

GEOSPATIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF RIGHT-LEANING EXTREMIST
IDEOLOGICAL GROUPS: RE-EVALUATING PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

SHELLEEN N. AKIN. Geospatial and Demographic Analysis of Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Groups: Re-Evaluating Preconceived Notions. (Under the direction of DR. SHANNON E. REID)

The growth of right-leaning ideological extremist groups during the 2012, 2016, and 2020 political election cycles emphasizes the need to re-evaluate our preconceived notions about the demographics of groups composition and geographical information about group location. The antiquated perceptions portrayed by media and public perception characterize these members as having lower educational attainment, middle-class to lower-class socioeconomic status, exclusively living in rural areas of Republican-led states, and Caucasian as their primary race. This study reviews scholarly literature associated with right-wing ideologies to examine the realities of right-leaning extremist ideological groups. Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) Hate Group frequencies and location data, Massachusetts Institute of Technology voting data, and United States Department of Commerce Census Bureau census data were used to examine relationships between right-leaning extremist ideological group locations in California and Georgia and demographic variables associated with right-leaning extremist ideological group stereotypes. While some demographic characteristics supported portions of the stereotypes, the qualitative and quantitative analysis found that much of the data indicates further investigation is necessary to define the modern-day right-leaning extremist ideological group characteristics more accurately.

Keywords: racist organizations, alt-right, white nationalists, stereotype, extremist ideology, white supremacy

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Studies related to racism and engagement with right-leaning extremist ideology discuss the last twenty years as having the most significant resurrection in overt and explicit racism, association with extremist ideological hate groups, and related racist and anti-government violence (Medaris, 2017; Kurtz, 2018; Schein, 2018; Peters & Besley, 2017; Eveland & Nathanson, 2020; Youngblood, 2020). In 2017, the United States witnessed one of the most racially charged and militaristic political demonstrations in Charlottesville, Virginia (Phillips & Yi, 2018; Le, 2020; Blout & Burkart, 2021; Shodiya-Zeumault et al., 2021; van der Vegt et al., 2021), followed by the insurrection on the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021 (Luke, 2021). In 2018 there were 8,496 incidents of hate crime against persons and property reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2018). Within this number, 3,445 incidents reported were crimes against persons motivated by race, ancestry, or ethnicity. Of those classified incidents, 52% were violent index crimes and simple assault. The offender group includes 24% African American and 56% Caucasian (Hate Crime Offender, 2019). From 2014 to 2018, there was a 30% increase of extremist right-leaning ideological groups across the United States (Southern Law, 2020). The exponential growth and advancement of these groups across the United States demonstrate the need to better understand demographic and geographic characteristics in and around locations identified as having established right-leaning extremist ideological groups.

This study will review racism and right-leaning ideology as *a feeling and expression of superiority over people with differing racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural backgrounds* (Grosfoguel, 2016). While most of the organizations analyzed in this study have structural racist ideologies, other groups have fundamental principles ingrained with supremacy through misogyny and suppression of others through gender superiority regardless of race or ethnic

background (Decook, 2018). Irrespective of the framework, the ideologies have common characteristics to control and suppress based on superiority and supremacy. This study includes, but is not limited to, groups and subgroups with right-leaning extremist ideologies such as neo-confederacy, Holocaust denial, male supremacy, white nationalism, and general hate groups like Proud Boys and Fraternal Order of Alt-Knights (SPLC, 2021). While there is a plethora of literature explaining the outcomes of association with extremist ideology, there is a critical gap in understanding the modern groups' demographic composition and geographic characteristics. Based on present-day media coverage, increased overt public appearance, and significant social media presence, preconceived notions surrounding these groups' figurative and literal landscape are no longer accurate or applicable to current and previous studies. For example, Blout and Burkhart (2021) described the required attire for White Nationalists during the “Unite the Right” in Charlottesville, Virginia, as polo shirts and khaki pants, which is a total deviation from the traditional Ku Klux Klan (KKK) robe and coned hood (Bickford & Clabough, 2019). Another example of the separation from traditional KKK-era hate group characteristics is Proud Boys divergence from traditional conservative perspectives while maintaining supremacy attitudes towards immigration, feminism perspectives, and “multiculturalism” (Decook, 2018: 486).

The importance of this study stems from the disparity of right-leaning extremist ideological group demographics in scholarly literature. As seen in the attacks in Charlottesville, Virginia, and the insurrection on Capitol Hill, confrontations exuded by these groups are progressively more violent. While the study only examines one facet of these organizations' complexities, the contribution widens the lens through which future research can examine right-leaning extremist ideological research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Right-Leaning Extremist Ideology

Insight into extremist group member demographics and geographic location requires a better understanding of the group ideological framework. These frameworks manifest through several mechanisms, which transfer to families and like-minded peers. First, extremist and racist attitudes may develop due to a person versus situation response; extremist and racist attitudes can manifest as a negative response to an everyday situation with an undesirable outcome (Barclay, 1982; Lee, Soto, Swim, & Bernstein, 2012). This type of development is generally a response to negative individual or group level interaction with someone of a different race or ethnic background. These unintended and undesirable outcomes become rooted as perception and evolve as a solely personal, outcome-based definition. Second, the theory of minority group threat may be responsible manifestation and solidification of the right-leaning ideology as a direct response to fear and anxiety of crime committed by minority groups (Blalock, 1970; Eitle & Taylor, 2008). As Eitle and Taylor (2008) explain, as minority group populations increase in size, oppositional feelings arise and intensify, creating a sense of community, social, and punitive control to eliminate fear and threat of crime.

Another mechanism in acquiring racially biased attitudes and beliefs is through transference by family, social groups, and community-level ideology. Social Learning Theory is one of the most referenced criminological and sociological theories for transferring ideologies. This theory effectively addresses mechanisms related to the spread of racist ideology because the tenets include social influence and the transference of behavioral definitions (Sarabia & Shriver, 2004).

While this study does not intend to test these theories, the theories are the best-fit explanations for developing, bolstering, and transferring right-leaning extremist ideology through peer-network groups. These groups tend to form based on non-racial similarities such as socioeconomic backgrounds, history with deviance, or other similar identity mechanisms (Sarabia & Shriver, 2004). Recently, right-leaning extremist ideology in the United States has substantially evolved from more outwardly and physically expressed attitudes like those seen during the “Jim Crow” south (Guffey, 2012) to more tunneled approaches to present-day use of content sharing social media platforms.

Digital forums are arguably the quickest and most effective way to spread racially biased ideological content. Since social media allows for seamless, non-contact associations, these groups' mobilization is virtually limitless (Peters & Besley, 2017; Decook, 2018). As Blout and Burkart (2021) present in their study of the Charlottesville riot in 2017, the social media platform Discord was used to coordinate the militaristic-style rally. One of the downfalls of the rapidly growing number of content and social media platforms is the equal volume transfer of hate content and racially motivated online hate crime. Though still applicable, historically, this content would have been passed primarily by paper pamphlets and fliers (Bowman-Grieve, 2009; Cope, 2017); social media allows for more effortless ideology transfer and recruitment across state lines in easily digestible and shareable forms such as internet memes (Decook, 2018).

Much like global terrorism activity, right-leaning extremist ideology activity and content are increasingly difficult to monitor due to social media and digital data transfer platforms. One study conducted by Youngblood (2020: 5) suggests that this fast-paced transference is akin to the “epidemiological” spread of infectious disease. The rising number of mechanisms in which hate content spreads is perhaps attributing to the rapid rise and expansion of racist ideological groups

across the United States, especially since the election cycle of 2016 (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020). A study conducted by Skinner and Fream (1997) addressed one of the primary mediators of cybercrime as the association of peer engagement in similar activities.

Virtual peer groups are relationships created, developed, and maintained in online environments (Miller & Morris, 2016). This relationship type virtually eliminates face-to-face contact, making it easier for those who experience social challenges to develop peer networks. Due to virtual peer networks' nature, a transference of definitions and racial attitudes is relatively fluid and easy to create. As individuals create their presence and identity online, they may either be vulnerable to persuasion by existing ideology or have a preexisting ideology and seek to reinforce their attitudes. Those who seek to find others with nearly identical philosophies will experience a phenomenon called “echo chamber” (O’ Hara, & Stevens, 2015). Echo chambers are especially prevalent among far-right and conservative groups along with other extremist ideological right-leaning hate groups. Echo chamber platforms include, but are not limited to, YouTube, 8chan, Twitter, Discord, and Facebook (van der Vegt et al., 2021). Some studies suggest social media platforms exacerbate the problem with lack of or delayed content filtering as well as bolstering popularity with “like” reactions and sharing functionality as seen on Facebook (O’ Hara & Stevens, 2015). Another study suggested the bolstering of online hate content occurs simply because users are in comfortable, safe spaces such as their home, allowing them to share and react to content without fear of confrontation and consequence (Futrell & Simi, 2004).

There is historical and accurate context to the research of geographical locations of racist and right-leaning extremist ideological groups. However, Nelson and Dunn suggest that racism and extremist ideology cannot be treated as a “spatially homogeneous phenomenon” (Nelson &

Dunn, 2017, p. 26). In a sense, extremist ideology not only looks different on a global scale but does so especially in the United States. Understanding the geographic context of these ideologies is not only important to better understand the demographics of group composition, but also the importance of homogeneity and group member willingness to travel to comfortable spaces. Reid and Valasik (2020) discuss this homogeneity in their study related to alt-right gangs. As discussed by Reid and Valasik (2020, 2018), and Futrell and Simi (2017), members of these groups will actively seek out locations comfortable and familiar to avoid expression and ideology suppression and confrontation. Comfort level in surroundings and peers suggests that group members will not necessarily travel long distances, except for large-scale events such as rallies. Groups' willingness to travel is crucial to understanding the reasoning behind identified group locations compared to outdated geographical stereotypes.

2.2 Preconceived Notions (Stereotypes) of Affiliation with Right-Leaning Extremism

Associations with groups or communities with individualistic traits may also have stereotypical characteristics. Kanahara (2006) explains that, much like the term ideology, the definition of a stereotype is often loosely defined and ambiguous. For this research, a stereotype is a *generally accepted concept or belief about a set of characteristics or traits that describe a type of individual or group* (Kanahara, 2006). While the attributes or characteristics are generally understood, they may be ill-defined or considered a “bad generalization” (Kanahara, 2006, pg. 308). Members of right-leaning extremist ideological groups historically have common stereotypical characteristics. The most common stereotype is the term “red neck” (Duff, 2018). The original definition was seemingly innocuous as it referred to sunburn on the necks of field workers. However, as Duff (2018) explains, this single term expanded as a disparaging term closely associated with a caucasian person living in low socioeconomic housing with strong

prideful beliefs aligning with the white supremacy framework supporting the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The KKK has deeply rooted origins in the southern half of the United States (Cunningham, 2012, pg. 151) and had been historically supported by Republican institutions (Cunningham, 2012, pg. 18). While this is ingrained in United States history, this geographic perception remains the stereotype (Kurtz, 2021) even though current social turmoil suggests groups have migrated north and as far west as California. In addition to location, right-leaning extremist stereotypes are caucasian, low educational attainment, and generally lower socioeconomic status (O'Brien et al., 2010; Medaris, 2017).

2.3 Present Study

The present body of scholarly literature related to racism and extremist militaristic and white supremacy ideology lacks modern-day characteristic definitions of group composition and definitive consensus on where associated groups are forming. The motivation behind this study is to widen the literature lens into understanding modern demographic characteristics of areas surrounding locations identified by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) as containing a group considered right-leaning extremist. The present study will utilize a qualitative and quantitative methodology to analyze stereotypical variables presented in the literature to visually assess the demographic and geographic characteristics of the population where a right-leaning extremist ideological group was identified.

Question 1: Are right-leaning extremist ideological groups located in urban or rural areas?

Given historical literature, the expectation is that group locales will fall outside of a ten-mile buffer of cities with equal to or greater than fifty thousand people, especially the historically Republican state, Georgia. These groups may be expected to appear in higher frequencies outside

of urban boundaries through the lens of minority group threat. Conversely, the theory may also explain a concentration of right-leaning extremist ideological groups as a means of infiltrating areas predominantly populated by minority groups (Eitle & Taylor, 2008).

Question 2: Are right-leaning extremist ideological group locations within counties and census tracts where residents' mean income is equal to or greater than \$50,000?

Question 3: Are right-leaning extremist ideological group locations within counties and census tracts where adults age twenty-five and older attained a Bachelor's degree or higher?

Question 4: Are right-leaning extremist ideological group locations within counties and census tracts where over 50% of the reported population self-reported as one race (white)?

These questions seek to identify the socioeconomic and demographic differences in counties and census tracts with and without group presence. Some scholarly literature, popular culture, and media often portray right-leaning extremist ideology group members as living in lower socioeconomic status, poorly educated, and considered only one race (white).

Question 5: Are right-leaning extremist ideological group locations within counties reported to have primarily voted Republican during the 2012, 2016, and 2020 presidential elections?

Like the demographic variables, typical stereotypes of right-leaning extremist ideology group members only live in the southern region of the United States in areas predominantly voting for Republican presidents and other conservative politicians.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

3.1 Data

The present study examines the geographic locations of right-leaning extremist ideological group headquarters identified by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and the population's demographic characteristics in the areas surrounding those locations. While the present study cannot determine the specific residential addresses or socioeconomic, educational, or racial characteristics of group members, the study attempts to understand better the population's demographic characteristics where the identified group locations appear. The data were obtained from the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) Hate Group dataset, the United States Department of Commerce Census Bureau American Community Survey, and presidential election result data analysts using data posted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on the GitHub data-sharing platform.

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 Groups

Extremist ideological groups were selected from the Southern Poverty Law Group (SPLC) Hate Group dataset from years 2012 through 2019, accounting for three election cycles. Some of the right-leaning extremist ideologies included are Anti-LGBTQ, Anti-Muslim, General Hate, Neo-Nazi, and White Nationalist. A complete list of groups is listed in Table 6 in Appendix A.

3.2.2 States

This study utilized the Southern Poverty Law Group (SPLC) data from 2012 through 2019 to select states based on group frequency counts. Based on frequency counts and historical political affiliation, California and Georgia were selected as the test cases. These states included a minimum of thirty-two group observations and represented two distinct regions of the United

States as defined by the United States Department of Commerce Census Bureau (n.d.): West (Pacific, Mountain) and South (West South Central, East South Central, South Atlantic).

3.2.3 City and Town Selection

Based on the United States Department of Commerce Census Bureau definition, urbanized areas are *developed spaces containing at least fifty thousand people* (Census Bureau, 2020). Cities in California and Georgia were selected using the American Community Survey population data tables to determine accurate city populations for the years 2012, 2016, and 2019.

3.2.4 Demographic Characteristics

Based on the United States Department of Commerce Census Bureau definition, urbanized areas are *developed spaces containing at least fifty thousand people* (Census Bureau, 2020). Cities in California and Georgia were selected using the American Community Survey population data tables to determine accurate city populations for the years 2012, 2016, and 2019.

3.2.4.1 American Community Survey

The American Community Survey one-year estimate survey results for years 2012, 2016, and 2019 were utilized to create the choropleth analysis maps in the ArcGIS ArcMap application.

Educational Attainment. One-year educational attainment estimates for adults age twenty-five or older who obtained a Bachelor's degree or higher were obtained from the American Community Survey (ACS) 2012, 2016, and 2019 Demographic and Housing datasets.

Mean Income. One-year household mean income estimates were obtained from the American Community Survey (ACS) 2012, 2016, and 2019 Demographic and Housing datasets.

Self Reported Race. One-year single race identification estimates were obtained from the American Community Survey (ACS) 2012, 2016, and 2019 Demographic and Housing datasets.

3.2.4.2 Presidential Party Majority Results by County.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) geospatial presidential voting data by county were downloaded from the GitHub software and data-sharing platform.

3.3 Procedure

3.3.1 Group Analysis

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) Hate Group dataset was first filtered in Microsoft Excel to include the highest frequency group count of right-leaning extremist ideologies, including Anti-LGBTQ, Anti-Muslim, General Hate, and White Nationalist groups. Next, the data table was filtered by test state and by year. Any identified group not containing a plottable location by cities identified by the United States Department of Commerce Census Bureau shapefiles was removed for geospatial analysis but remained in the frequency analysis tables.

3.3.2 Spatial Analysis

ArcGIS ArcMap software was used to create base maps for Georgia and California using state, county, and census tract shapefiles provided by the United States Census Bureau. The list of selected plottable groups listed in Table 1 was utilized to create a point marker feature location layer on the base map. Next, a ten-mile buffer polygon layer was created around cities with a population equal to or greater than fifty thousand to measure the occurrence of right-leaning extremist ideological group presence within a rural or urban area.

Next, choropleth analysis maps were created for the mean income, educational attainment, race, and political affiliation demographic variables. Each demographic variable was first geocoded and joined to census tract shapefiles. The educational attainment and race variables were normalized to percentages using the survey question result total divided by total

county population. Voting results were recoded using python if/then statements using the definition query function in the attribute table. This script was used to convert election tallies to dichotomous values: “Republican” or “Democrat.” There were no changes to mean income. The demographic variable results were symbolized by the choropleth function and manually classified by four or five equal-size groups using gray-scale color ramps except for presidential election results. Election results were symbolized as two groups using variations of gray. See Figures 7-18 for Georgia and Figures 19-30 for California in Appendix B.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The overall group presence frequency count noticeably fluctuated nationally year over year. While ideologies such as Christian Identity and Holocaust Denial decrease, there were significant increases year over year among ideologies like Anti-Immigrant and Anti-LGBTQ. The rise in White Nationalist groups like Proud Boys and Bugaloo Boys may explain these differences.

TABLE 1: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Frequency Change, 2012-2019

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Grand Total	2012- 2019 % change
Anti-Immigrant	9	9	9	12	15	19	17	19	109	111%
Anti-LGBTQ	34	40	45	48	52	49	49	70	317	106%
Anti-Muslim	33	34	24	34	81	98	88	78	470	136%
Christian Identity	53	36	21	19	20	19	17	11	196	-79%
General Hate	63	57	47	51	45	36	69	71	439	13%
Hate Music	11	8	11	10	16	14	12	13	95	18%
Holocaust Denial	9	11	11	11	10	10	8	7	77	-22%
Ku Klux Klan	127	113	53	140	99	45	22	16	615	-87%
Male Supremacy							2	1	3	-
Neo-Confederate	30	31	28	27	36	25	28	20	225	-33%
Neo-Nazi	69	69	59	42	63	27	23	13	365	-81%
Neo-Volkisch	1	1	1	8	2	6		14	33	1300%
Racist Skinhead	93	77	66	49	19	12	9	4	329	-96%
Radical Traditional Catholicism	17	17	17	17	14	11	11	10	114	-41%
White Nationalist	114	103	85	71	60	65	92	76	666	-33%

While some group frequencies substantially decreased, others have significantly increased. These variations are not necessarily indicative of an exponential increase in group frequencies. Instead, they likely dissolved a group and formed a new group using a different title.

For example, the steady decrease in Ku Klux Klan frequencies may not necessarily indicate a decline in the number of people associated with right-leaning extremist ideological groups.

Instead, it is more likely that members shifted from a faith-based ideology and joined a group aligned more closely with militaristic, anti-government ideologies like White Nationalist groups (Isom et al., 2021).

TABLE 2: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Frequency Change, Georgia (2012-2019)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Grand 2012-2019	
									Total	% change
Anti-Immigrant						1	1	1	3	-
Anti-LGBTQ	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	12	0%
Anti-Muslim	2	2	2	2			1	1	10	-50%
Christian Identity	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	-50%
General Hate	2	3	2	2			3	6	18	200%
Ku Klux Klan	9	8	1	2	6	2	2	1	31	-89%
Neo-Confederate	3	4	2	2	2		3	3	19	0%
Neo-Nazi	2	3	3	3	1	1			13	-100%
Neo-Volkisch										-
Racist Skinhead			1	1					2	-
White Nationalist	4	5	2	4	2	5	4	4	30	0%

Like the national percentage changes in group frequencies, Georgia saw a polarized fluctuation from group to group represented in Table 3. Table 4 shows a pattern for California similarly fluctuating. Notably is the consistent upswing in White Nationalist and Anti-Muslim groups. When looking at this particular frequency through minority group threat, the likely explanation is the increasing rise of Muslim immigration into Europe and North America (Heindl, 2017).

TABLE 3: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Frequency Change, California (2012-2019)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Grand Total	2012-2019 % change
Anti-Immigrant	2	2	1	2	2	3	3	3	18	50%
Anti-LGBT/LGBTQ	3	5	5	5	7	6	5	9	36	200%
Anti-Muslim	8	9	4	7	9	12	12	12	73	50%
Christian Identity	1								1	-
General Hate	17	15	12	11	13	5	9	9	91	-47%
Hate Music	1	1	1		1				4	-
Holocaust Denial	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	28	-25%
Ku Klux Klan				1	2	1			4	-
Neo-Confederate	1	1	1						3	-
Neo-Nazi	7	5	3	4	5	1	1	1	27	-86%
Neo-Volkisch				1		2		4	7	-
Racist Skinhead	7	7	6	7	4	3	4	2	40	-71%
Radical Traditional										
Catholicism	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	13	-50%
White Nationalist	9	7	5	5	5	5	10	11	57	22%

4.1 Geospatial Analysis: Georgia (2012, 2016, 2019)

Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3 symbolize an overview analysis demonstrating the geospatial variation in group locations in urban and rural areas in Georgia, addressing research question one. The black circular polygon features (point markers) represent the identified location of a right-leaning extremist ideology group.

FIGURE 1: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and City Populations of 50,000 or Greater - Georgia, 2012

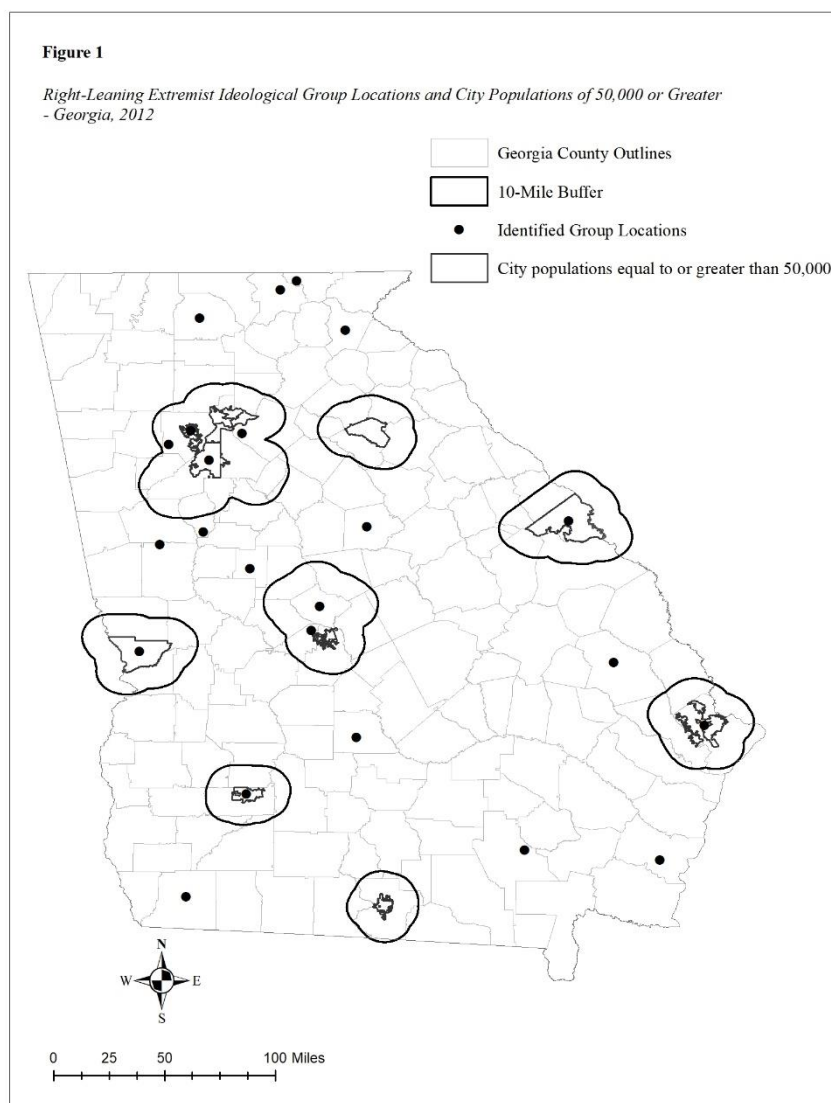


FIGURE 2: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and City Populations of 50,000 or Greater - Georgia, 2016

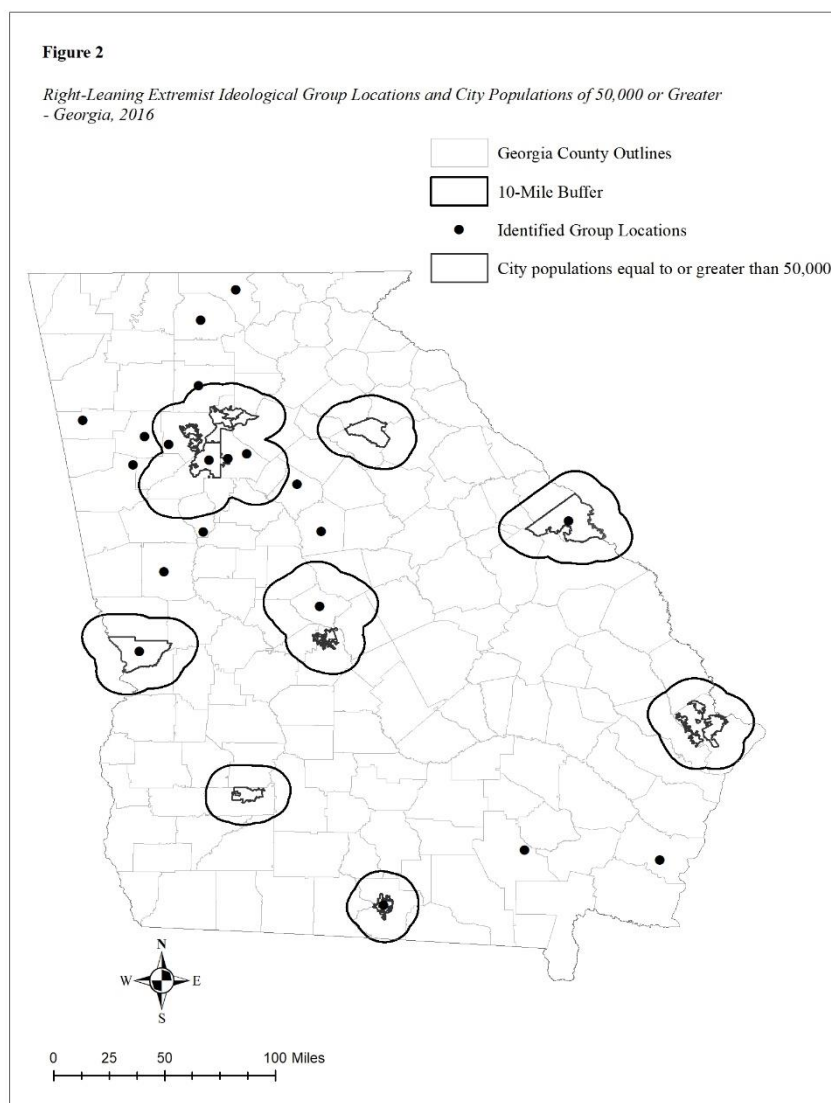


FIGURE 3: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and City Populations of 50,000 or Greater - Georgia, 2019

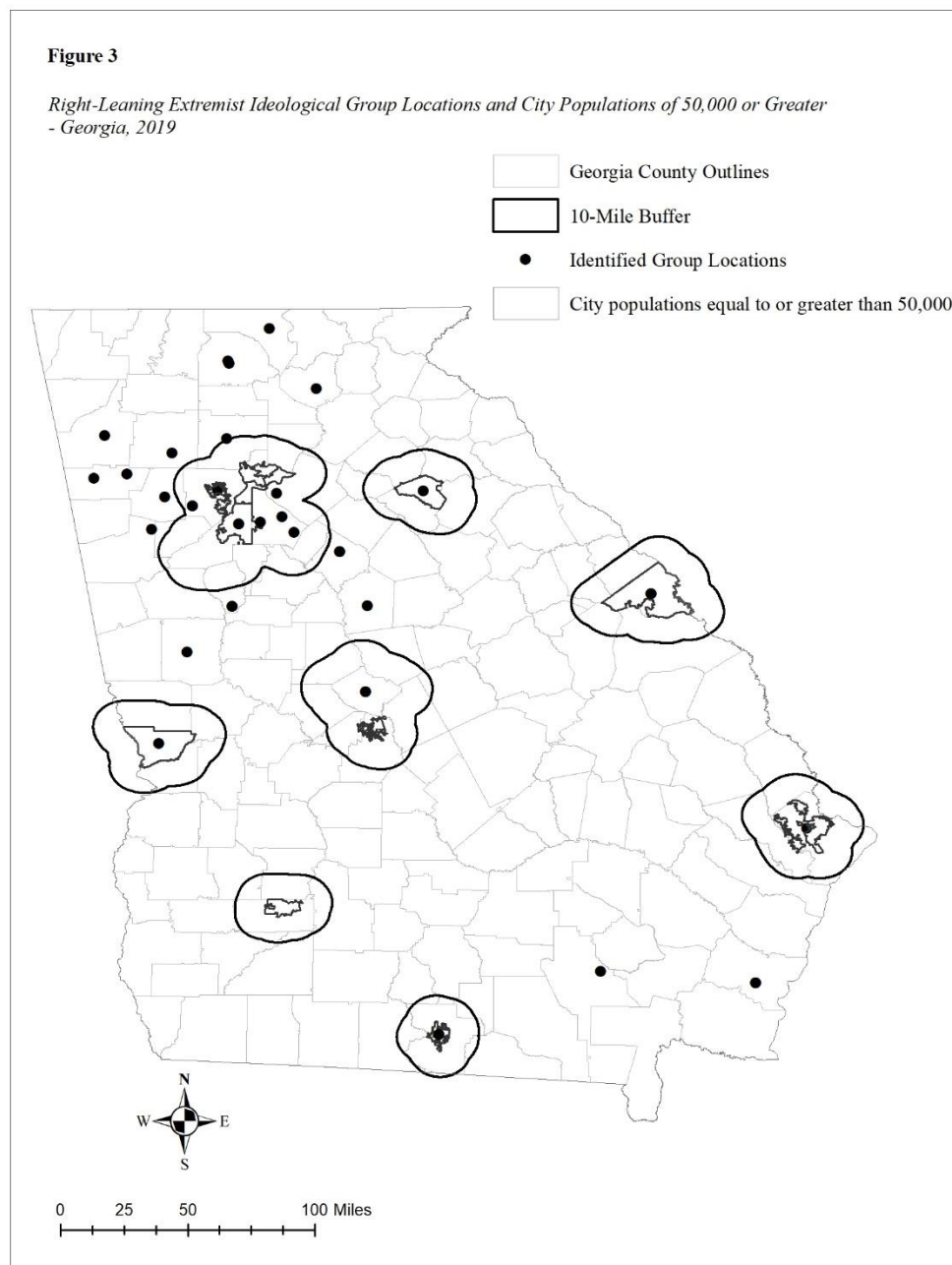


Table 5 represents the distribution of point markers across Figures 1-3 above and Figures 7-18 located in Appendix B. Figures 1-3 address research question one in determining if groups are observed in urban or rural counties. This figure was determined by observing the groups

within or outside the ten-mile buffer zone around cities with fifty thousand or greater populations. The analysis for research question one indicates that in 2012 and 2016, more groups were represented in rural locations than urban. This distribution changed in 2019, where 56% of the groups were observed within the ten-mile buffer zones, or the urban areas.

Figures 7-18 in Appendix B represent the choropleth analyses of the demographic variables for Georgia in 2012, 2016, and 2019, and Table 5 illustrates the calculations for the demographic variables. The figures in Table 5 were calculated for each choropleth map and indicate the percentage of group frequencies located on census tracts where: (research question two) adults age twenty-five or older obtained a Bachelor's degree or over, (research question three) income is equal to or higher than \$50,000, (research question four) respondents self-reported their race as only white, and (research question five) the Democrat or Republican majority vote count by county during the 2012, 2106, and 2020 presidential elections. These distributions indicate several notable distinctions related to research questions two through five. For research question two, the mean income of groups was consistently above \$50,000 for each year. For research question three, the percentage of group locations on tracks where adults age twenty-five or older obtained a Bachelor's degree or higher were below 50% for all three years analyzed. In question four, the analysis tested the stereotypical assumption that Georgia would have an exceptionally high census tract volume where respondents indicated they were only one race (white). There is a noted higher value for 2019 at 50% and is not necessarily exceptional given the total group count of eighteen.

For the presidential elections, Georgia consistently voted for Republican candidates until the election in 2020. There is a significant change in voting majorities toward the Democratic

candidate. In terms of preconceived notions, 2019 appears as the only anomaly for political preference.

TABLE 4: Group Location Relative to 10-Mile Geospatial Buffer and Associated Demographics, Georgia (2019-2019)

	2012	2016	2019
Rural	57%	60%	44%
Urban	43%	40%	56%
Bachelor Degree or Over (>40%)	17%	20%	33%
Mean Income (>\$50,000)	52%	60%	83%
Race (reported only white) (>50%)	30%	35%	50%
Presidential Vote Majority - Republican	70%	60%	44%
Presidential Vote Majority - Democrat	30%	40%	56%
Total groups	23	20	18

4.2 Geospatial Analysis: California (2012, 2016, 2020)

Figure 4, Figure 5, and Figure 6 symbolize an overview analysis demonstrating the geospatial variation in group locations in urban and rural areas in California, addressing research question one. The black circular polygon features (point markers) represent the identified location of a right-leaning extremist ideology group. Table 6 is the distribution calculation of point markers in Figures 4-6 below and Figures 19-30 located in Appendix B. Regarding research question one, less than 15% of identified groups were consistently located outside of the ten-mile buffer zone around cities with populations fifty thousand or greater.

FIGURE 4: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and City Populations of 50,000 or Greater - California, 2012

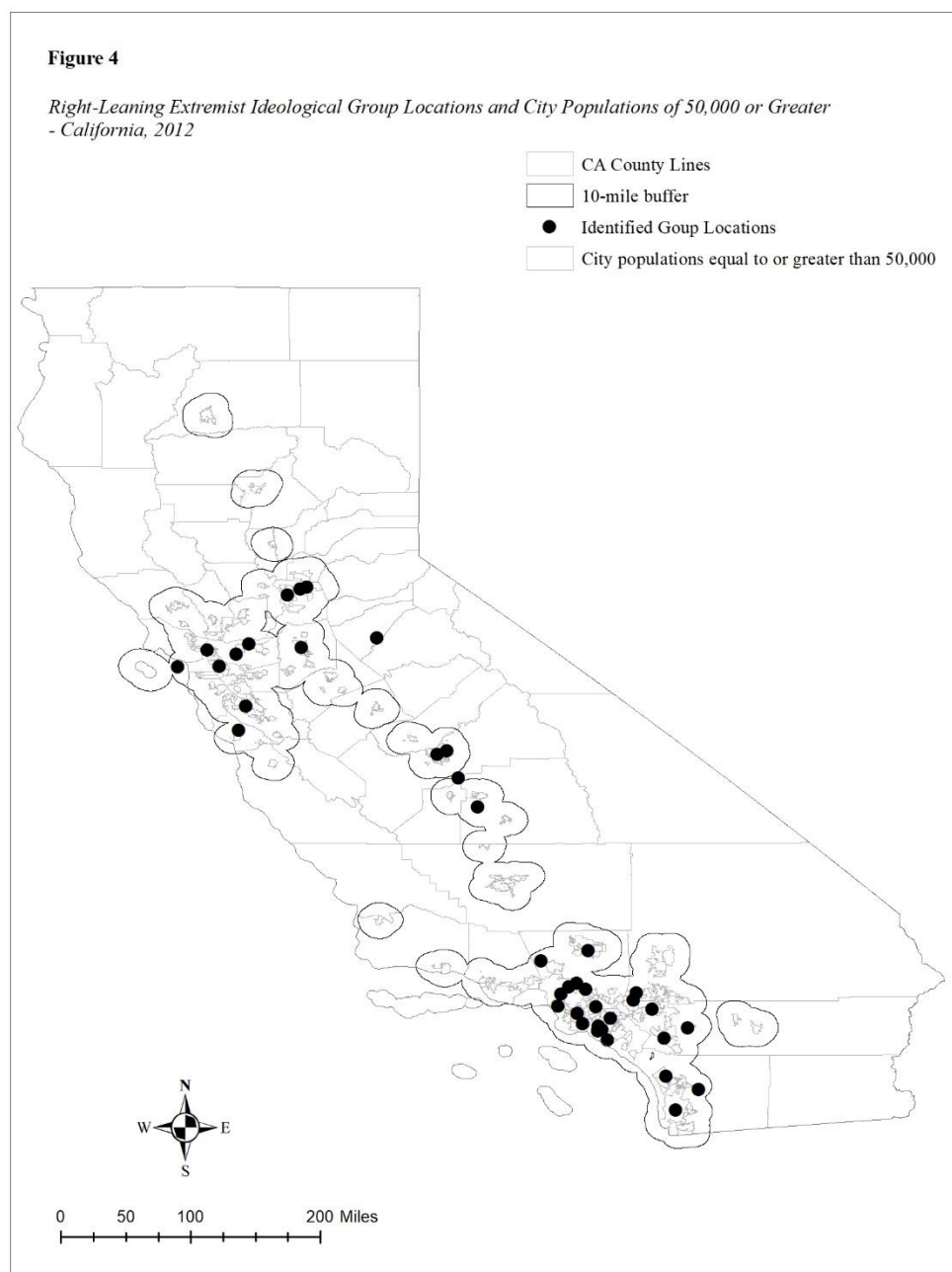


FIGURE 5: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and City Populations of 50,000 or Greater - California, 2016

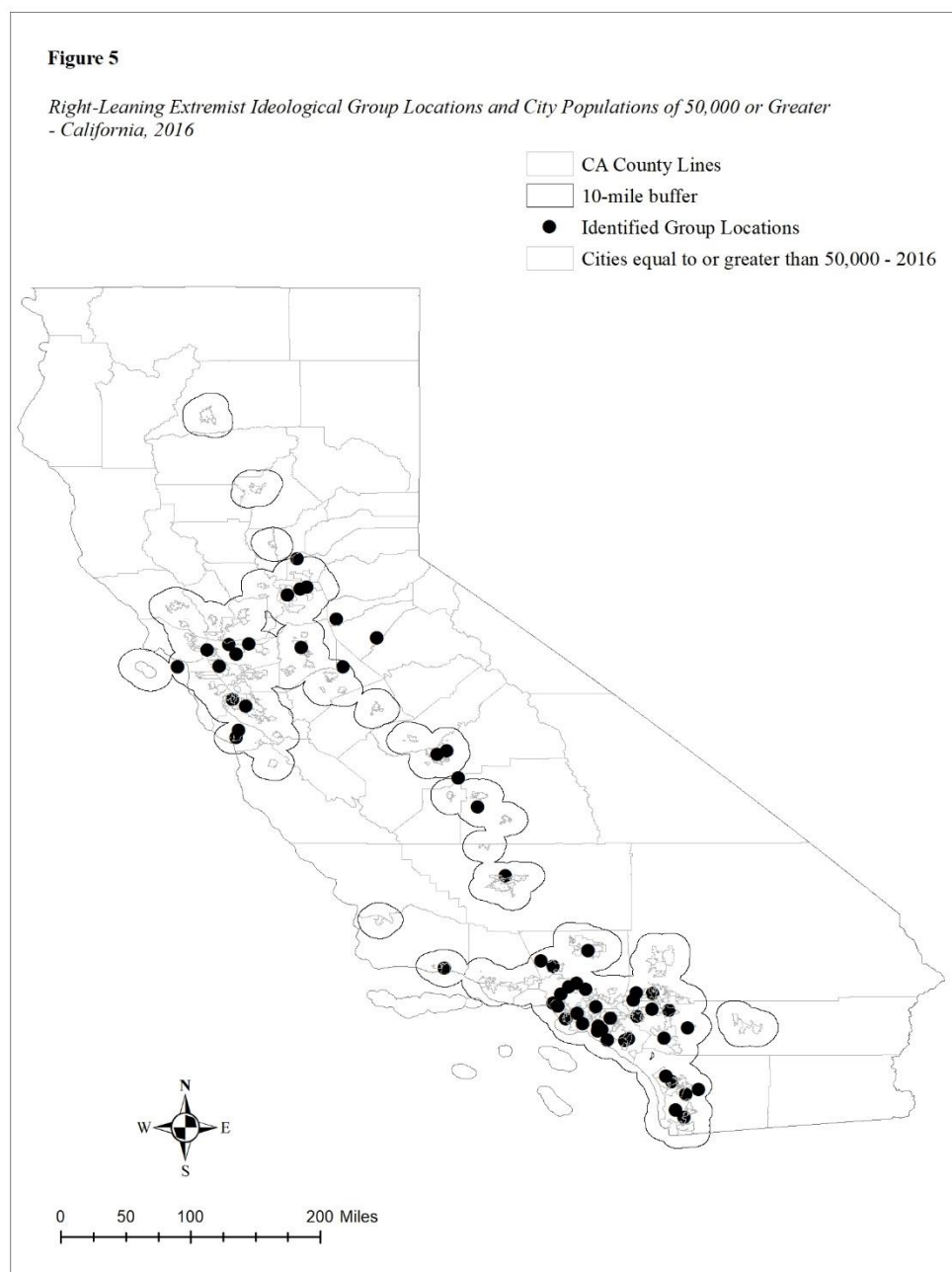
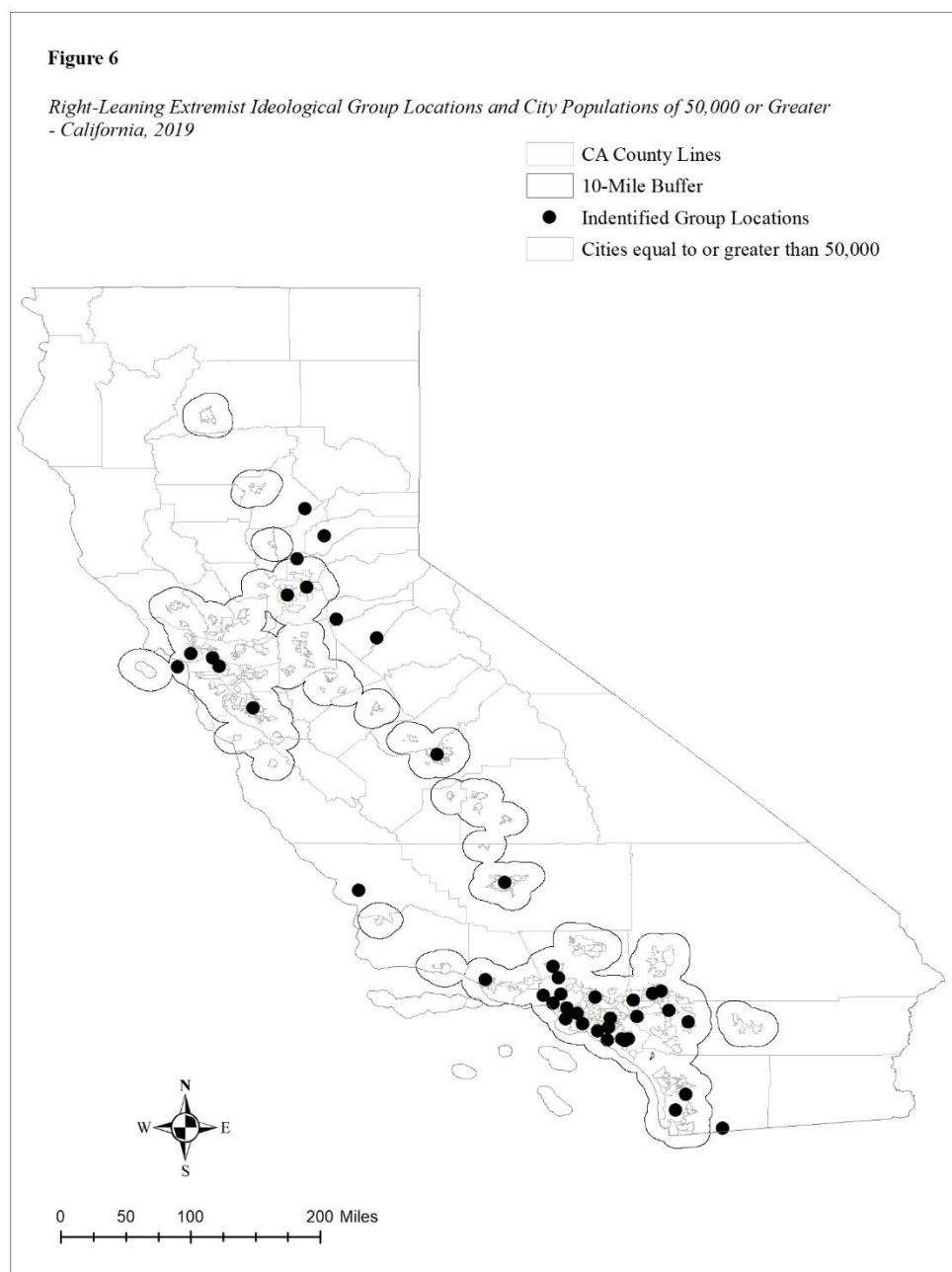


FIGURE 6: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and City Populations of 50,000 or Greater - California, 2019



Figures 19-30 represent the choropleth analysis of the demographic variables for California in 2012, 2016, and 2019. The percentages in Table 6 were calculated for each choropleth map and indicate the percentage of group frequencies located on census tracts where: (research question two) adults age twenty-five or older obtained a Bachelor's degree or over, (research question three) income is equal to or higher than \$50,000, (research question four) respondents self-reported their race as only white, and (research question five) the Democrat or Republican majority vote count by county during the 2012, 2016, and 2020 presidential elections.

The distributions across the four demographic variables were mainly misaligned with preconceived notions, and there were only two notable distinctions related to research questions two through five. First, the educational attainment percentage related to research question three in 2019 is significantly lower than in 2012 and 2016. This substantial difference is most likely due to the lower count of census tracts reported in the estimate for that year. The next notable observation related to research question four is the percentage of self-reporting as a single race (white). This calculation indicated over 80% of the respondents in that tract consider themselves of one race (white), making the geographic area possibly more attractive for groups with tenets of white supremacy. For research questions two and five, the calculations of these variables align with the standard expected demographics of California but not of the stereotypical characteristics of those who are members of right-leaning extremist ideological groups.

TABLE 5: Group Location Relative to 10-Mile Geospatial Buffer and Associated Demographics, California (2012-2019)

	2012	2016	2019
Rural	5%	8%	14%
Urban	95%	92%	86%
Bachelor Degree or Over (>40%)	95%	95%	31%
Mean Income (>\$50,000)	95%	95%	95%
Race (reported only white) (>50%)	92%	89%	83%
Presidential Vote Majority - Republican	40%	11%	10%
Presidential Vote Majority - Democrat	60%	89%	90%
Total groups	37	39	42

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study utilized geospatial analysis to assess demographic characteristics of census tracts containing locations of right-leaning extremist ideological groups identified by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). This project aimed to determine if the demographic characteristics of the census tracts aligned with preconceived notions of group characteristics. The findings in this study suggest that the demographic characteristics of right-leaning extremist ideological groups discussed in literature may be antiquated and in need of re-examination. In the geospatial analysis of group locations compared to census demographic data in Georgia, some characteristics addressed in the analysis align with stereotypes generally described in the literature. Conversely, most characteristics addressed in the analysis of California in this study do not sufficiently align with the stereotype demographics.

The first research question addresses the notion that southern states are the predominant locations for right-leaning extremist ideological groups. The SPLC data indicate that right-leaning extremist ideological group locations are currently identified in nearly every state. In this study, there is evidence that California contains higher frequencies of group count than the southern state, Georgia. The geospatial analysis revealed that almost all groups are located in urban areas rather than rural areas in California. In Georgia, groups identified in 2012 and 2016 were located in rural areas, where most groups in 2019 were located in urban areas.

Research questions two through five analyzed census demographic data comparing identified group locations to determine if demographic variables could explain the geographical placement. Considering the demographic stereotypes of poor education, low socioeconomic status, and race, the assumption before this study is that Georgia would have a higher representation of these stereotype characteristics. The educational attainment statistics revealed that most of the reported adult population over the age of 18 in counties across Georgia in 2012,

2016, and 2019 did not obtain a Bachelor's degree or higher. This observation aligns accordingly to the stereotype. On the other hand, though, the mean income and race variables did not wholly support the stereotypes. The mean income analysis indicated that groups were located on census tracts where there was a higher percentage of the population with a mean income of equal to or greater than \$50,000. Regarding race, only the 2019 calculation indicated a higher percentage of respondents who identified as having one race (white). For research question five, Georgia voting records for presidential elections aligned with the notion that right-leaning extremist groups are located where Republican candidates are selected.

The analysis of California presented a stark contrast comparison in terms of the stereotypical demographics of a right-leaning extremist ideology group member. Most of the demographic variables in 2012, 2016, and 2019 do not reinforce the stereotypes except the race variable. The percentages for the race variable consistently show most of the census survey respondents self-identify as having only one race (white).

The motivation of this study is to address the disparity in historical and current literature, which provides very little insight into the current demographic composition of the modern-day right-leaning extremist ideological group. Studies indicate the rapid growth rate in group formation (Medaris, 2017; Kurtz, 2018; Schein, 2018; Peters & Besley, 2017; Eveland & Nathanson, 2020; Youngblood, 2020) warrants closer scrutiny and closer observation of group composition and activity. As discussed, scholarly literature, media, and pop culture are all limited in addressing the reasoning behind the rapid formation and identifying more appropriate modern-day demographic characteristics of right-leaning extremist group composition. Future research should also widen the lens used to discuss the rapidly growing diversity of right-leaning extremist ideological groups. An example of diversity is the ideological difference between the

Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and Proud Boys. These two groups have starkly different viewpoints on conservative values and race, but both groups have foundations based on supremacy ideology (Decook, 2018: 486). Another example is the wide variety of participants present at the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville. Groups displayed an eclectic series of uniforms by ideology, sub-group, and chapter. In this case, white nationalists wore polo shirts with khaki bottoms where Klansman donned varying styles of traditional Klan robes and hoods (Blout & Burkart, 2020). These differing uniforms and dress costumes alone can make group characteristics and association identification difficult.

Finally, the importance of understanding the development and transfer of these ideologies relates to the willingness of individuals to mobilize and congregate with other like-minded individuals, especially at politically motivated and racially charged events such as “Unite the Right” and the insurrection on the United States Capitol. Studies indicate groups tend to gather closer to familiar locations where they feel comfortable expressing their ideology and congregate around like-minded group members and peers (Reid & Valasik, 2020; Futrell & Simi, 2017). Currently, definitive information about how far a group member is willing to travel has not yet available in literature outside of media content related to major events like those discussed in this study.

5.1 Limitations

The present study of demographic characteristics compared to preconceived notions of far-right extremist ideological groups is, first and foremost, an exploratory analysis to initiate further conversations related to group demographics. Due to the nature of this study, limitations and areas are requiring further exploration.

The present study relies on literature loosely describing ambiguous and antiquated characteristics of persons involved in far-right extremist ideology. Primarily, characteristics addressed in literature are analogous to those describing members of the Ku Klux Klan. The landscape of far-right extremist ideology encompasses actors who no longer fit the stereotypical descriptions based on media representation alone. This study results further support the notion that demographic characteristics in areas containing a right-leaning extremist ideology group may not necessarily align with outdated stereotypes. Although the demographics discussed in this study are represented at state, county, and census tract population levels, these high-level, specific characteristics may not be necessarily useful in predicting or intervening with individuals who are more prone to engage with extremist ideological groups.

The present study relies solely on group identification and location data provided by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). The methodologies described by SPLC for data collection are helpful but vague. Most likely, this is with intention due to the elusive nature of extremist ideological groups. This study reviewed the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) extremist ideology group identification data for inclusion, but the data were outdated and limited in scope and therefore eliminated. The singular data usage leaves research like the present study limited to insight into more finite information about certainty and verifiability in group locations, formation and dissolution in groups, and classification criteria in which groups are considered extremist. Relying on a single data source for group identification could create a lens of bias.

Finally, to further prevent bias and increase study validity, robust right-leaning extremist ideology group demographic and geographic characteristic research requires better quantitative measures. While this study utilized a geospatial analysis on census-driven and verifiable voting

data, these variables are among many that can be quantitatively measured to expand literature and testing in the new reality of right-leaning extremist ideology.

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APPENDIX A: EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES WITH SUBGROUPS

TABLE 6: Extremist Ideology Categories with Subgroups, 2012-2019

<i>Extremist Ideology Categories with Subgroups</i>								
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Grand Total
Anti-Muslim				1	56	61	57	175
ACT for America				1	45	47	47	140
Soldiers of Odin					11	14	10	35
General Hate						10	21	31
American Guard						10	17	27
Gallows Tree Wotansvolk Alliance							4	4
Ku Klux Klan	58	67	38	55	61	25	9	313
Ku Klos Knights of the KKK	10	13	13	30	34	5		105
Loyal White Knights of the KKK	16	52	22	24	23	17		154
Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan							7	7
United Klans of America	32	2	3	1	4	3	2	47
Neo-Confederate	24	18	16	15	23	21	26	143
League of the South	24	18	16	15	23	21	26	143
Neo-Nazi	62	72	62	62	46	32	54	390
American Nazi Party	6	7	7	5	3	2	2	32
Aryan Nations Sadistic Souls MC		9	5	7	9	7	6	43
Atomwaffen Division					1	1	27	29
National Socialist Movement	55	55	49	46	22	13	6	246
Traditionalist Worker Party				3	10	8	12	33
White Aryan Resistance	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Racist Skinhead	34	48	52	44	42	31	22	273
Aryan Strikeforce		9	19	13	12	5		58
Confederate Hammerskins	9	11	9	6	5	5	5	50
Crew 38	13	14	12	13	14	12	8	86
Eastern Hammerskins	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	10
Keystone State Skinheads	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	13
Midland Hammerskins	3	4	2	2	2	1	2	16
Northern Hammerskins	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	13
Northwest Hammerskins	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	17
Western Hammerskins	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	10
White Nationalist	37	33	35	21	16	34	61	237
American Freedom Party		9	12	11	7	7	10	56
Council of Conservative Citizens	37	24	23	10	5	2	1	102
Patriot Front						4	16	20

The Right Stuff	4	21	34	59
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APPENDIX B: GEOSPATIAL ANALYSIS FIGURES OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

FIGURE 7: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Educational Attainment - Georgia, 2012

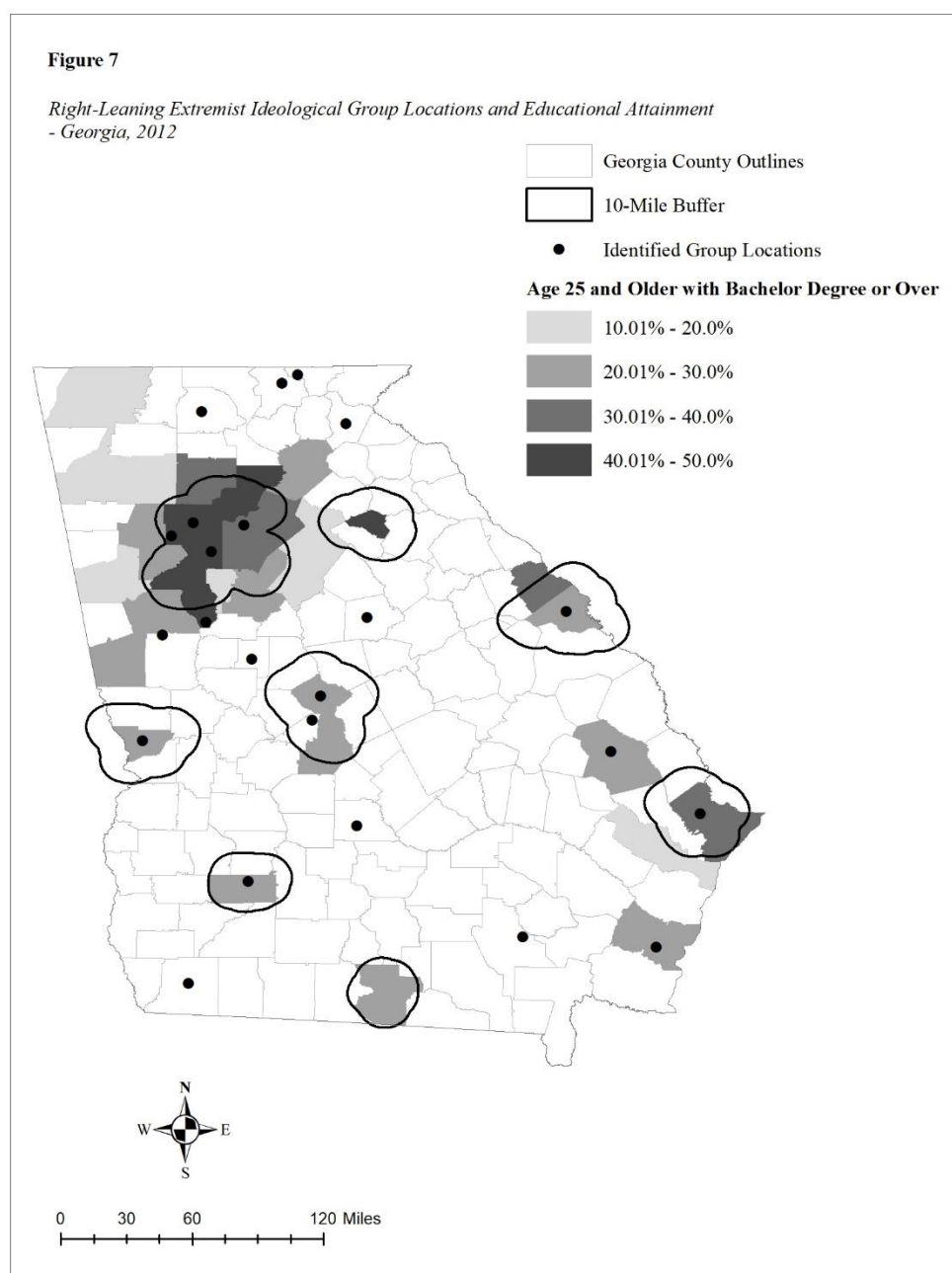


FIGURE 8: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Mean Income - Georgia, 2012

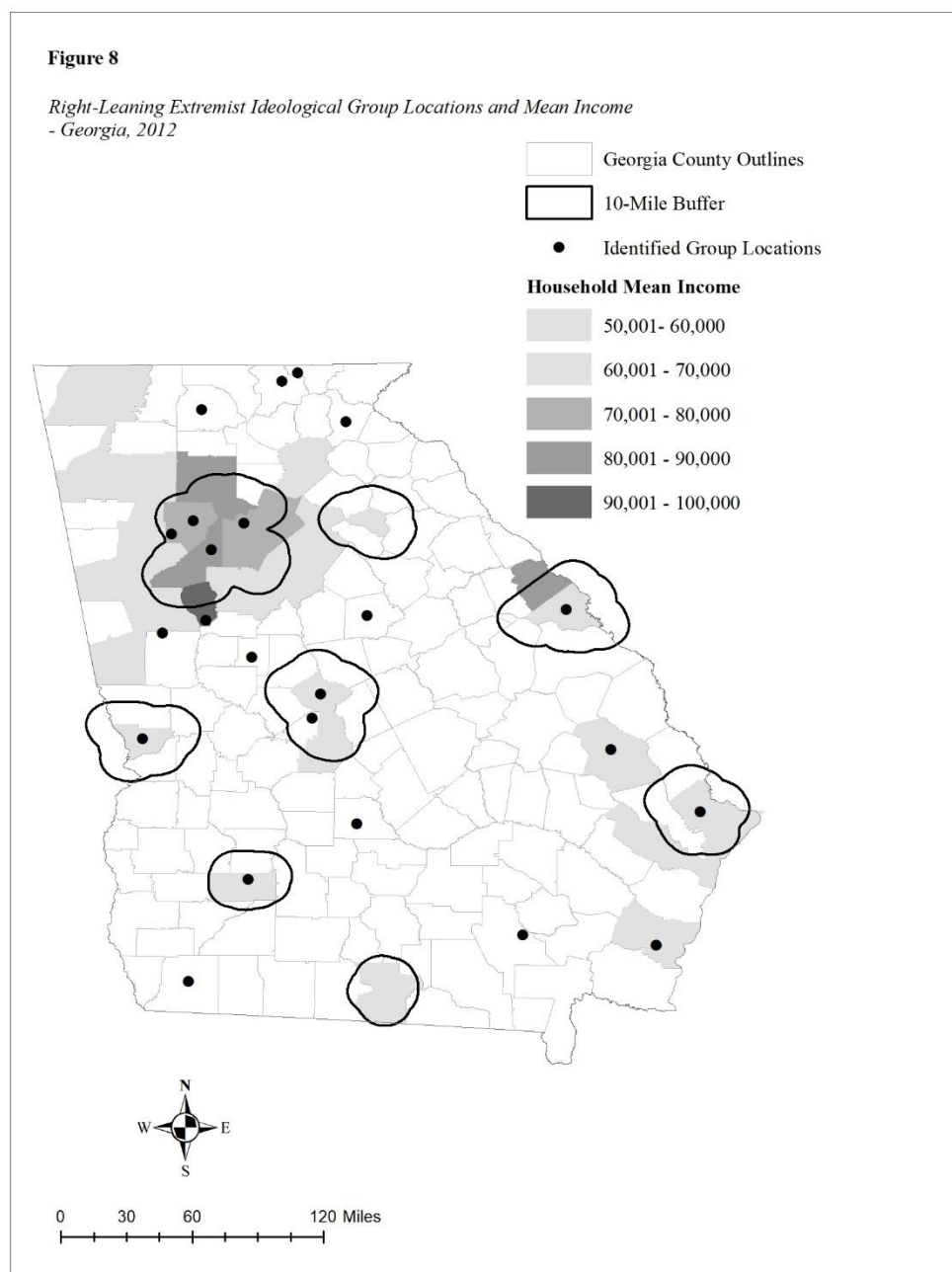


FIGURE 9: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Reported One Race - Georgia, 2012

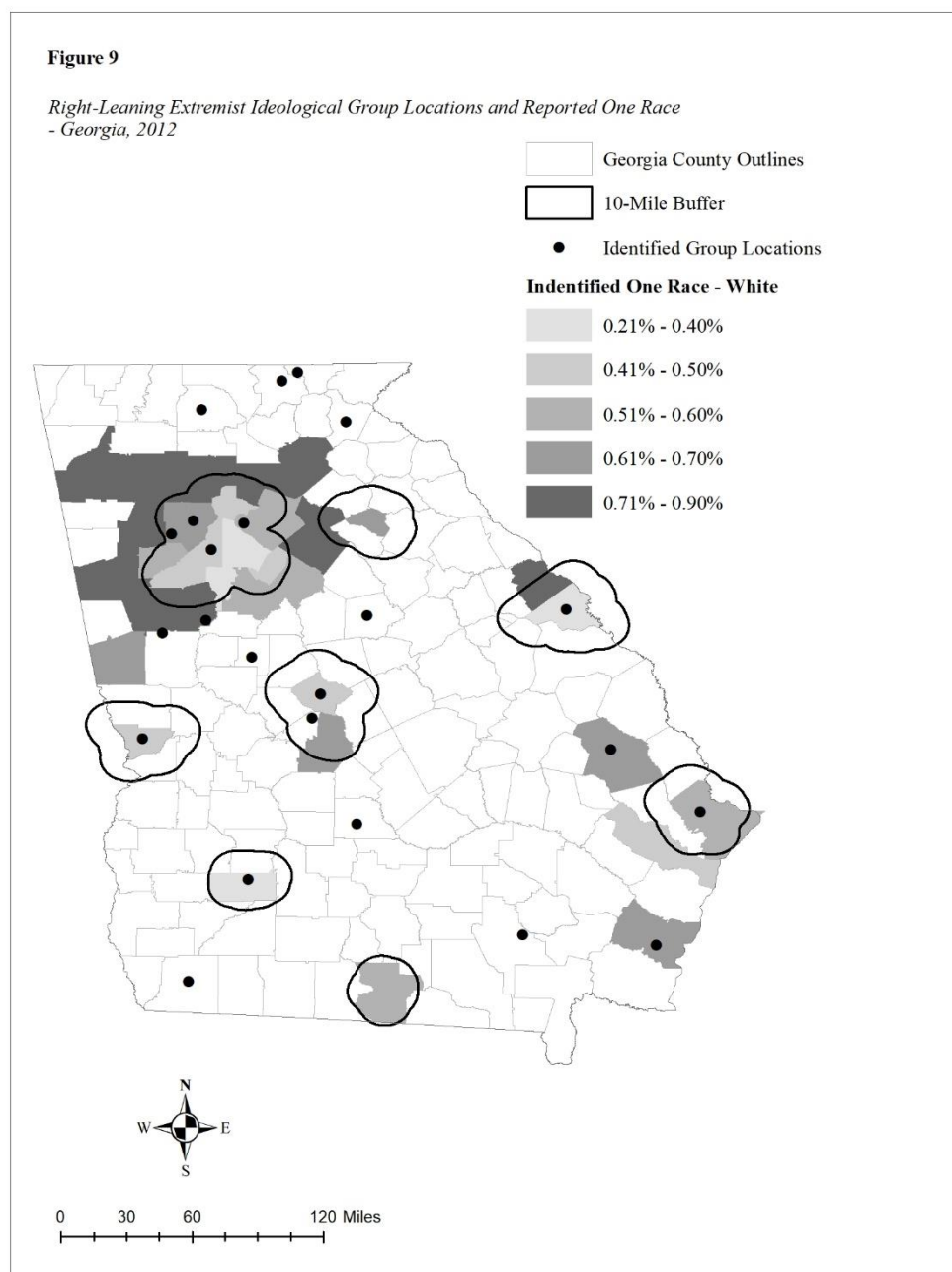


FIGURE 10: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Presidential Party Vote Majority - Georgia, 2012

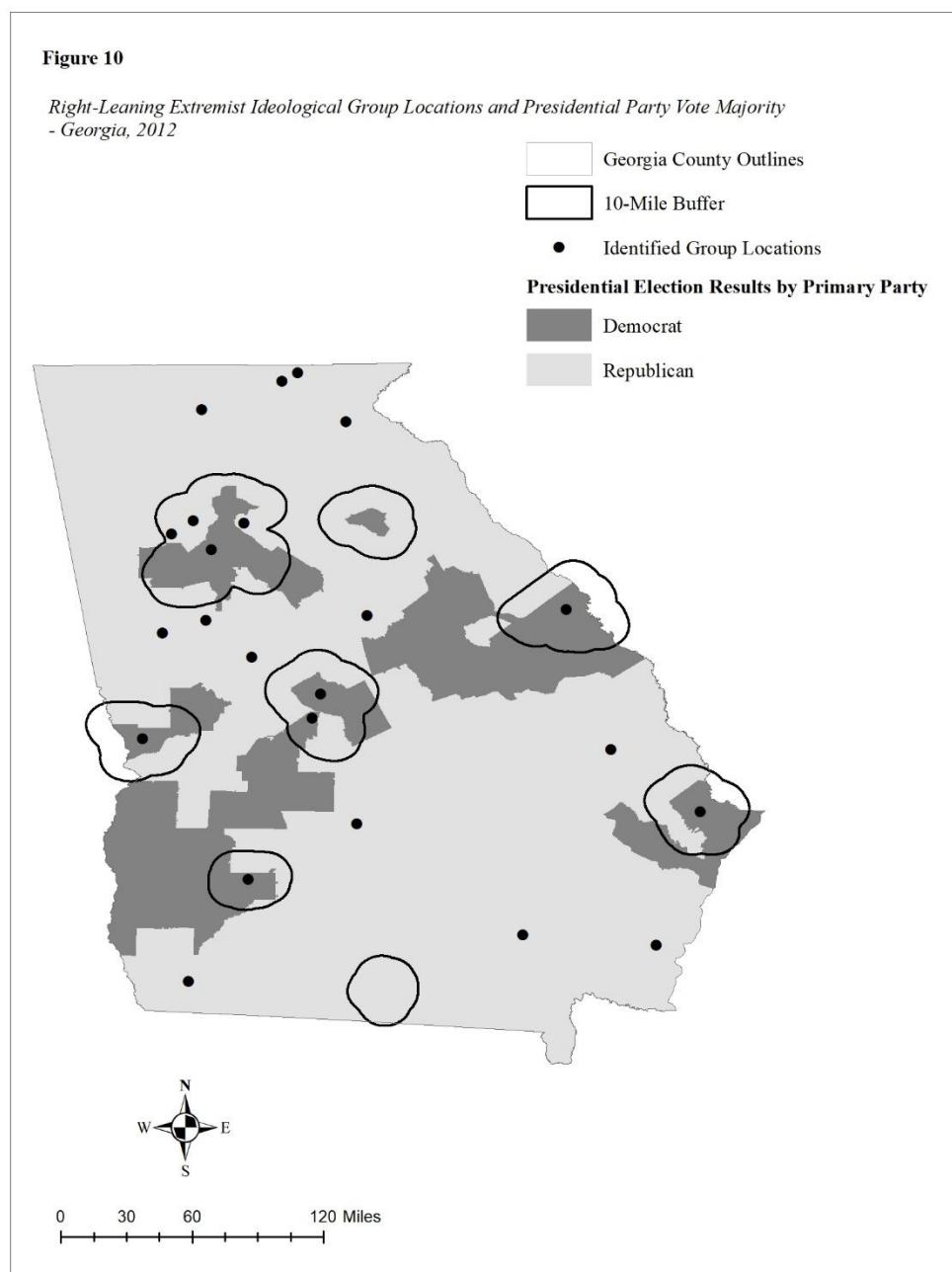


FIGURE 11: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Educational Attainment
- Georgia, 2016

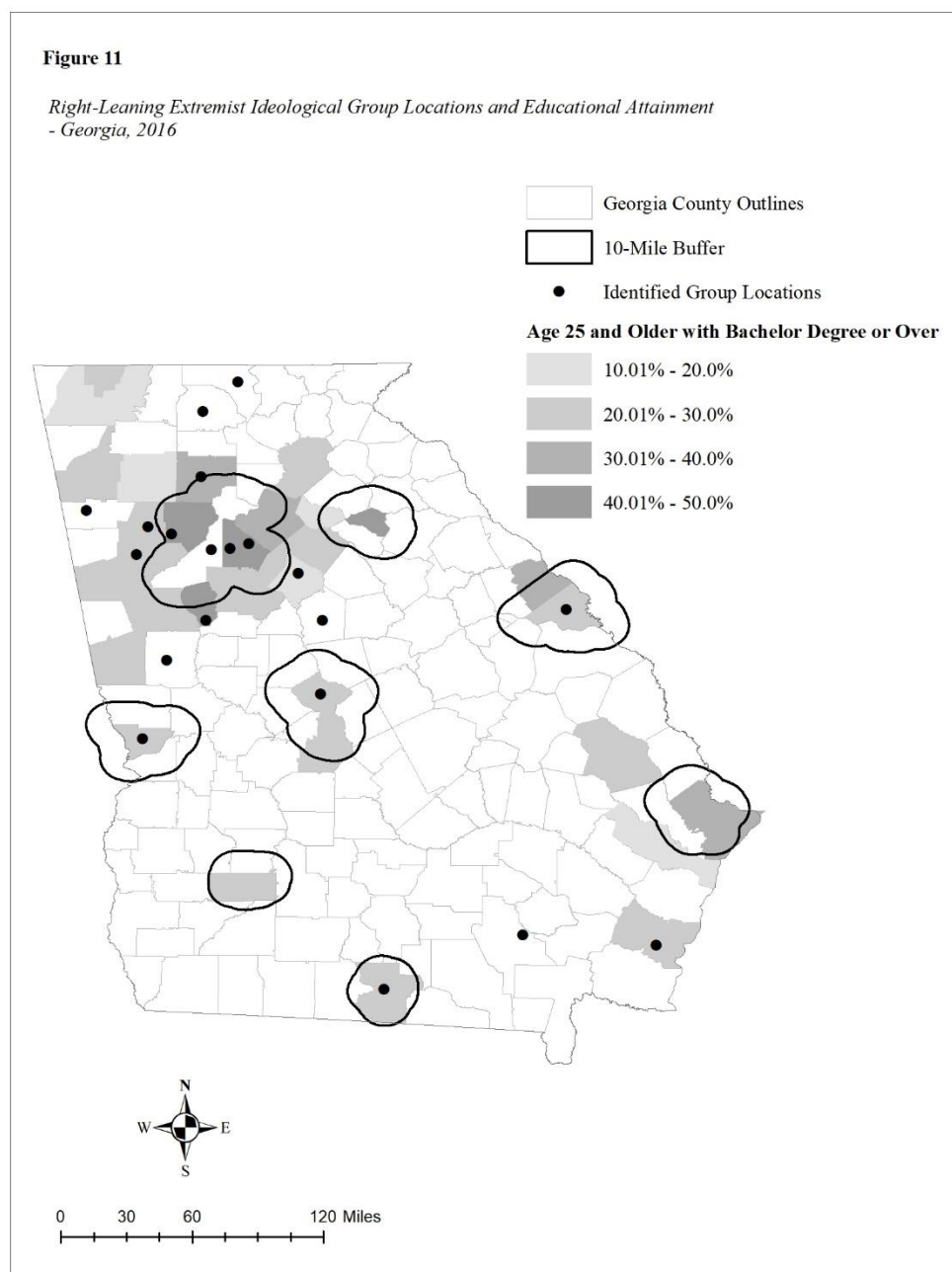


FIGURE 12: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Mean Income - Georgia, 2016

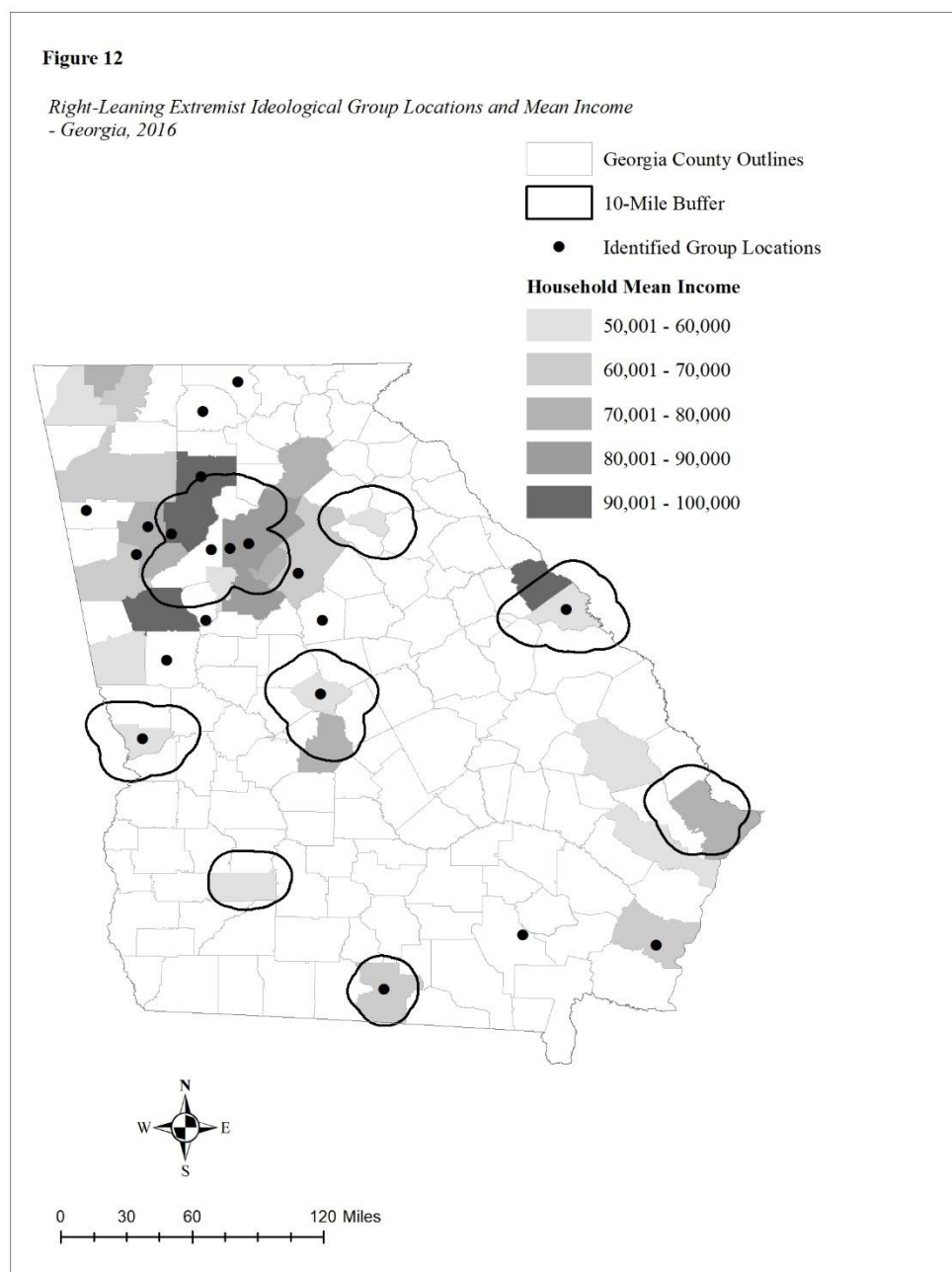


FIGURE 13: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Reported One Race - Georgia, 2016

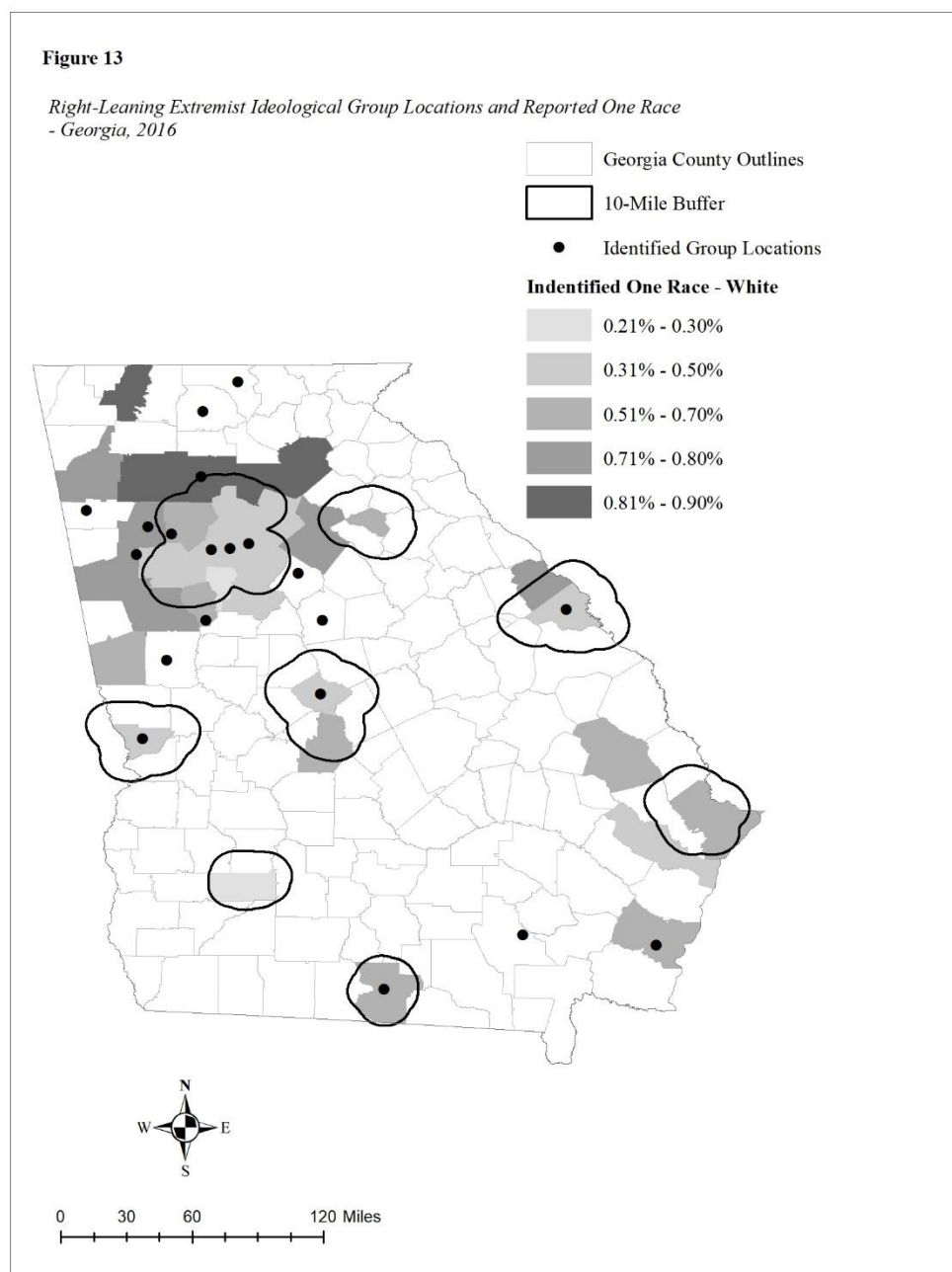


FIGURE 14: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Presidential Party Vote Majority - Georgia, 2016

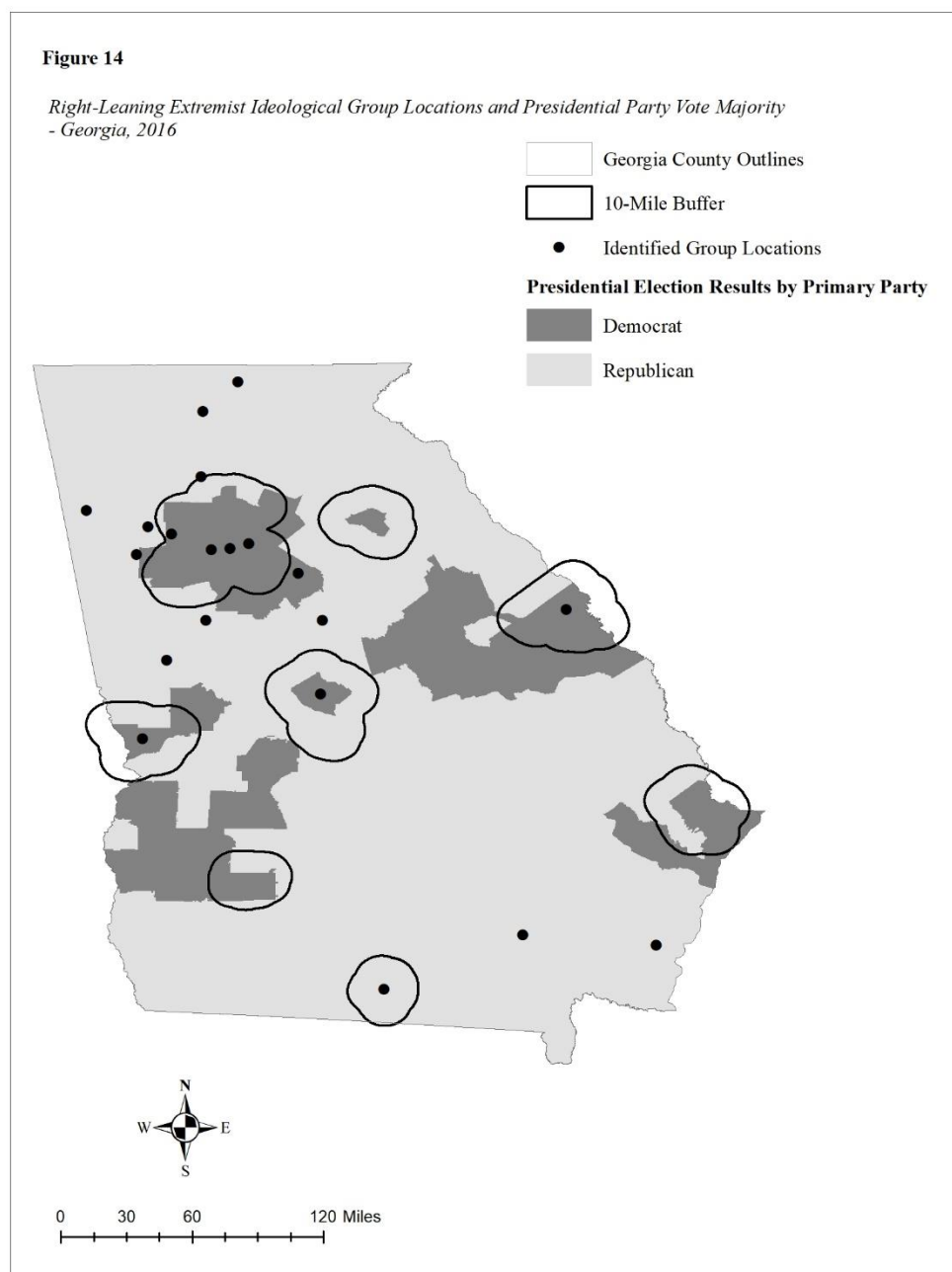


FIGURE 15: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Educational Attainment
- Georgia, 2019

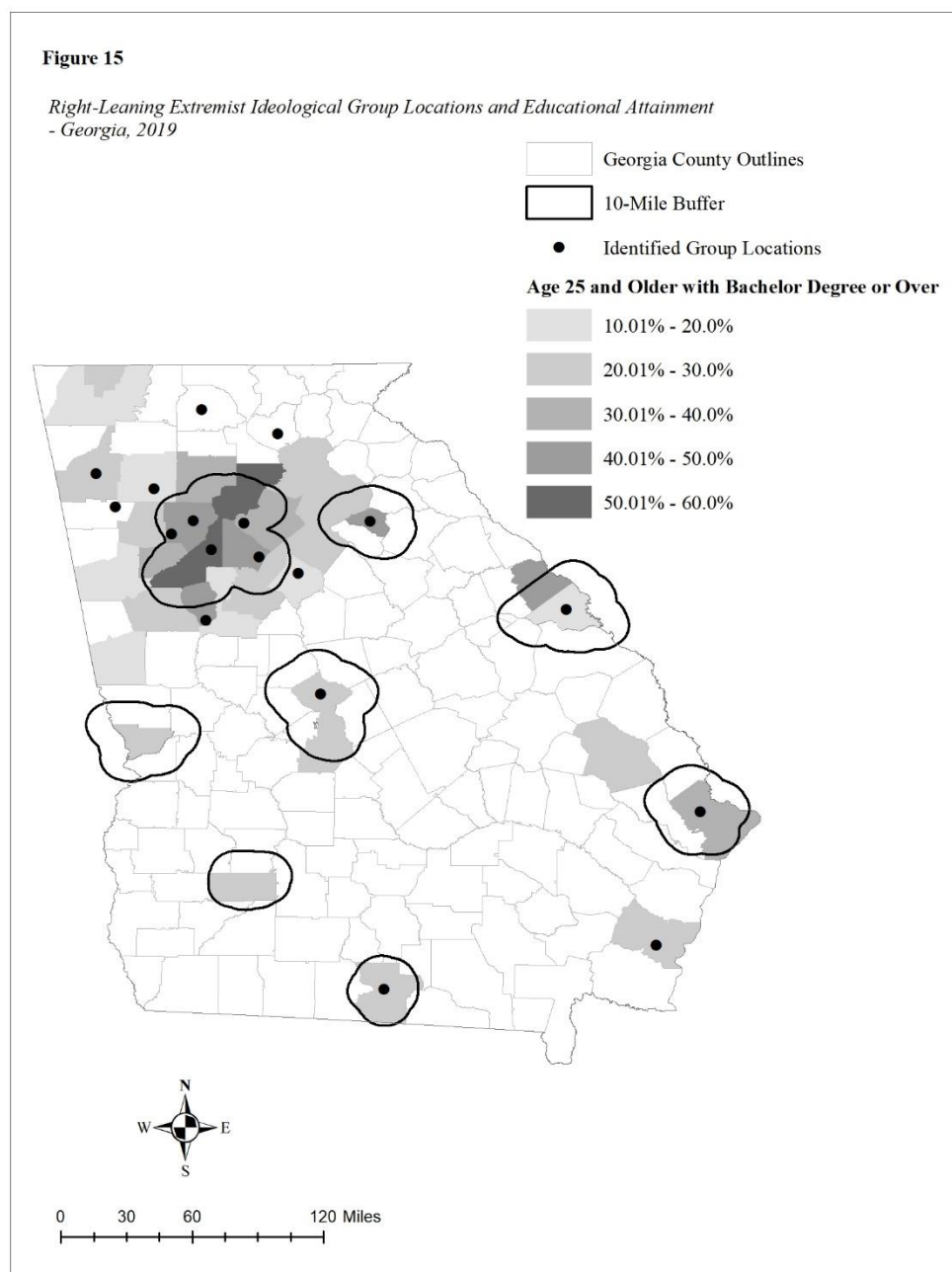


FIGURE 16: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Mean Income - Georgia, 2019

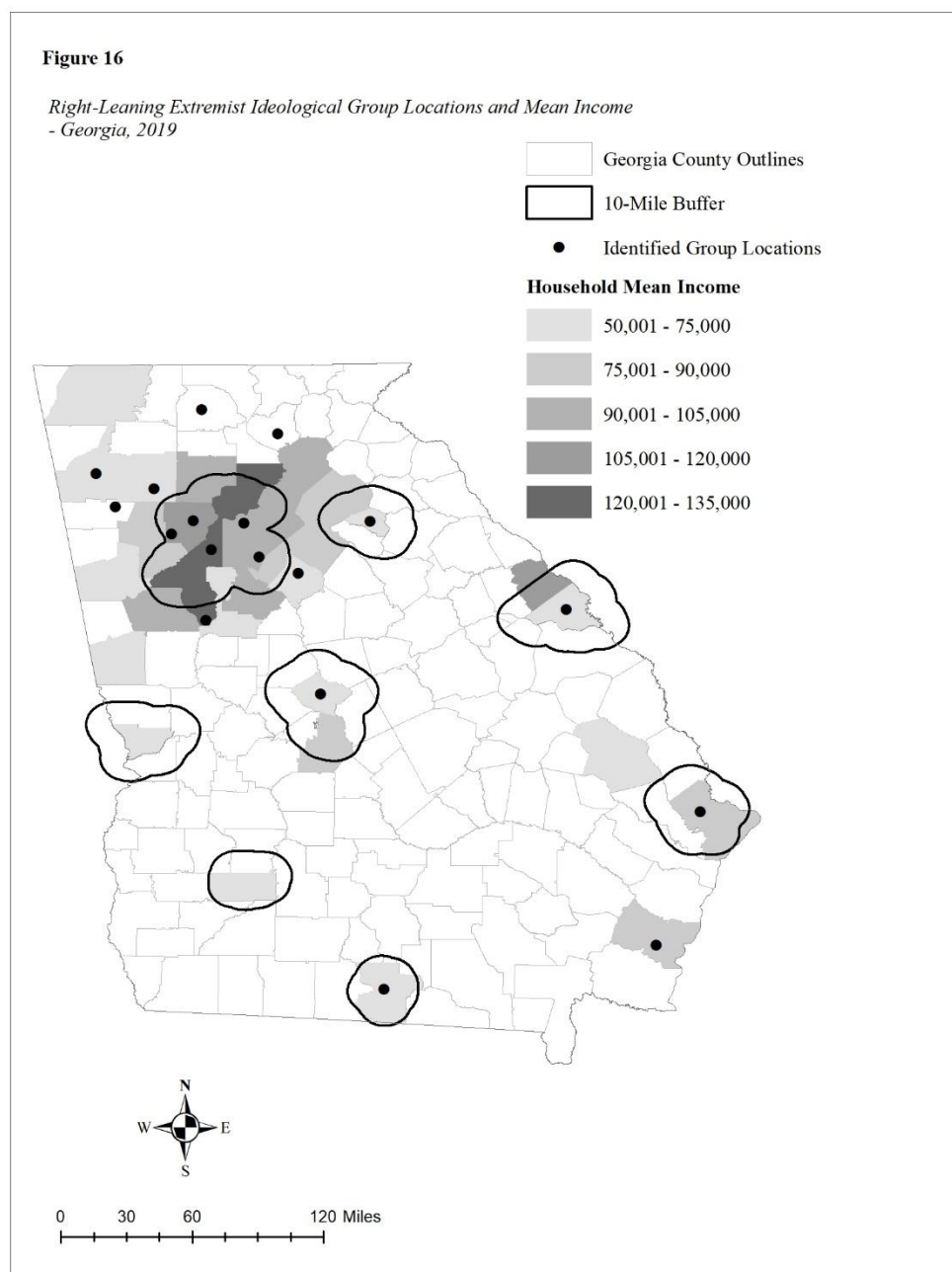


FIGURE 17: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Reported One Race - Georgia, 2019

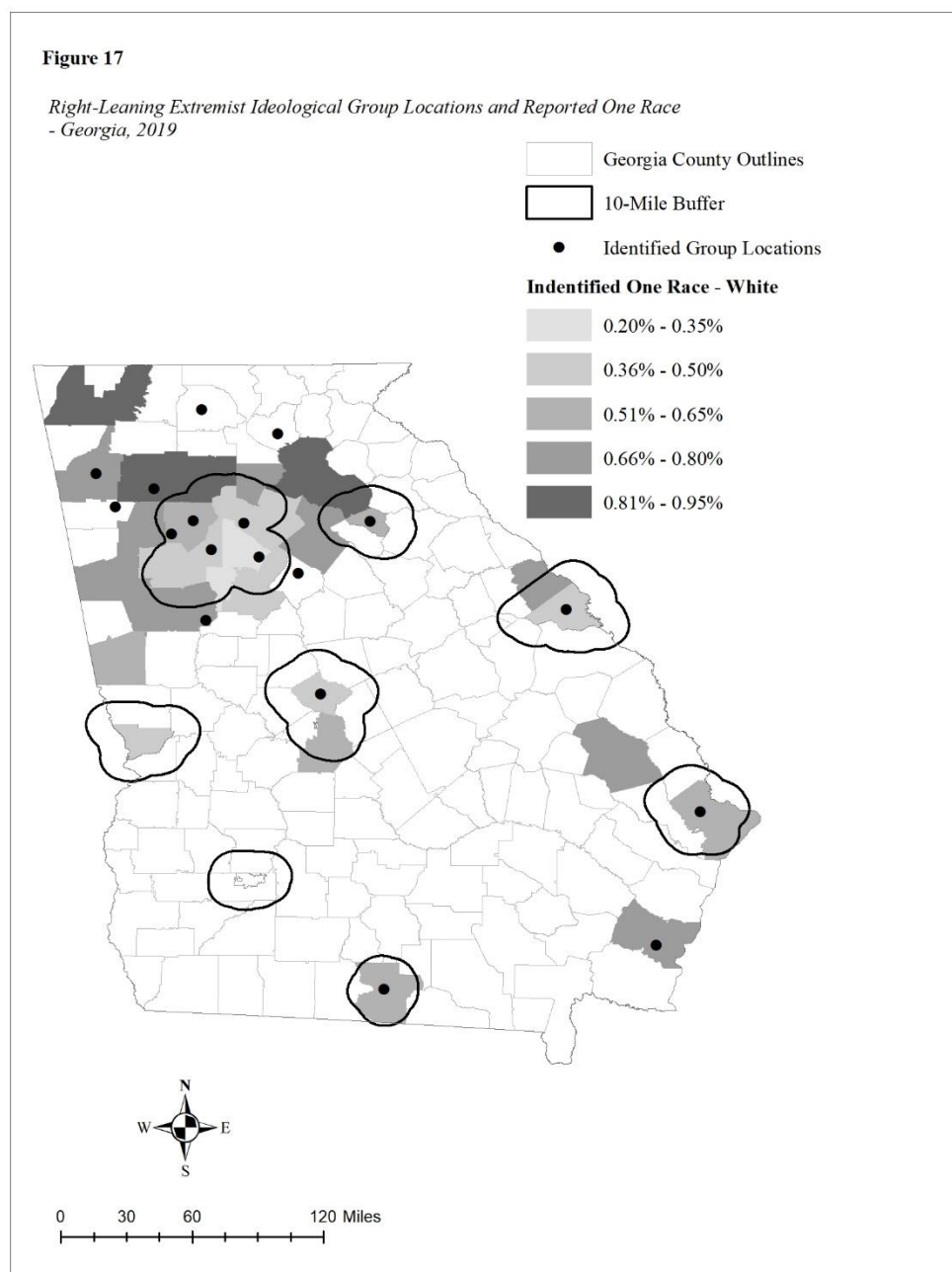


FIGURE 18: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Presidential Party Vote Majority (2020 Election) - Georgia, 2019

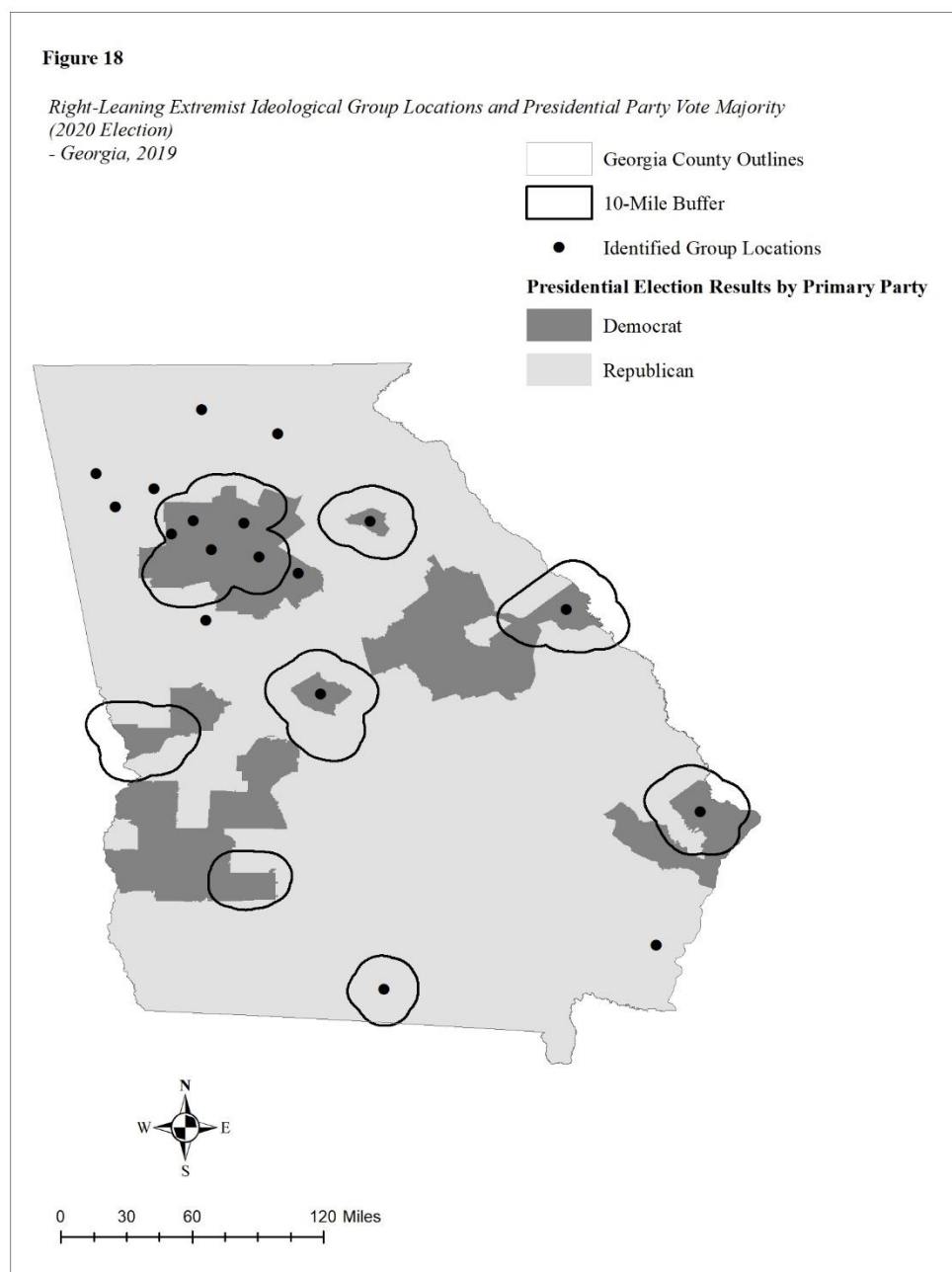


FIGURE 19: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Educational Attainment
- California, 2012

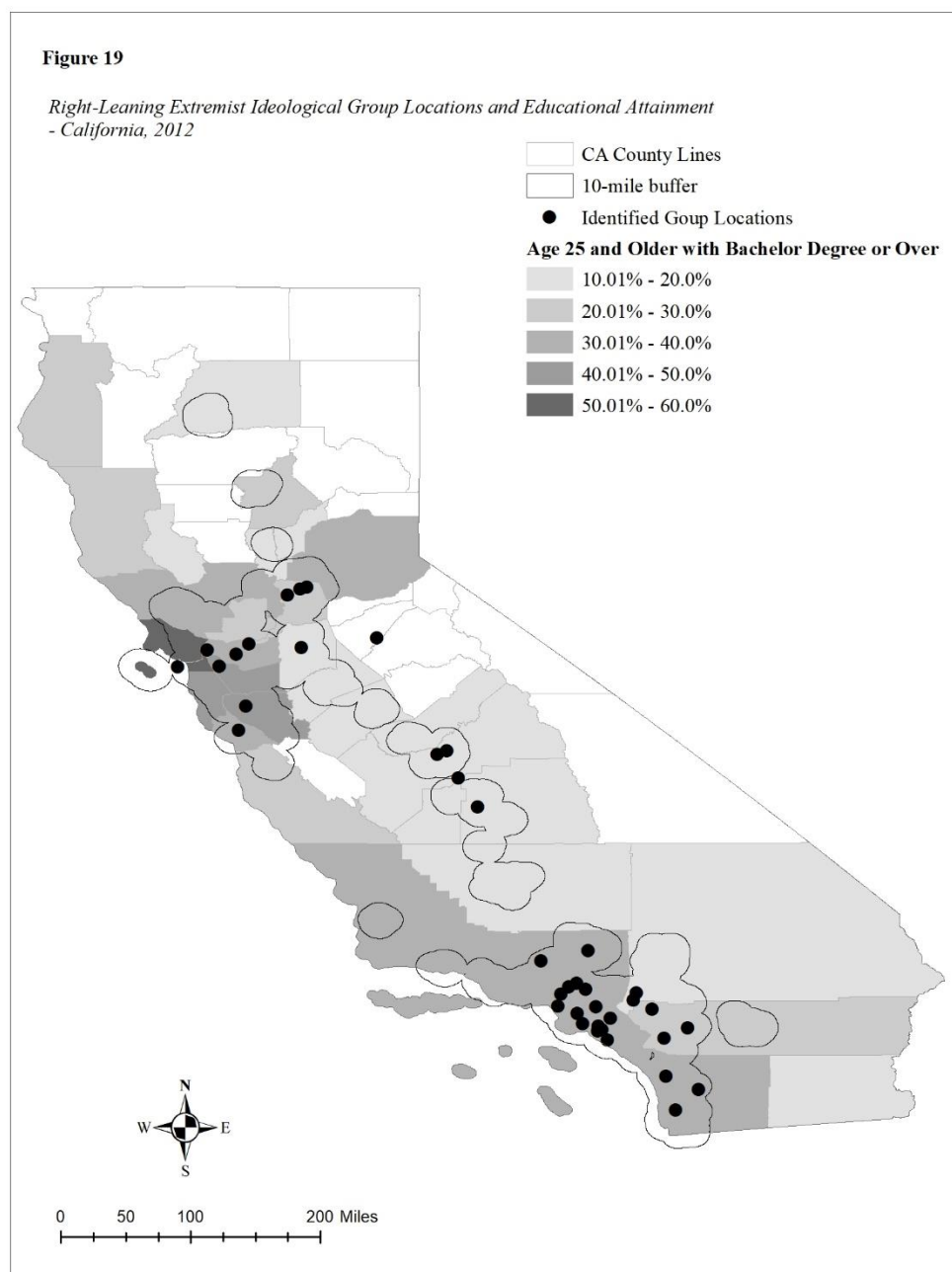


FIGURE 20: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Mean Income - California, 2012

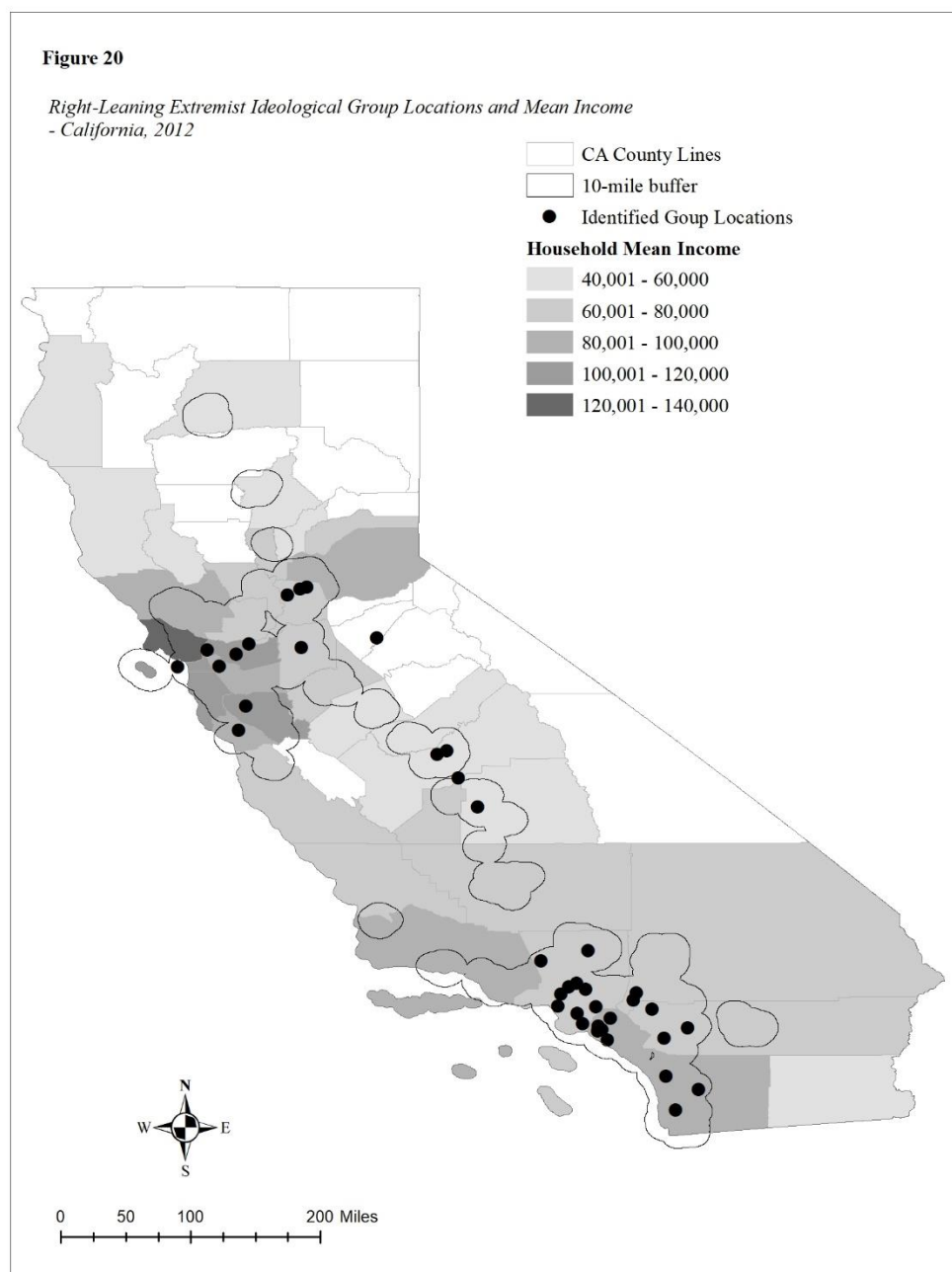


FIGURE 21: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Reported One Race - California, 2012

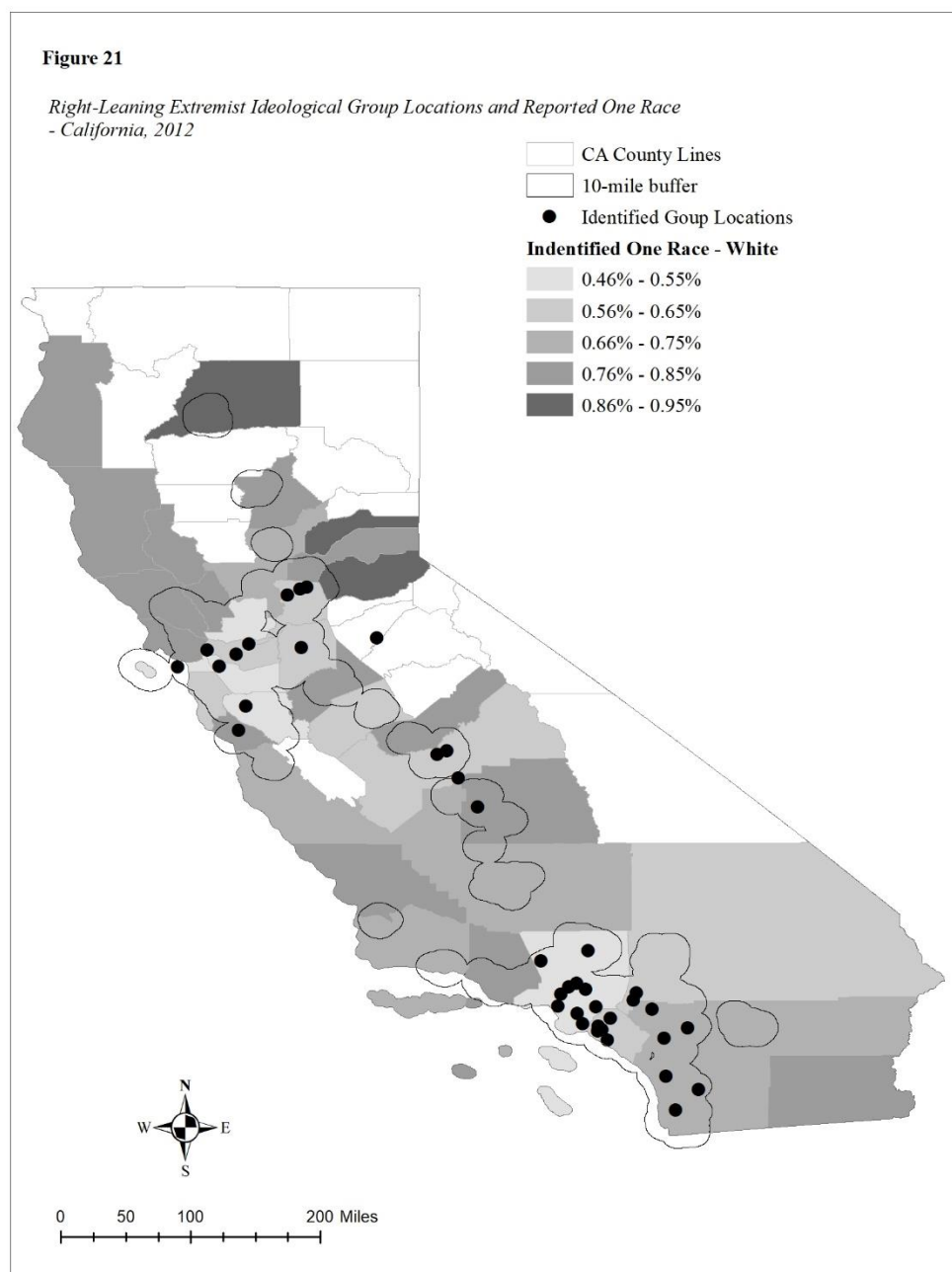


FIGURE 22: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Presidential Party Vote Majority - California, 2012

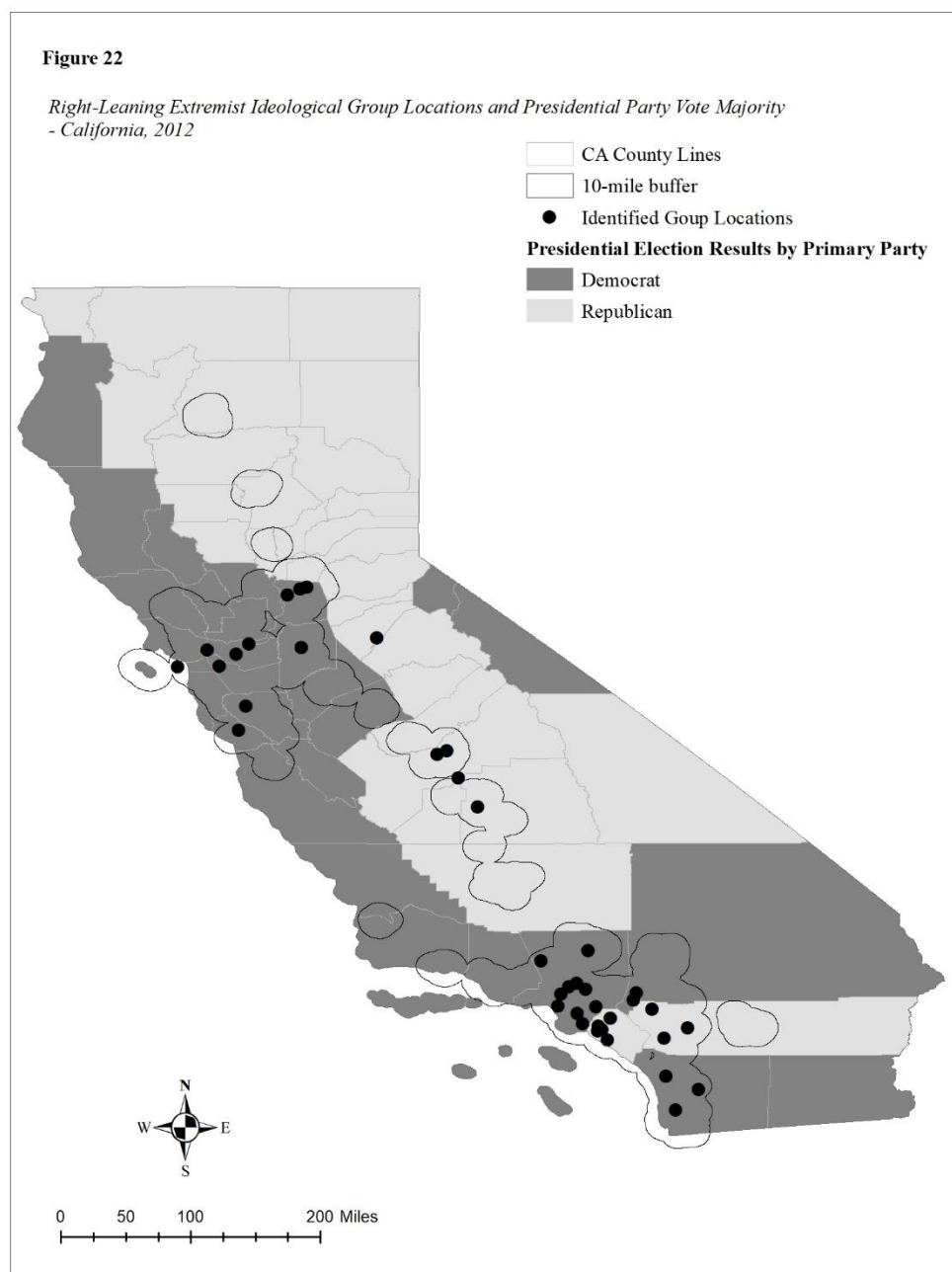


FIGURE 23: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Educational Attainment
- California, 2016

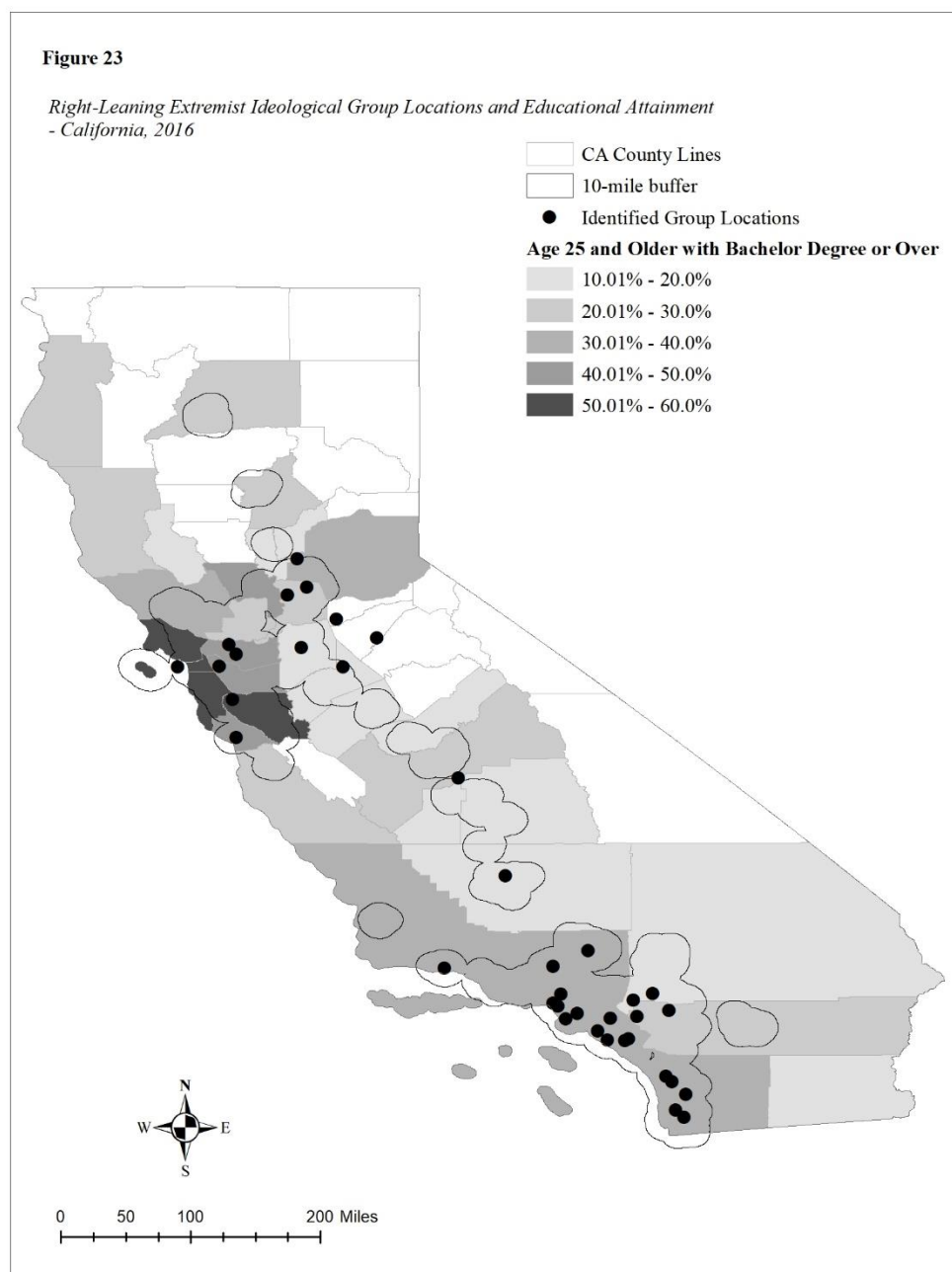


FIGURE 24: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Mean Income - California, 2016

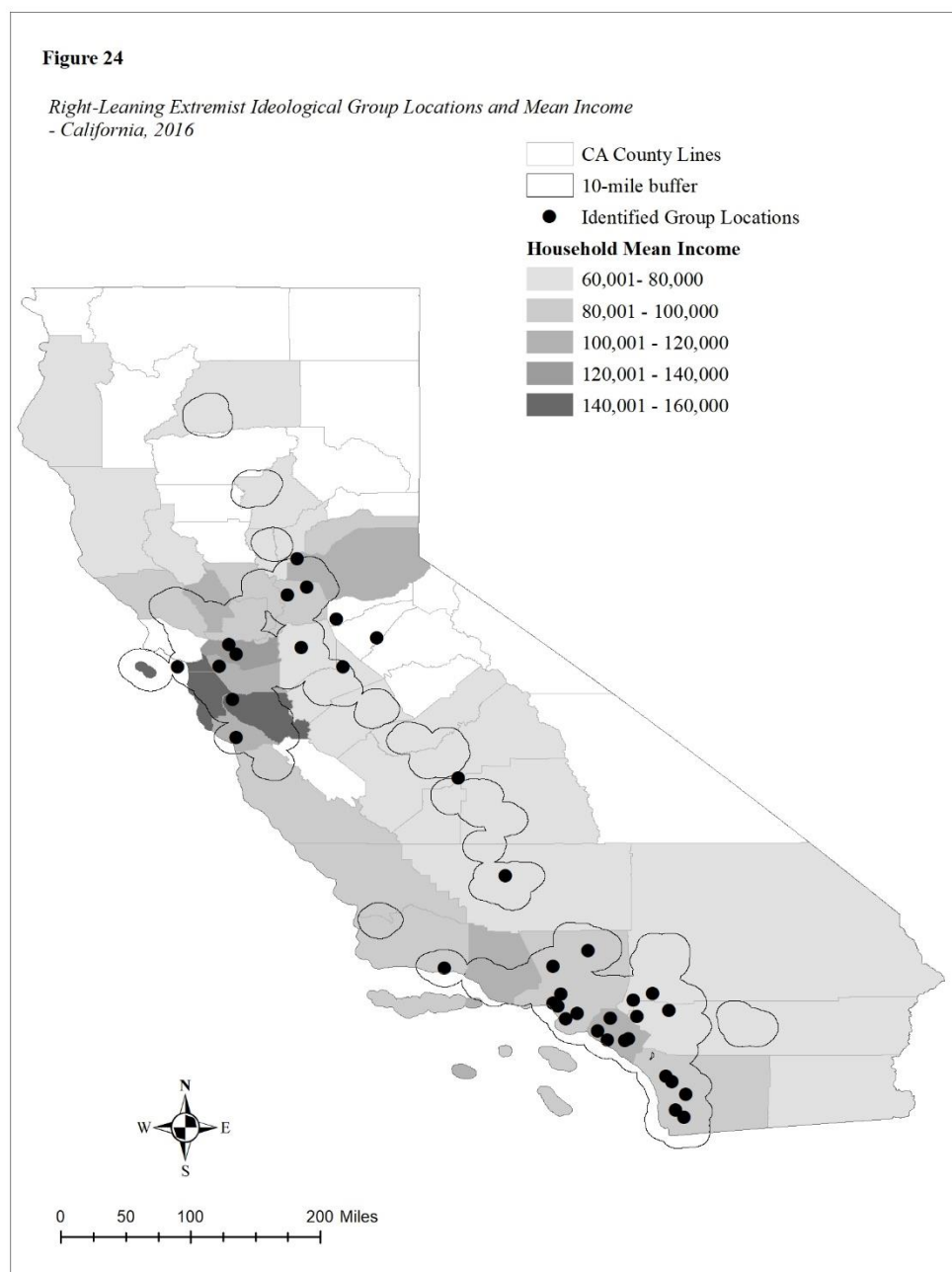


FIGURE 25: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Reported One Race - California, 2016

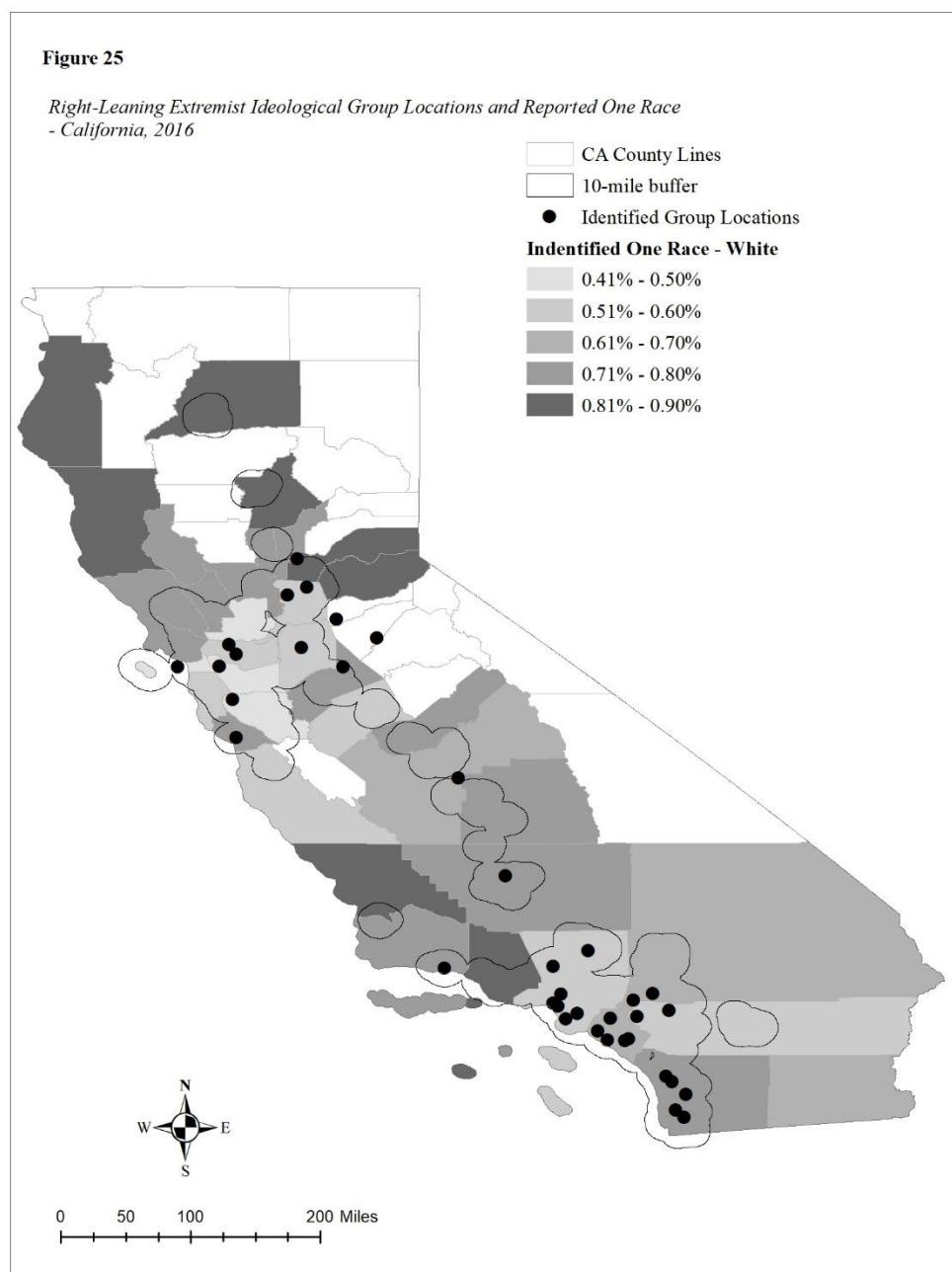


FIGURE 26: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Presidential Party Vote Majority - California, 2016

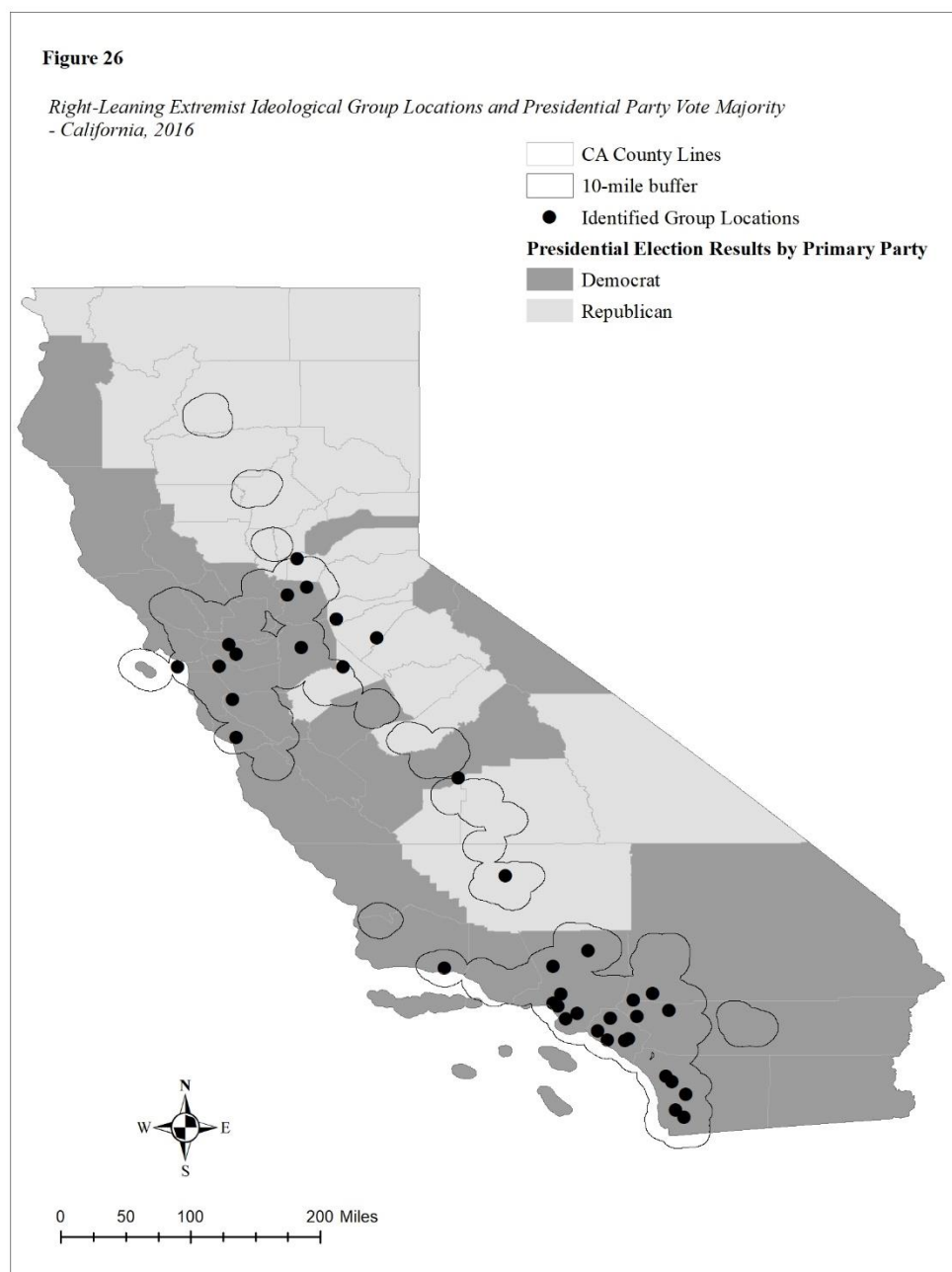


FIGURE 27: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Educational Attainment
- California, 2019

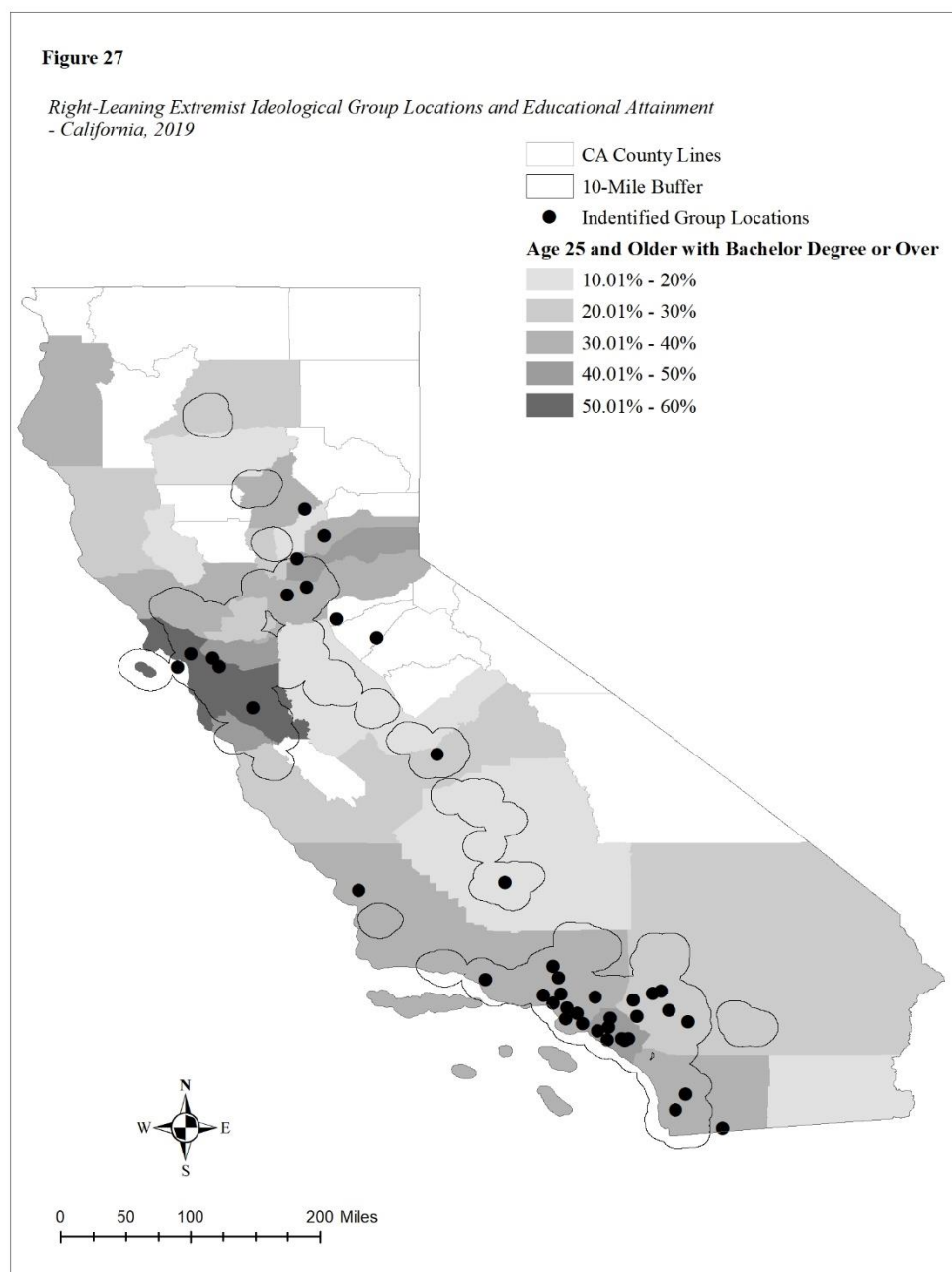


FIGURE 28: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Mean Income - California, 2019

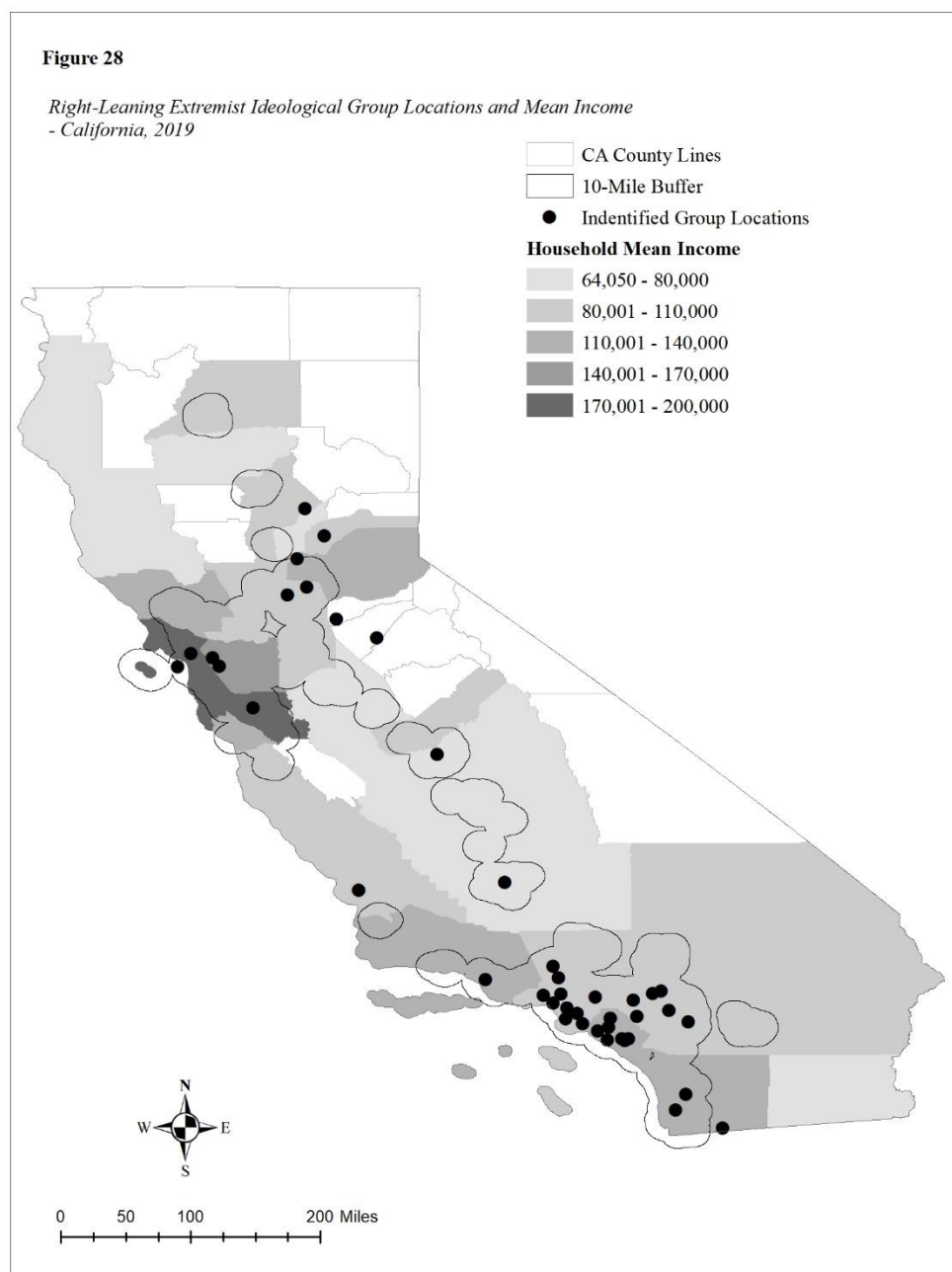


FIGURE 29: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Reported One Race - California, 2019

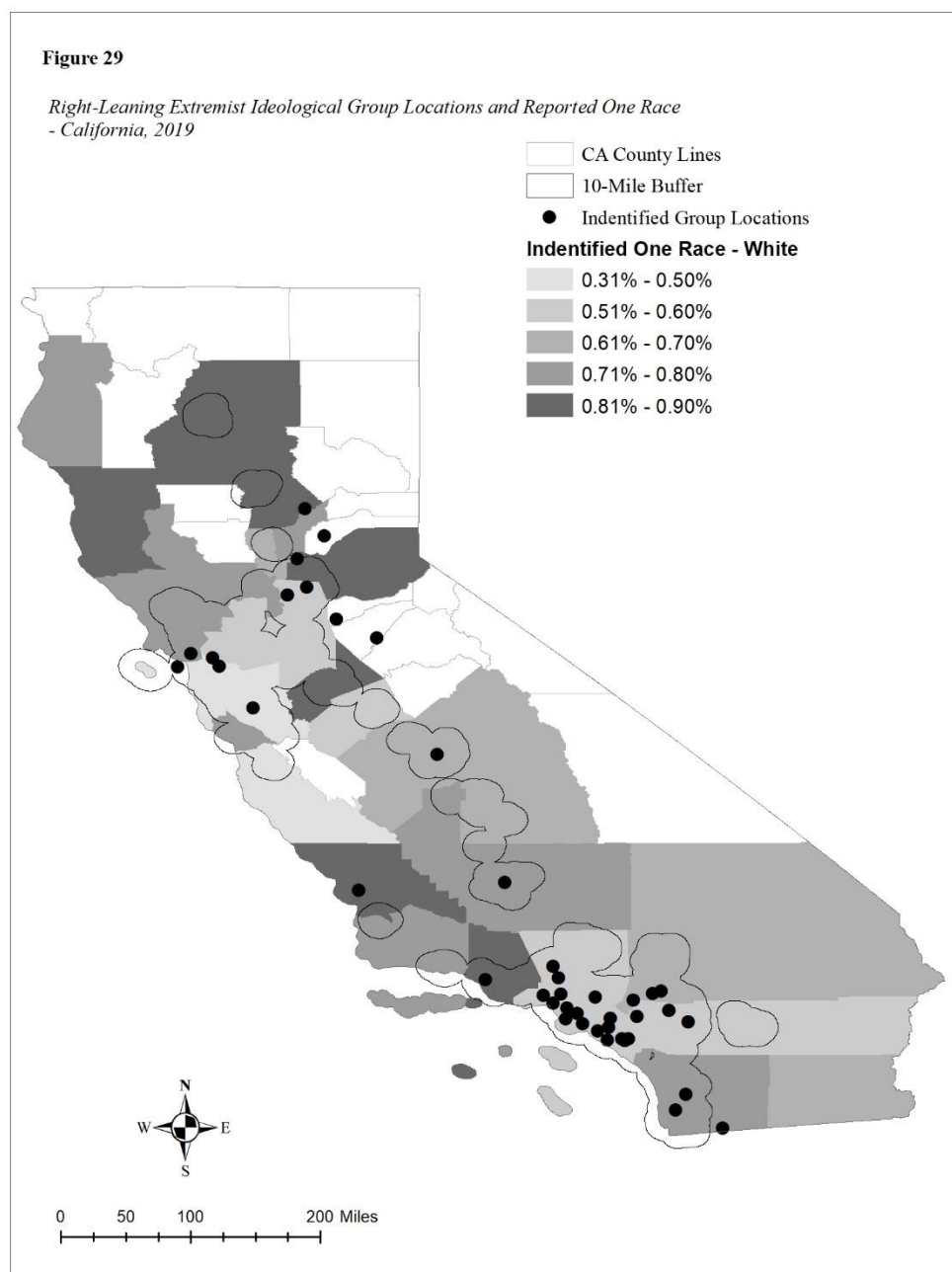


FIGURE 30: Right-Leaning Extremist Ideological Group Locations and Presidential Party Vote Majority (2020 Election) - California, 2019

