, reach their audience. [Yet] [t]hat same data also has a growing power to divide, marginalize, exclude, and reinforce abhorrent constructs in a society…" (n.p.). As such, we must always be cognizant of "how power unfolds in and around data" (D'Ignazio and Klein, 2020, p. 26).

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[1] See Derrida, J.; *Dissemination* (translation of La dissemination. Paris, 1972). Chicago, 1981.

In light of such ambivalent relations between data and power, a rhetorical data studies perspective challenges rhetoricians to interrogate not only the technical implications of data but also our rhetorical engagement with data through all phases of the research process—interrogations that cannot dismiss how race, data, and technology are often intertwined. In one sense, we must, as Safiya Noble (2019) argues, acknowledge how the information and communication technologies that we rely on for our projects "are fully implicated in racialized violence and environmental destruction; from extraction to production, and from consumption to disposal of digital technologies" (p. 31). We must also, Noble (2018) teaches us in *Algorithms of Oppression*, acknowledge that our data collection processes rely on biased algorithms that may very well impact our data findings. We thus especially, and from also the perspective of Ruha Benjamin (2019), need to pay attention to discriminatory design, how biased judgements that are encoded into the technical systems that we rely on may unknowingly be impacting our entire data process. We cannot ignore, in other words, both how data is inherently tied to often unjust "technological, political, social, and economic infrastructures that sustain it" (Currie, Paris, Pasquetto, and Pierre, 2016, p. 3) and how our own practices might be maintaining such structures even as we seek to challenge them.

In a recent conversation with Dr. Keon Pettiway (2022), I asked him how such awareness might actually come into play as we do work in data advocacy. Pettiway is an independent rhetoric and black digital humanities scholar who works on critical race design. He says that in very real ways, scholars who work with digital technologies can never escape the fact that very tools and platforms that we rely on are complicit in perpetuations of unjust systems. But at the very least, he says, we must foreground that phenomenon, so that we never forget about this complicity. We can also try to counterbalance such phenomenon by making rhetorical choices such as presenting counter designs that challenge dominant perceptions of historical and contemporary events and by embracing Kim Gallon's (2016) ideas about "technologies of recovery." Gallon, a founding scholar of Black DH, defines technologies of recovery as "efforts to bring forth the full humanity of marginalized peoples through the use of digital platforms and tools" (p. 44). A rhetorical data studies embraces such tenet of the black digital humanities by keeping in mind that data advocacy needs to always be a double move. In one sense, it is about making visible injustices but, too, it ought also always be about finding ways to bring forth humanity in data advocacy projects by making sure that the very humans our work attempts to benefit are actually present in our work–present on the research and design team, present in the audience, present in the data through voice and story. As just a few examples, then, in addition to asking how algorithms and filter bubbles impact what data we are exposed to, we can ask: whose groups and stories have been and not been included and/or represented in our data and projects; how have we made our data findings accessible to the very people and communities it aims to help; and which people and communities have been given the opportunity to weigh in on both design and outreach, and even, in some cases, consent to being counted?

A rhetorical data studies approach to data advocacy also pushes us to rhetorically interrogate the multimodal design choices in our work. The rhetorical politics of accountability, after all, has everything to do with our coding and rendering processes—knowing that naming, ordering, and classifying are always a highly ideological enterprise full of rhetorical ramifications. It also has to do with our presentation choices— knowing that data displays are not only always a negotiation of selection and omission, revealing and concealing (Prelli, 2006) but also reliant on culturally situated aesthetic conventions (Kostelnick, 2012) and culturally valued ways of knowing that are often imbued with gendered and racial implications. The Urban Institute, a nonprofit research organization in Washington, D.C., for instance, encourages data advocates to really think through the rhetorical choices in our data visualizations, legends, and maps. For instance, in their "Do no Harm Guide" authored by Jonathan Schwabish and Alice Feng (2021), "label people, not skin color" is one of their mantras (p. 41). Others include, avoid reinforcing gender or racial stereotypes when using colors and icons to represent certain demographics. Avoid ordering data in ways that reflect historical biases. Use people-first language. These are all suggestions (p. 41) that draw attention to the rhetorical politics of accountability and encourage rhetorical mindfulness because we know that when "communicated carelessly, data analysis and data visualizations have an outsized capacity to mislead, misrepresent, and harm communities that already experience inequity and discrimination" (Schwabish and Feng, n.p.).

Of course, the links between data, power, and unjust infrastructures are not new to the highly mediated digital worldmaking that many of us find now ourselves working and living in. In fact, as D'Ignazio and Klein (2020) remind us, all sorts of systems for classifying are historically rooted in terms of race (and gender). One only has to think back to the role data played in the scientific racism of the mid-18th century or to data about enslaved peoples recorded in logbooks of slave ships in the 17th century to remember that data has often been used as colonial enterprises. If we pay close attention, we can also witness the longstanding links between data, power, and ongoing injustices that are impacting many diverse populations today. During the ongoing Covid pandemic, as just one example, the director of the Urban Indian Health Institute, Abigail Echo-Hawk (Pawnee) (2021), has shed light on the distorted accounting of Covid-19's impact on Native communities, going so far to argue that the omission of data on Native communities has essentially resulted in "data genocide," a phenomenon in which Native people are continuously eliminated in the public eye and thus dismissed, ignored, and mistreated (Urban Indian Health Institute, 2021, n.p.). In other words, as paraphrased in a news article about this dilemma, "No data on Native people means no need to meet obligations or provide resources" (Bennett-Begaye, Clahchischilligi, and Trudeau, 2021, n.p.). Such incidents make the rhetorical politics of accountability not only an imperative matter for data justice but also, in many cases, for individual and collective survivability.

## A Conclusion—of Sorts

As I have worked on The Swastika Counter Project over the last few years, I have been haunted by such compounding injustices in which data is complicit. As previously mentioned, this project is still very much in the works, and at this point, we are proud of the work we have thus far done to do data justice, which as Caroline Kuhn explains, is about "scrutinising, uncovering, and challenging…invisible structures of oppression that are entrenched in the social and cultural structures in which we are embedded." But again,we are constantly haunted by the ways in which our data and project on the whole might also do harm—concerns that are driving us to move slowly, consult with members of communities being impacted by swastika incidents, and carefully ask, in addition to the questions raised above: How do we adequately warn visitors about the traumas they may experience from being exposed to painful data? How do we make visible the horrifying discursive injustices that need to be exposed without offense? How do we safeguard the identities and locations of victims that have already been through enough trauma? How do we protect our many Jewish and minoritized advisory board members from being targeted with future violence? How do we activate inclusive design so that people with different abilities and literacies can interact with our website? These are just a few of questions we continue to grapple with and those don't even count for the ones we have already dealt with such as possible inaccuracies and distortions of data that we know exist despite all of our concerted efforts as well as the ways our data collection process were severely limited. The rhetorical politics of accountability, as you might guess by now, is a very complicated and consequential affair.

As I move toward conclusion, I don't want to pretend that I or we have proven answers to the complex rhetorical politics of accountability in this age of intense datafication. This project, to be honest, is very much a learn-as-you-go endeavor, and we still have a ton to learn. But I do feel that a rhetorical data studies perspective is at least putting us on the right track toward more ethical data advocacy action, and I hope that in addition to the method of iconographic tracking, this methodology might prove useful to rhetoricians across the Atlantic as you all work to serve politics in your own unique ways. I want to end by also noting that I believe this work has potential to diversify rhetorical education, specifically to better train undergraduates in the productive potentials of visual rhetoric. I am now currently leading a $300,000 grant-supported project called Data Advocacy for All in which we are developing curricula to train students in the arts of rhetorical data studies so they can learn how to ethically use and communicate with data for social change. As I have argued elsewhere (Gries, 2018), civic engagement requires rhetorical entanglement, a process that emerges only when our own discursive productions have the opportunity to intermingle with other circulating discourses. Leaning into rhetorical data studies to develop data activist tools such as The Swastika Counter Project is an opportunity for our own scholarship to become an active mediator with constitutive force to intervene in our local and national communities. It is also an opportunity for our students to learn how to advocate for their own community needs, especially in the face of ongoing and intensifying hate incidents. As we take up more data advocacy in both our research and our pedagogy then, I want to end this article with a question than more than a suggestion: What else might rhetoricians on both sides of the Atlantic be doing in rhetorical scholarship *and* rhetorical education to harness the potential of rhetorical data studies in order to confront the intensification of discrimination, harassment, and intimidation currently being felt within and across local, national, and transnational borders?

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This article is an extension of the keynote talk I delivered at the Nordic Conference on Research in Rhetoric that took place in Örebro, Sweden in October 2022. While the section on rhetorical data studies was not delivered at the conference and is admittedly more theoretical, the prior parts of this article, as well as the style, are presented here in the same vein as the keynote