STATE HATE CRIME LEGISLATION DATABASE

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01. INTRODUCTION

Hate crimes were first recognized by Congress in 1968, passing a broad statute that "[prohibits] violent interference with several enumerated rights" (DOJ, 2025). Since then, the focus of hate crime legislation has shifted to protecting the rights and identities of minority groups. Currently, hate crimes are defined as "criminal offense[s] against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or sex" (FBI, 2025). While there are federal laws meant to protect all vulnerable groups, state legislation can impose their own hate crime policies, leading to disparities. The legislation of each state differs in the number of groups they protect and how offenders are addressed. Current organizations like the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) have a database of the most recent hate crime laws for each state but contains inaccuracies and there are no clear databases that show the evolution of hate crime legislation.

Thus, our research project aims to analyze state hate crime legislation by examining its evolution over forty years, between 1984 to 2024. The goal of this project is to create a comprehensive database that illustrates the trends and patterns in state legislation; specifically, their inclusion of certain protected groups. We have collected and compiled data from each state's history to illustrate trends in legislation, including changes within hate crime policies in response to civil rights movements. Overall, this database will allow the public to easily access this information and raise awareness about the inconsistencies of state hate crime legislation protections.

02. METHODOLOGY

Throughout our project, we collected and analyzed information from two online databases: Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and Justia.

- By utilizing the ADL Hate Crime Map, we were able to successfully obtain the legal codes for each U.S. state. These codes allowed us to locate the hate crime laws for each state, within their respective legal statutes.
- After obtaining these legal codes, we employed Justia to collect any available data on a state's hate crime legislation, over the past forty years.
- We then compiled the data into Excel worksheets, allowing us to track any changes made in the wording of each state's hate crime laws. Additionally, we recorded the number of groups a state protects under their legislation each year.
- Once completed, we transferred the data into Stata, a statistical software program, to finalize the database and to analyze additions of new groups and patterns among each state's statutes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge Matthew Vanden Bosch for his guided expertise and endless support throughout the research process. Thank you.

03. RESULTS

Overall, our results demonstrate disparities in the amount of protection allocated to each group, under a state's hate crime legislation. We also tracked a general increase in the number of protected groups over the past 40 years.

- 46 out of the 50 states have legislation that protects at least one of the five groups: Race/Religion/Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, Disability, Gender, and Gender Identity.
- 19 states are fully inclusive in their legislation and protect all five groups.
- On the other hand, four states were completely non-inclusive and did not protect any of the five major groups: Arkansas, Indiana, South Carolina, and Wyoming.
- We also noticed that certain states included additional groups outside of the main five categories, such as nationality, ancestry, and age.
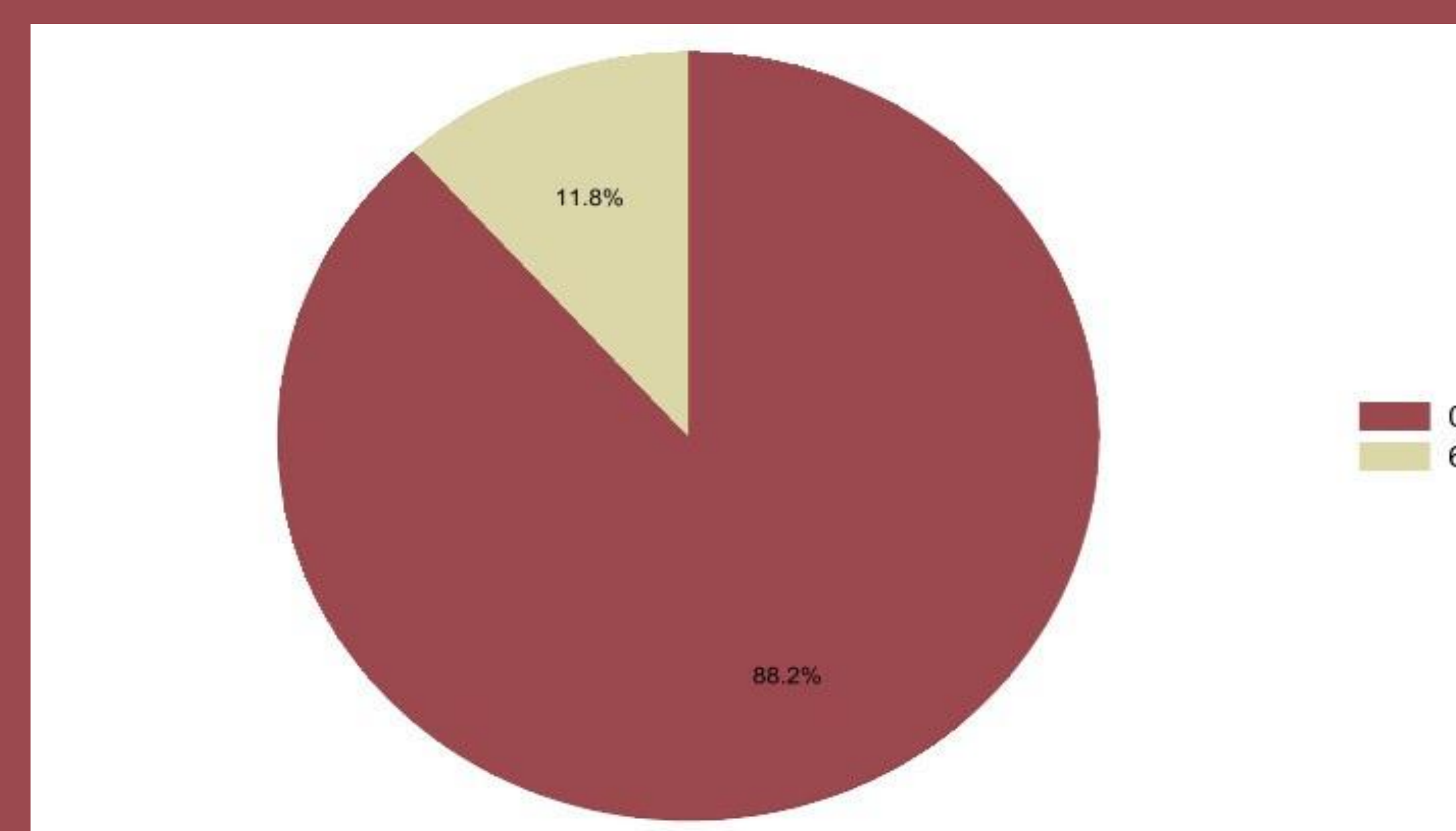

Figure 1. Pie Chart of 2000 State Hate Crime Protected Groups
This figure illustrates how many different groups were protected under each state's hate crime legislation in the year 2000.
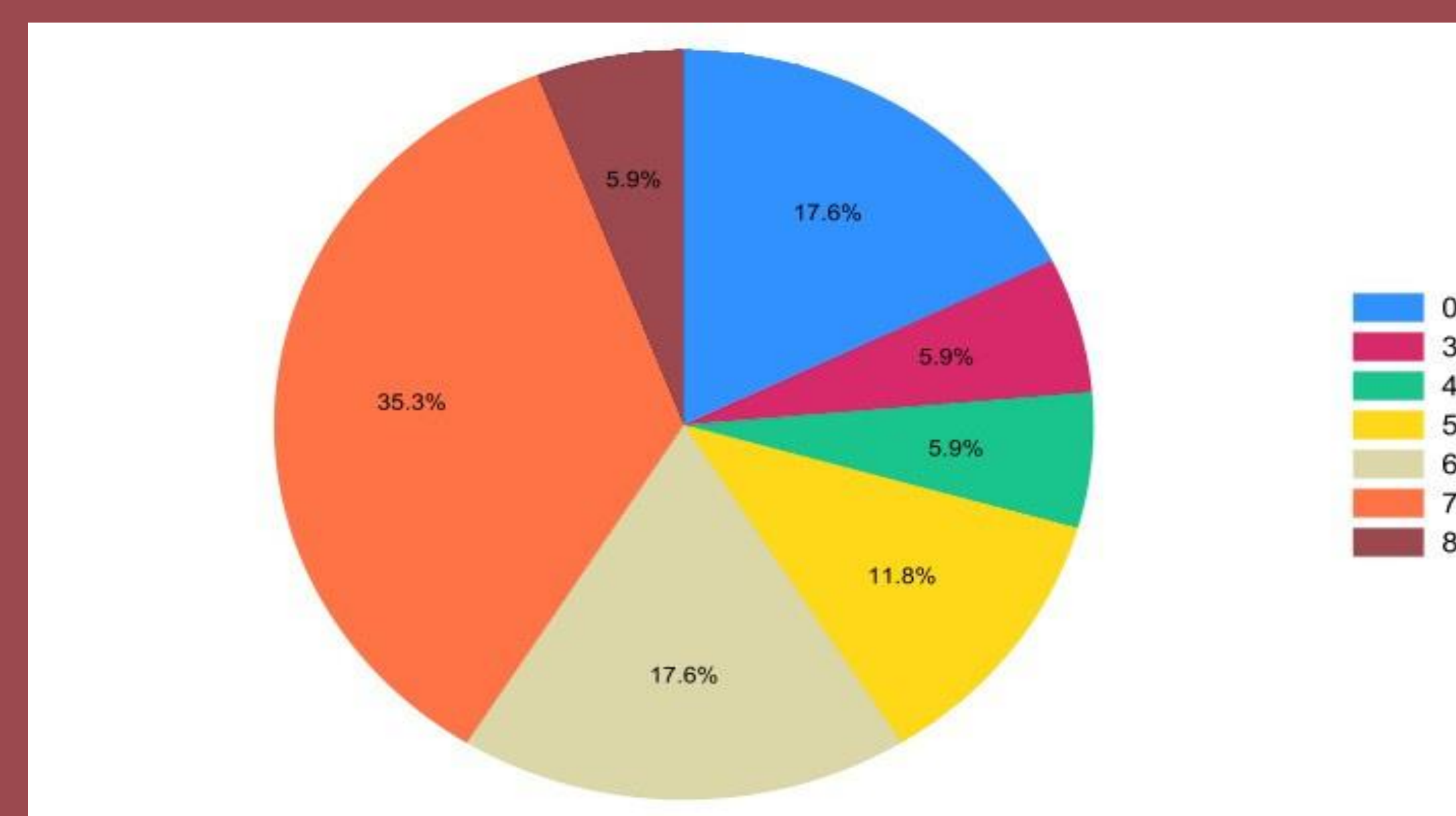

Figure 2: Pie Chart of 2020 State Hate Crime Protected Groups
This figure illustrates how many different groups were protected under each state's hate crime legislation in the year 2020.

REFERENCES

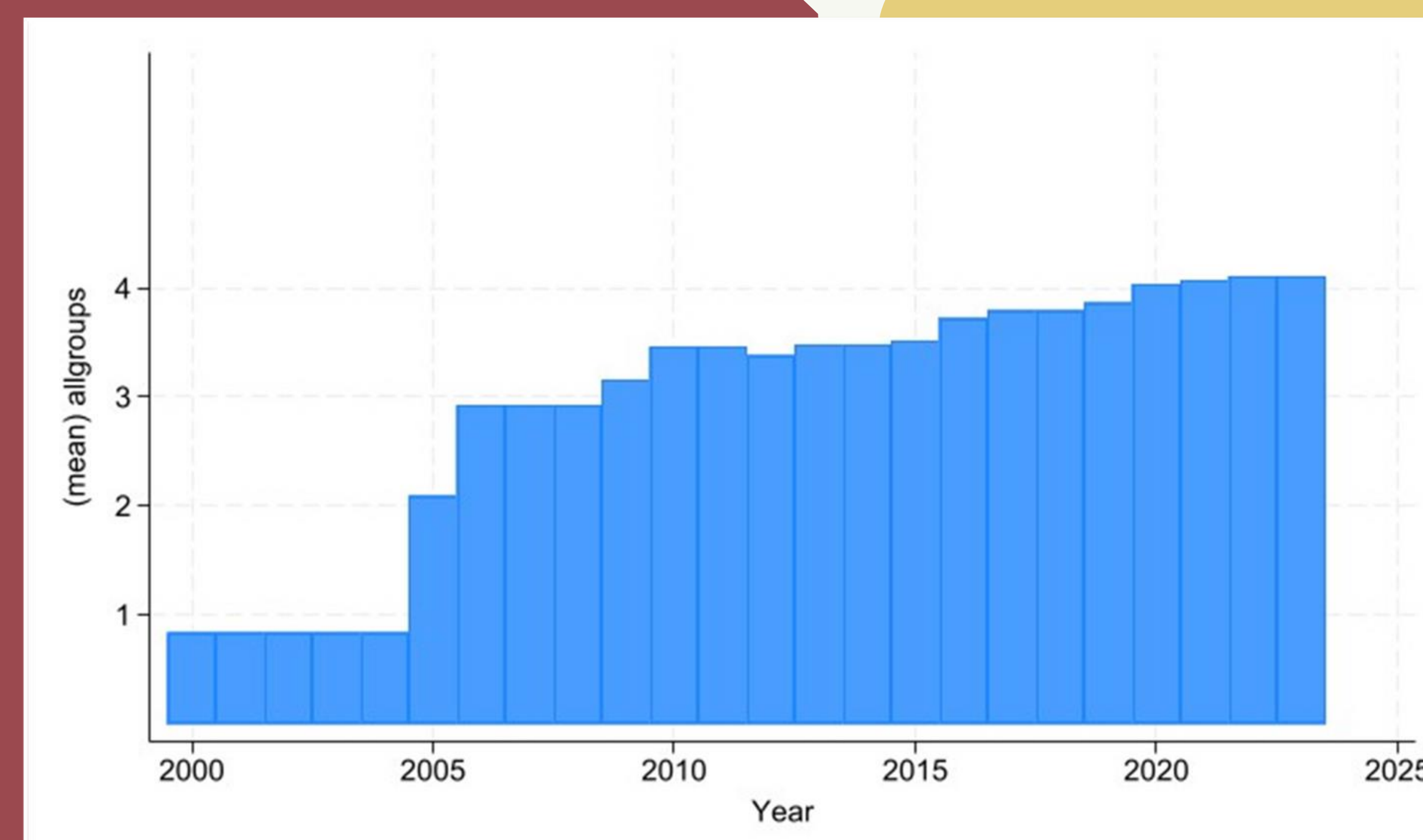Scan this QR code to view our references sheet.

Figure 3: Changes in Mean Protected Groups Bar Graph
This figure demonstrates changes over time in the inclusion of protected groups under state hate-crime legislation. Displays the years between 1999 and 2024.

04. DISCUSSION

In conclusion, our results indicate that states have become more inclusive over the past 40 years through their increasing protection of various hate crime groups. This is significant because it implies that the concept of hate crimes has evolved from a recent phenomenon into a widely recognized criminal offense. Since states have come to acknowledge the seriousness of hate crimes, their legislation has continually expanded to include additional protected groups. As of now, this project is still ongoing, as the database has not been finalized yet. Additionally, we plan to broaden the focus of our research to include legislation dealing with data collection and police training pertaining to hate crimes.

A limitation of this project includes our restricted use of Justia as our sole reference for state legislative statutes. Justia is one of the only databases with easily accessible legislation relating to hate crimes, however, it lacked consistent legal statutes for every year between 1984 and 2024. This led to some inconsistencies with data collection, causing us to rely on the laws from previous years to track trends.

We noticed a trend in new legislation being introduced in tandem with civil rights movements, such as a rise in protection for gender identity in the last four to five years. Each state has different hate crime legislation with varying levels of protection and punishment, with three states having none. The inconsistencies among each state's protections suggest that stronger federal laws should be implemented to encompass all vulnerable groups. Further research should be conducted to examine how each state individually responds to hate crime and how they train their police forces to counter hate-motivated offenses.