The Baha'i Faith Compared to Race in American Counties

Introduction

The Baha'i Faith is a relatively new world religion. Born on the streets of Persia in the mid 19th century, the religion quickly spread throughout the world as a result of organized teaching campaigns in the 20th century. In the United States, the Baha'i Faith is estimated to have about 175,000 adherents.

Yet, analysis of the spread of the Baha'i Faith in America has been tightly controlled by the national offices. In my project, I sought to perform my own analysis of key community areas in order to both demonstrate to the National Spiritual Assembly – the ranking Baha'i leadership in America – the usefulness of open data as well
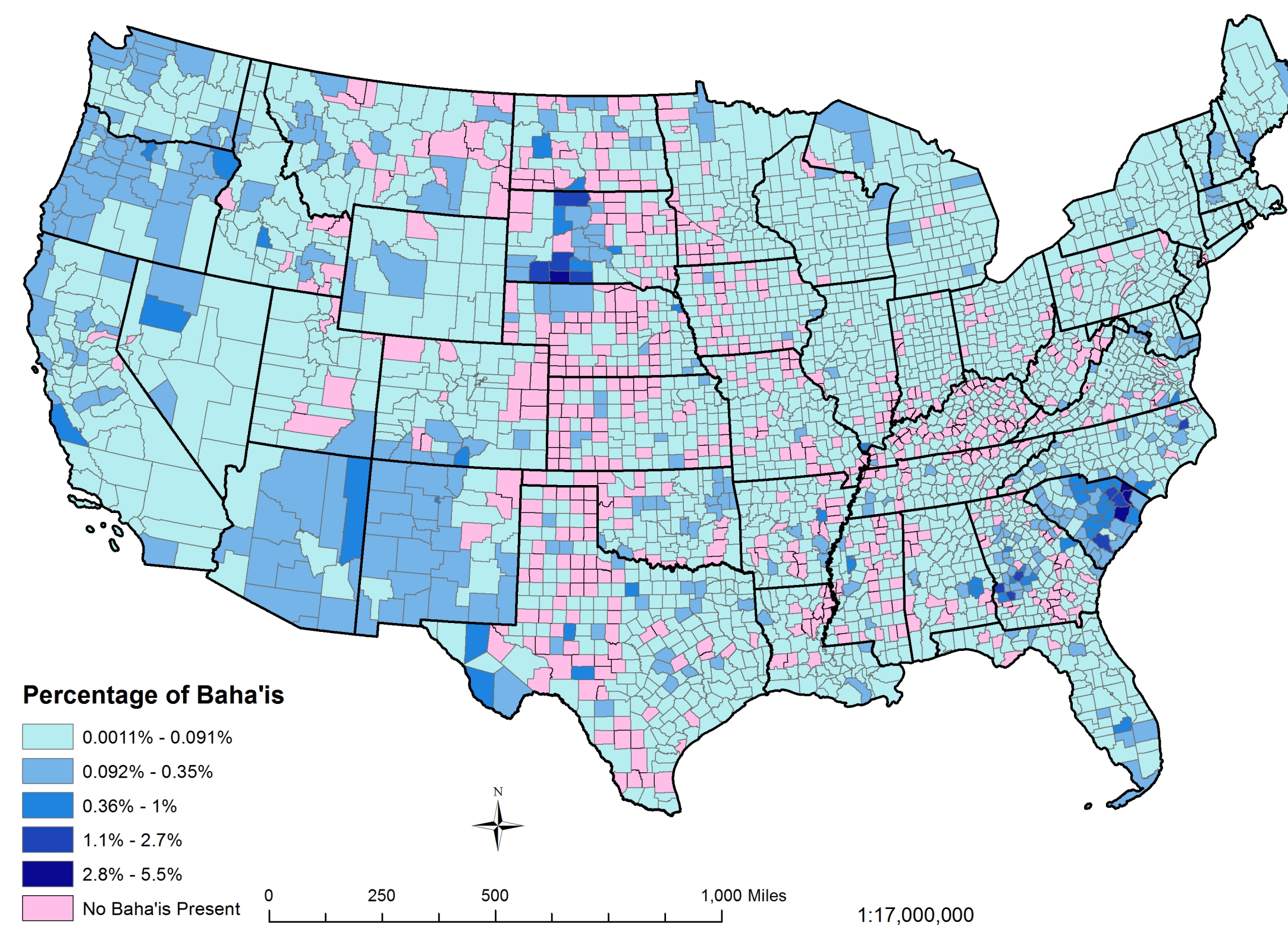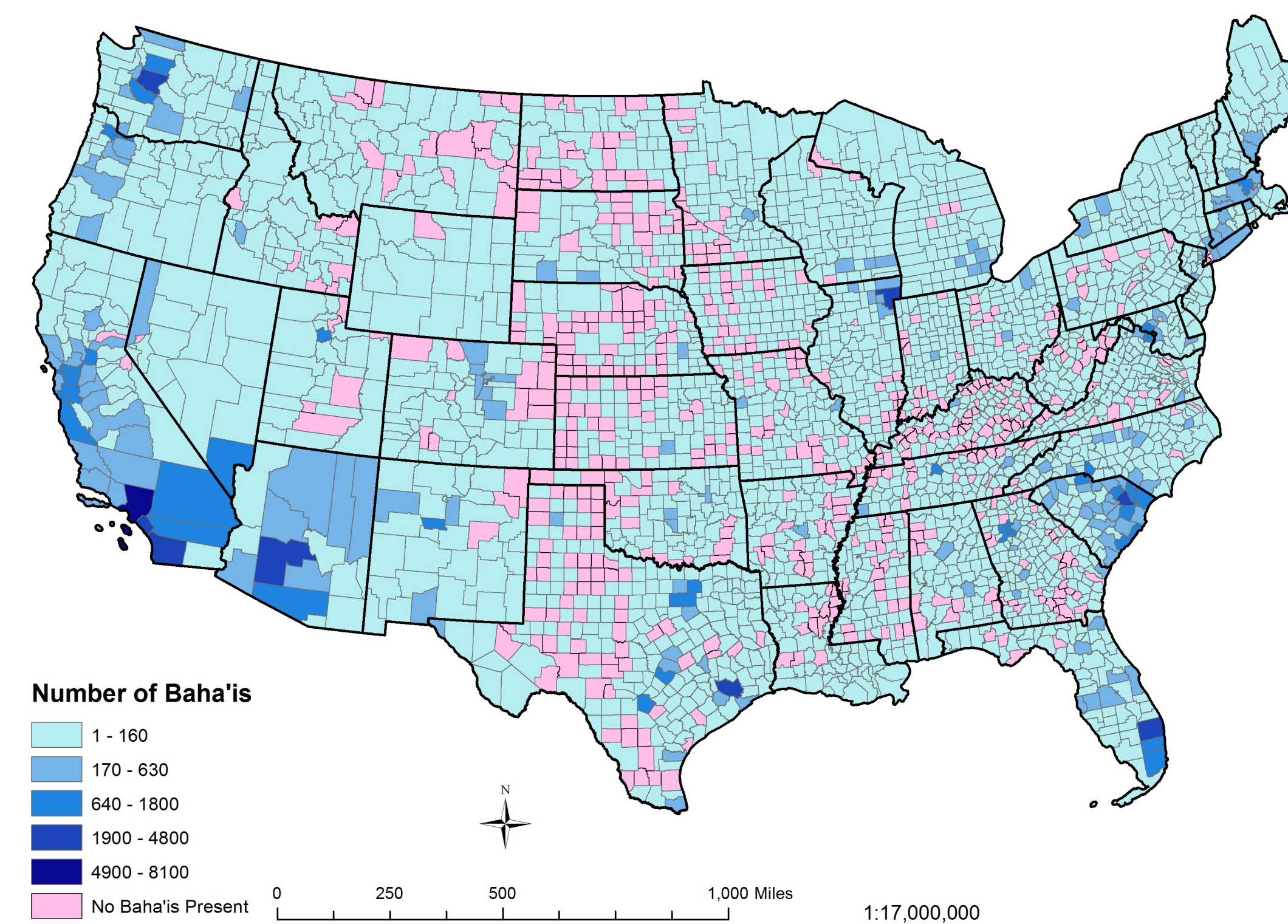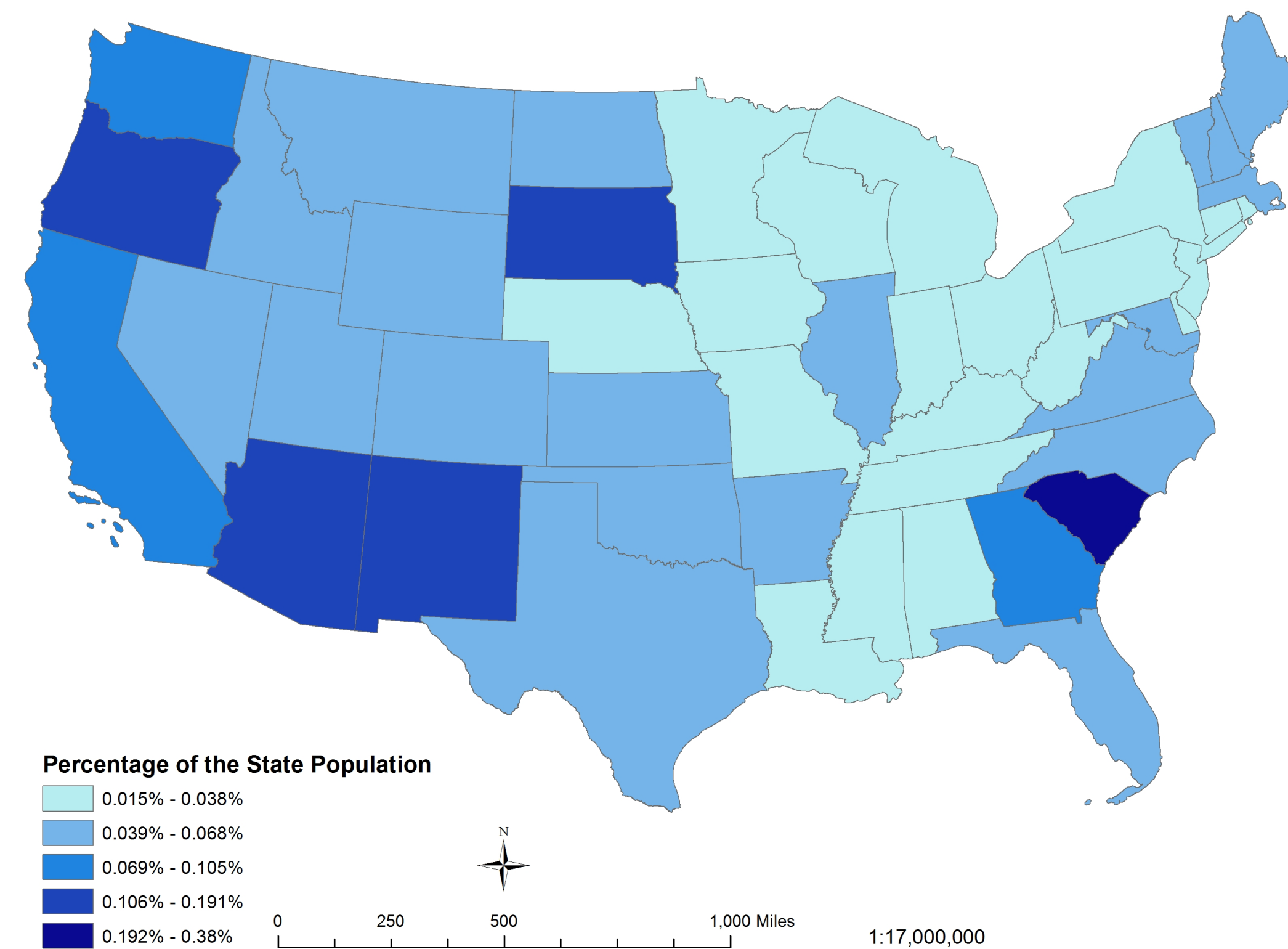
as allow for average Baha'is to compare accessible maps of their community to put their efforts in the scope of the larger Baha'i activities. The maps on this poster are a few of those I created for Baha'i communities across America. For my project, I specifically focused on race within each community as the global Baha'i Community prides itself on being very racially diverse.
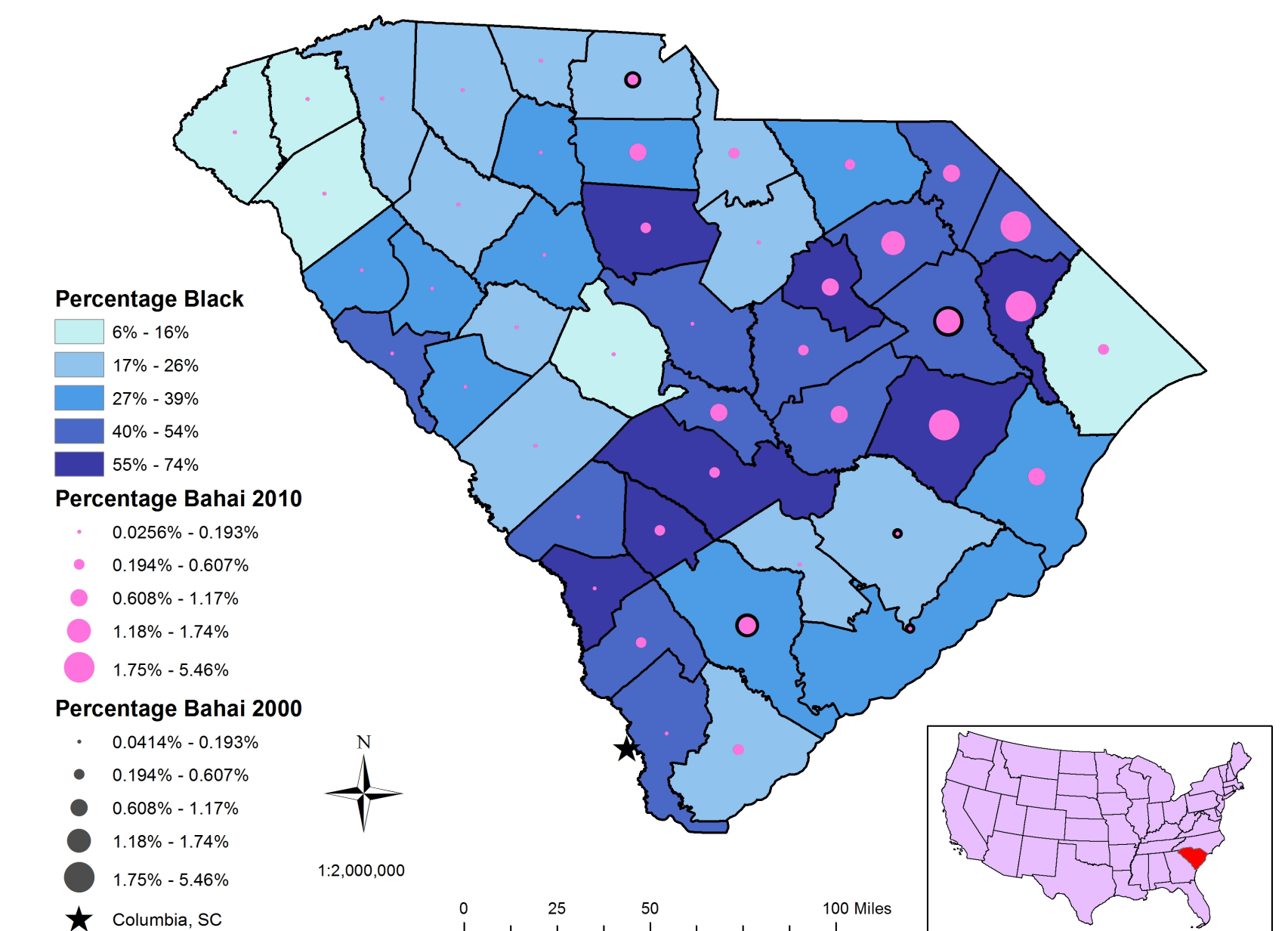
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Data Sources: 2010 Census. Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies.

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Baha'i Population By State & County

Percentage of the State Population
- 0.015% - 0.038%
- 0.039% - 0.068%
- 0.069% - 0.105%
- 0.106% - 0.191%
- 0.192% - 0.38%

1:17,000,000

Number of Baha'is
- 1 - 160
- 170 - 630
- 640 - 1800
- 1900 - 4800
- 4900 - 8100
- No Baha'is Present

1:17,000,000

Percentage of Baha'is
- 0.0011% - 0.091%
- 0.092% - 0.35%
- 0.36% - 1%
- 1.1% - 2.7%
- 2.8% - 5.5%
- No Baha'is Present

1:17,000,000

Case Study: South Carolina

Percentage Black
- 6% - 16%
- 17% - 26%
- 27% - 39%
- 40% - 54%
- 55% - 74%

Percentage Bahai 2010
- 0.0256% - 0.193%
- 0.194% - 0.607%
- 0.608% - 1.17%
- 1.18% - 1.74%
- 1.75% - 5.46%

Percentage Bahai 2000
- 0.0414% - 0.193%
- 0.194% - 0.607%
- 0.608% - 1.17%
- 1.18% - 1.74%
- 1.75% - 5.46%
- Columbia, SC

1:2,000,000

Case Study: Illinois

Number of Bahais in 2000
- 1 - 25
- 26 - 85
- 86 - 183
- 184 - 400
- 401 - 2781

Number of Bahais in 2010
- 1 - 25
- 26 - 85
- 86 - 183
- 184 - 400
- 401 - 2781

Percent Black in County
- 0.1% - 2%
- 2.1% - 6.4%
- 6.5% - 11%
- 12% - 19%
- 20% - 35%
- Springfield, IL

1:2,500,000

Summary of Project Results

The maps detail the physical location of the Baha'is across America by County and by State. When comparing the data from 2000 and 2010 regarding Baha'i population and percentage of population, I unexpectedly found some communities to be declining even though national Baha'i totals are growing. There are several possible reasons for this, not all of which indicate a shrinking community. However, reaching the exact cause would require input from the National Baha'i Office—an impossibility at this time.

The results also indicate that the Baha'is tend to be located in Counties that have a higher percentage of Black populations in Illinois and South Carolina. Similarly, Baha'is in South Dakota live in areas with a high percentage Native American population in the Southern Counties.

Conclusion & Recommendations

There are several available steps for expanded learning based on the maps created. First, if the National Baha'i leadership chose to release its official data gathered then it would be interesting to compare to data gathered by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies in order to check for consistency in the AS-ARB data. Second, demographic data collected

by the Baha'i office can be used to compare to census data in order to see if the Baha'is are consistent with the general breakdown of race in each county. Baha'is pride themselves on being very racially diverse so plotting actual demographic data instead of relying on census averages would create a deeper layer of analysis.

Methods

The first step was obtaining reliable data on the number of Baha'is in America. The National Spiritual Assembly, the leading body for the Baha'is in America, denied my official request for its records citing the data may violate the safety of some community members. Fortunately, I found the site of the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB), a group of statisticians that actively catalogue data regarding the size of religious communities in America. I then cross referenced data obtained from the ASARB with a few communities that I knew the size as reported by the Baha'is and found the data to be very accurate.

I then obtained data on the race breakdown of America per county from the Census website. I also obtained a shape file of every county in America from the Census website. Joining the data on the Baha'is with the census data by

county proved harder than anticipated because matching by county name did not account for the various counties with the same name residing in different states. Thus, counties with the same name (Jefferson County) became stacked on top of each other after the join. The vlookup command in excel similarly failed to provide accurate results. I ended up having to process each state with its own vlookup formula to give the Baha'i data unique county identifiers that matched the census data.

I was then able to join the census shape files obtained from the census website with the data on the number of Baha'is by county and then by state in order to build the final maps.

Case Study: South Dakota

Percentage Baha'i in 2000
- 0.006% - 0.059%
- 0.06% - 0.151%
- 0.152% - 0.293%
- 0.294% - 1.53%
- 1.531% - 3.56%

Percentage Baha'i in 2010
- 0.00367% - 0.0591%
- 0.0592% - 0.151%
- 0.152% - 0.293%
- 0.294% - 1.53%
- 1.54% - 3.56%

Percent American Indian
- 0% - 1.9%
- 2% - 3%
- 4% - 14%
- 15% - 62%
- 63% - 96%
- Pierre, SD

1:3,000,000