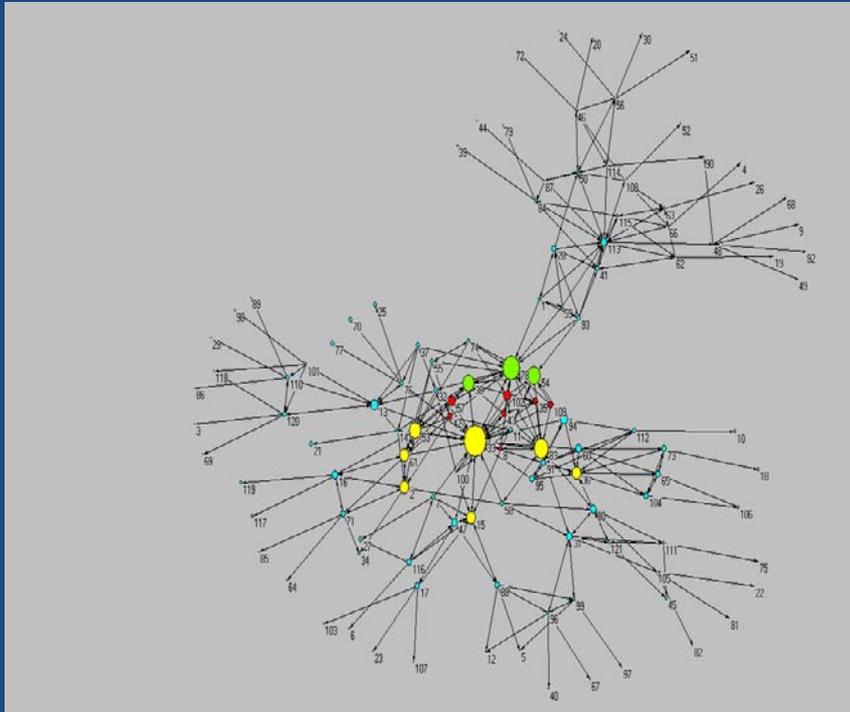


# Assessing Structures and Links Among Violent American White Supremacist Through the Lens of Network Analysis

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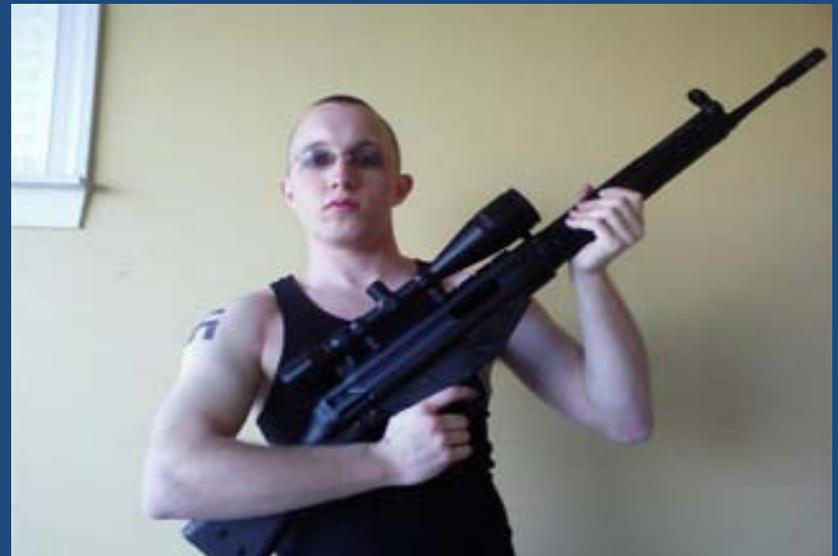


# The Threat of the Extreme Right

- within the United States domestic terrorism attacks outnumber international attacks by a ratio of 7:1 (LaFree, Dugan, Fogg & Scott, 2006)
- Significant far right presence in most states (Simone, Freilich & Chermak)
- Far- right extremists claimed more than 250 lives between 1978 and 2000 (Hewitt, 2003)
- extremist far-right is responsible for over 4,000 criminal incidents involving approximately 4,600 offenders, 250 homicides, 100 homicide attempts (Freilich and Chermak, 2007)

“In the 10 years since the April 19, 1995, bombing in Oklahoma City, in fact, the radical right has produced some 60 terrorist plots.”

*(Blejwas, Griggs & Potok, 2005)*



# Literature Review

## Research by Criminologists

- *focus on characteristics of the individual*

- > domestic terrorists engage in different types of preparatory crimes than international terrorists (Hamm, 2005; Smith & Morgan, 1994)
- > during the 1980s, right wing terrorists were white, male, poor, possessed a high school education or less, lived in rural environment, and were more likely than associated with Christian Identity (Smith and Morgan, 1994)
- > religion plays important role in strengthening one's racial identity (Dobratz, 2001)

## Research by Psychologists

- *focuses on the mind* (micro-level analysis)

- > Inconsistent Findings - some studies found terrorists suffer psychological disorder (i.e. antisocial personality), others found no such evidence.

# Literature Review

## Research by Sociologists

- *focus on societal factors* (macro-level analysis)
  - > terrorism is a result of oppression and exploitation (Turk, 2004)
  - > terrorism is linked to relative deprivation (Margolin, 1977)
  - > terrorism is a social construction employed, for self-serving purposes, by the powerful (i.e. state) against the weak (i.e. sub-state group). (Turk, 2004)

## Religiously Focused Research

- *examines the role of religion* in causing, motivating, and facilitating terrorism
  - > religion used as tool to enable terrorists to achieve political objective (Sosis and Alcorta, 2007)
  - > religion helps frame the conflict, justify actions, offers divine rewards, and fosters greater commitment to the group (Juergensmeyer, 2003)

# Literature Review

## *Application of SNA to the Study of International Terrorism*

- many, if not most, of the links amongst the 9/11 hijackers centered around those in possession of a valuable skill, such as the ability to fly a plane (Krebs, 2001)
- study of Madrid bombers revealed that network thrived on ties between those who trusted each other based on participation in the same endeavors (Rodriguez, 2004)
- recruitment into global jihadist networks occurs via pre-existing social bonds, thus social bonds exist before radicalization (Sageman, 2004)
- suicide bombers primarily recruited from surrounding community using social ties. Although activist network maintained ties with the leadership of groups in whose name they were ostensibly operating, they self-managed and operated independently (Pedahzur & Perliger, 2006)
- new groups of European born Islamic Jihadists generally have only marginal ties to structured terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda which they consider merely a source of inspiration (Vidino, 2007)

# Why Use Social Network Analysis?

- SNA combines relational network data with non-relational attributes (micro and macro level).
- SNA assumes that individuals are interdependent rather than independent autonomous units. An actor's behavior and choices are impacted by family and peers. Thus, researcher must also consider relationships.
- the general hypothesis of SNA is that people who are similar (similar beliefs, interests, etc.) will connect, and interact more often, thus allowing for the development of a common attitude or identity

# Literature Review

*Application of SNA to the Study of Domestic Extremist Organizations*

Has never been done.



# The Study

## Purpose:

The purpose of this exploratory study is to map the networks of white supremacist groups and the individuals associated with those groups that have demonstrated a willingness to commit extreme violence in furtherance of their ideology. The networks will be drawn from direct and affiliation links between individuals, between individuals and groups, and between groups.

## Objective

To better understand domestic extremists (groups and individuals) that have demonstrated a willingness to engage in extreme ideologically motivated violence and ascertain what types of networks or links suggest a greater threat potential.

# The Study – Cont'd

## Methodology

the study will employ Social Network Analysis to map the various networks of twenty-five white supremacist groups and the seventy-five individuals associated with those groups that have engaged in acts of ideologically motivated homicide.

### *Single Mode Networks*

- **Group - Group** : ways in which groups are linked (i.e. co-attendance at events, leadership friendly, weblinks, shared ideology, etc.)
- **Individual – Individual**: ways in which individuals who have committed ideological homicide are linked (i.e. co-commission of crime, family, friends, ideology, prior criminal history, past affiliations, etc.)

### *Two Mode Network*

- **Group – Suspect** : how groups are linked via offenders, and how offenders are linked via groups

# The Study - Continued

## Measurement

- node centrality – which group(s) or individual(s) most central to network (hubs)
- network centralization – is the network as a whole centralized
- density & degree of individual and group networks – cohesiveness of network
- k core and m slices– identifies tightly connected clusters/subgroups

## Data

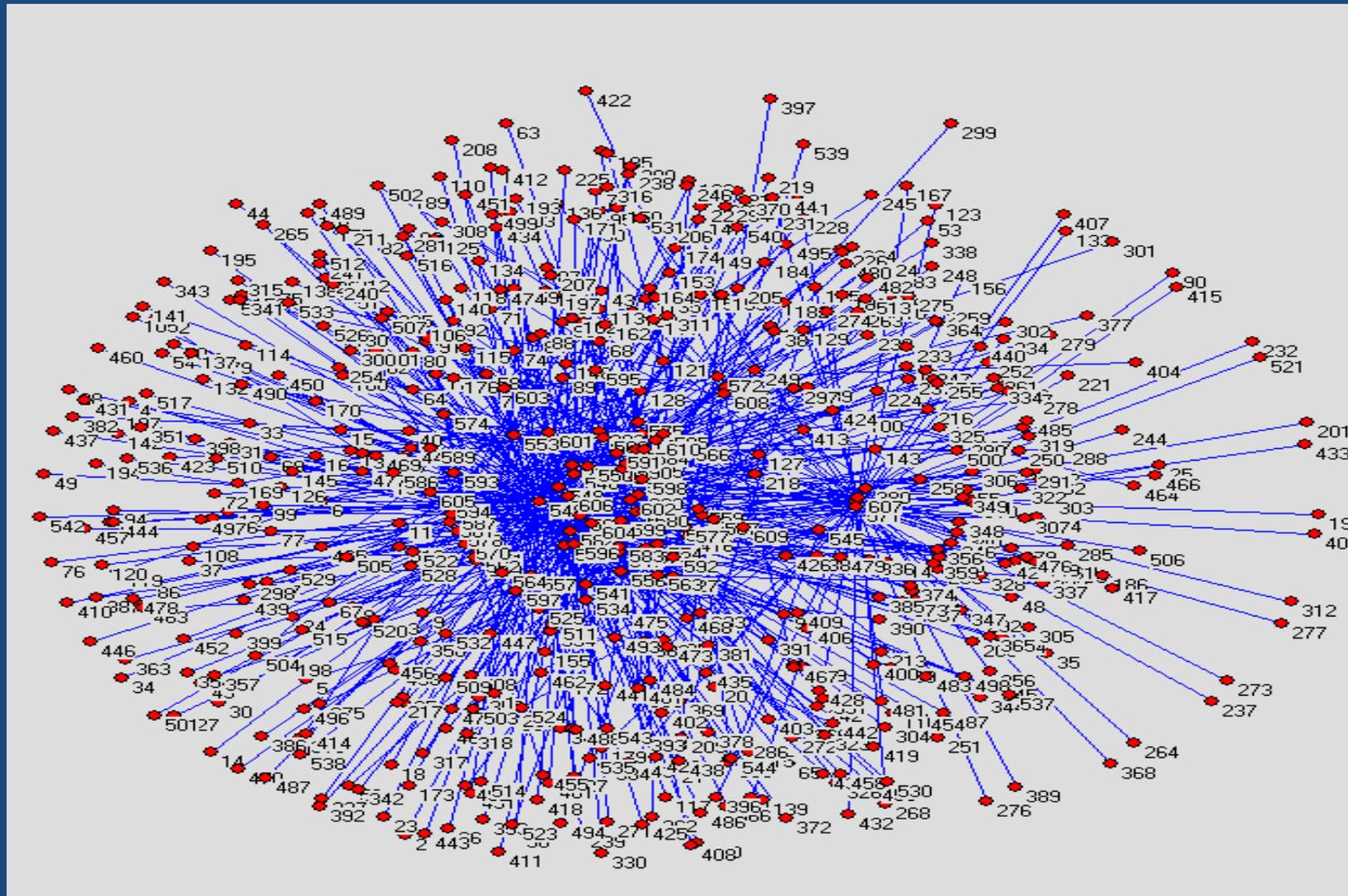
- U.S. Extremist Crime Database - Joshua Freilich & Steven Chermak
  - >includes all known crimes committed by domestic far-right from 1990 – present
  - > data culled from open source searches and scholarly accounts
- Data Specific to Study
  - >white supremacist groups and the individuals associated with those groups that committed murder in furtherance of their ideology between 1990 -2007
  - >data includes actors, groups, attributes of each (i.e. age, location, etc.) and the types of links connecting them

# Preliminary Findings – Data

- 275 homicide incidents committed by the extreme far right, which ultimately involve over 460 suspects/perpetrators.
- Over 120 of the homicide incidents were ideologically motivated.
- Approximately 45 formal white supremacist groups are linked to the hundreds of white supremacist suspects in the current database (many suspects do not belong to a formal group)
- Of the 43 formal white supremacist groups identified, 25 (58%) are linked to an ideologically motivated homicide.
- Connected to these 25 groups are 75 suspects/perpetrators that participated in a homicidal act in furtherance of the white supremacist ideology.

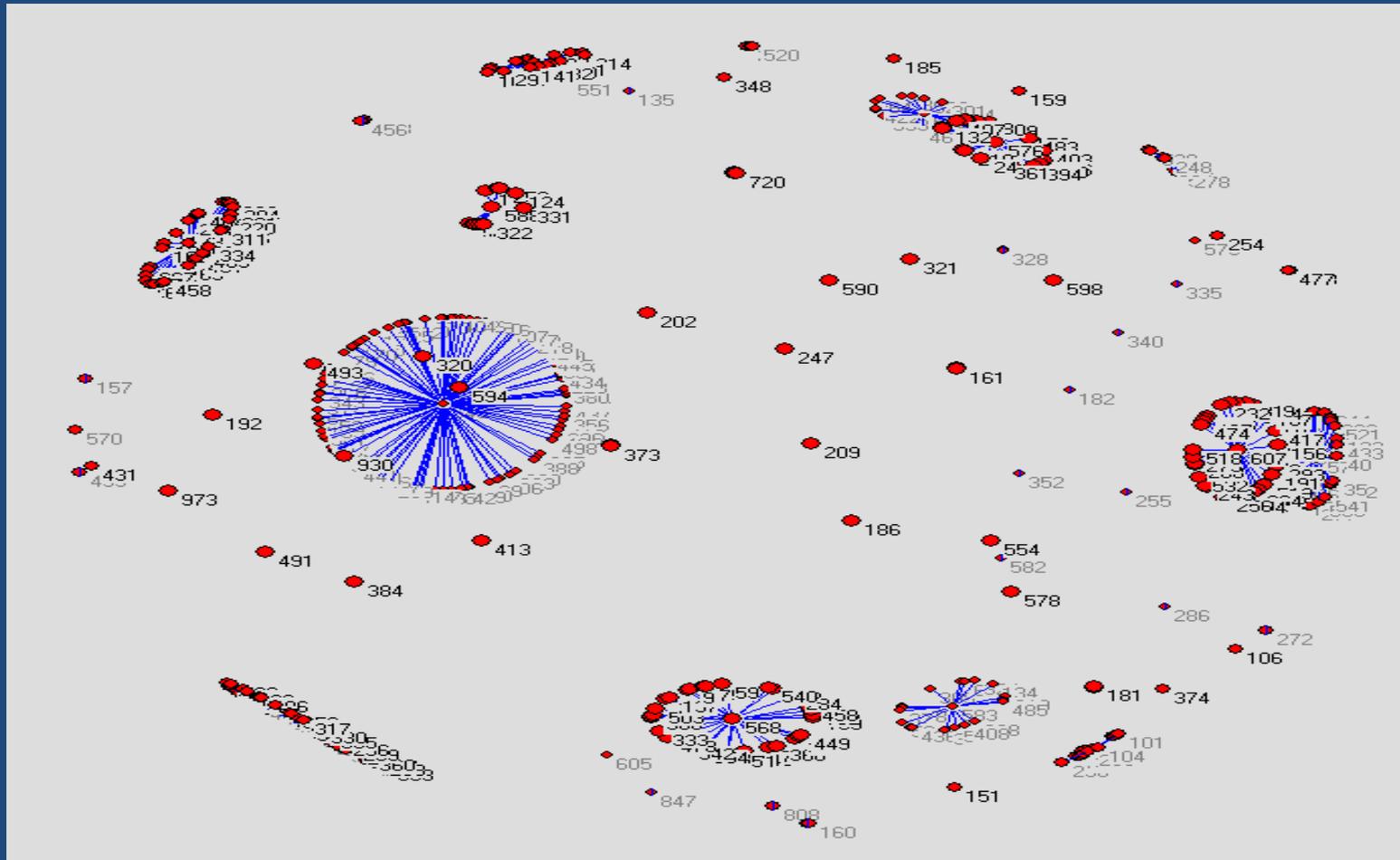
# Preliminary Findings

All Suspects and Groups – Suspects linked to groups only



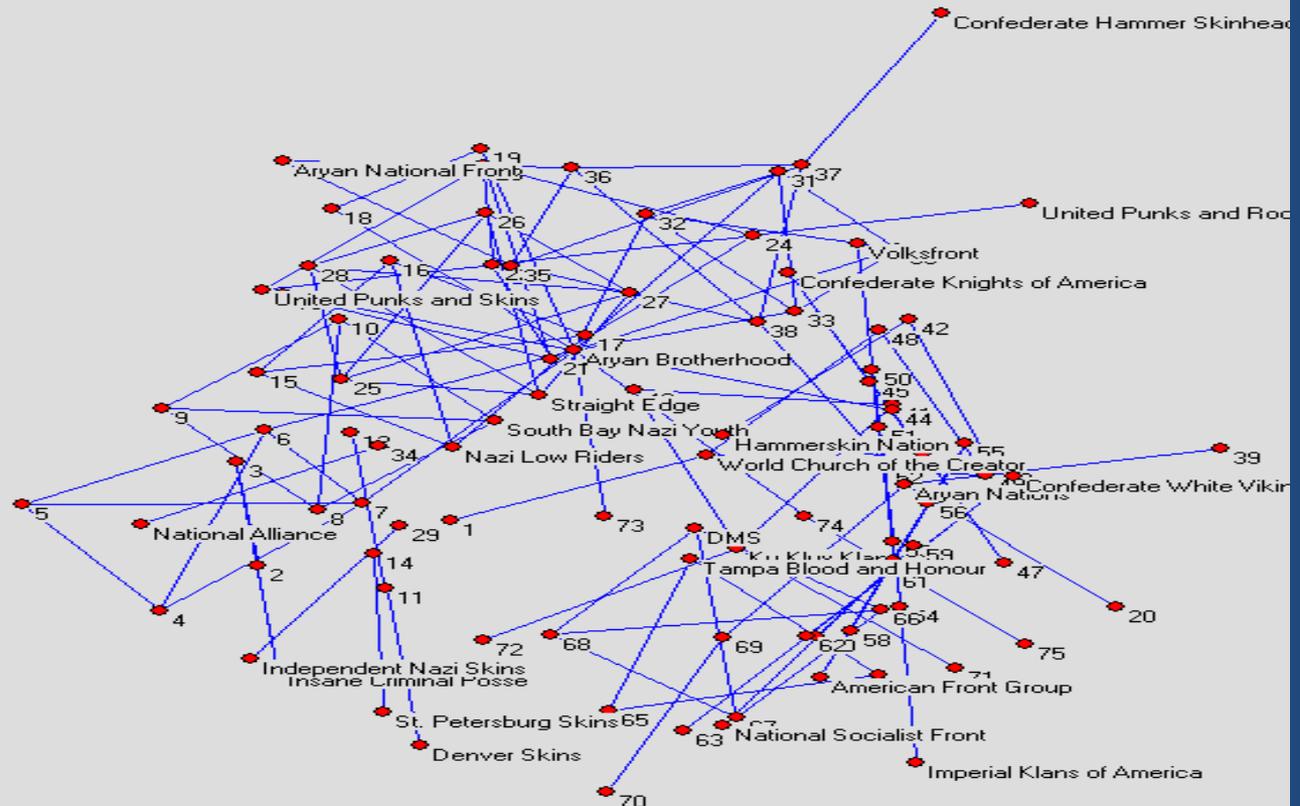
# Preliminary Findings

## Another View



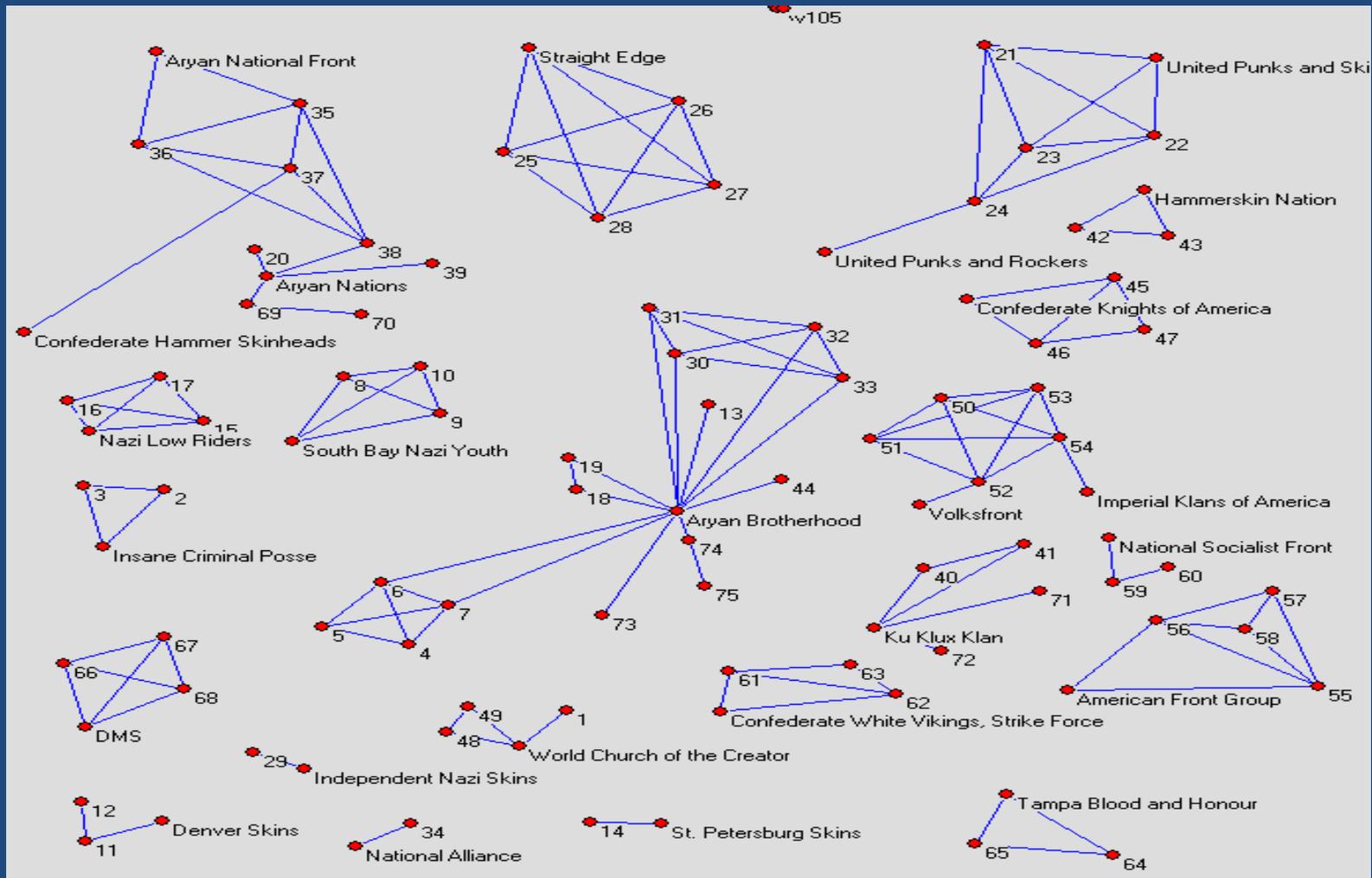
# Preliminary Findings

Network of WS Groups and Individuals Who Committed Ideologically Motivated Murder – Linked by Incident



# Preliminary Findings

## Another View



# Expected Findings

1. The WSM is not a cohesive movement but is rather a network comprised of cohesive cliques which are centered around various ideologies (Christian Identity, National Socialism, Odinism, etc.)
2. Groups espousing extremist religious ideology will be most central to movement.
3. Groups that are most central to the movement will not be the most dangerous. Groups on the fringe will pose a greater threat.
4. Homicide incidents involving more than one offender will more typically involve some friends and family with no formal links to a group, as opposed to a network of individuals who are all formal members.
5. It will not be high ranking individuals within a white supremacist organization that make up the bulk of the network of ideologically violent offenders but low level members and their friends.
6. Age, education, criminal history, ideology, and family background will be most important links, thus indicative of the greatest threat.

# Anticipated Contributions of Study

## Academic Contributions

- only 3%-4% of terrorism research is empirical (Lum, Kennedy, & Sherley, 2006)
- first application of social network analysis to the study of domestic extremists

## Policy Contributions

- results of this study may help law enforcement address a possibly underestimated threat
  - >further understanding of potentially dangerous domestic extremist groups
  - >increased understanding of the structure of the violent white supremacist movement
  - >identification of the groups most central/important to the violent white supremacist movement
  - >understanding of common affiliations that represented a heightened risk of danger
  - >better understanding of groups and offenders allows for strategies to identify and disrupt networks of dangerous white supremacist extremists

# Future Directions

1. Expand study to include attempted homicides.
2. Expand study to include bombings and attempted bombings committed in furtherance of an ideology.
3. Expand the number of violent white supremacist groups to obtain more global picture of movement.
4. Will include non-violent white supremacist groups to see how they are connected to those groups capable of extreme violence.

THE END