



Wisconsin Fandoms: A Turf War Over Fan Loyalty

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Abstract

Geographers study the earth's surface, and the people, places, and processes that shape it. Maps are a critical tool used by geographers to represent and analyze geographic data for locations and patterns. This project for our Geographies of Wisconsin class incorporates human and cultural geography, and creates a visual representation of sports fans in Wisconsin. The objective of this project was to examine the geographic patterns of people's preferences for professional sports teams present in the state of Wisconsin.

This was explored by creating an online survey that was sent out to University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire students, friends, family, and the greater community. Relevant information for this survey included; the zip code of the place the individual calls home, age category, gender, state in which they were born, as well as their favorite, and biggest rival team in the NFL, NBA, MLB, and NHL.

After the conclusion of the survey, the zip codes of the responses were mapped within the state of Wisconsin and analyzed to examine whether distinct lines or regions of fan bases are evident. We looked for trends such as areas in the state where the fan base slowly melts into another category. (Ex. Where Milwaukee Brewer fans start to fade, and Minnesota Twins fans start to occur more frequently). The results help us better understand the relationship between distance from sports hubs, and the amount of loyalty fans have.

Introduction

A fanatic is described as "a person marked by excessive enthusiasm and often intense uncritical devotion" (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary). Here in Wisconsin, we all know that Lambeau Field is the 'other' place of worship on Sundays. Our study was conducted to determine where professional sport fan loyalties lie in the great state of Wisconsin.

The state of Wisconsin presents an interesting opportunity for fans of professional sports. Though loyalties typically reside within the state, Wisconsin has a unique geographic distribution of professional sport franchises. Both Green Bay and Milwaukee host professional sport franchises. These two cities are located on the eastern edge of the state, separating them from a sizable population. The distance from resident to franchise may entice some who live in the western portion of the state to become fans of a franchise from another state.

Take the NFL into consideration; from Hudson, WI the Minnesota Vikings' stadium is only a 30 mile drive, compared to the Green Bay Packers' stadium which is over 250 miles away.

Another question of distance and loyalty resides in both the MLB and NBA. From Eau Claire, WI it is a 245 mile drive to attend a Milwaukee Brewers or Bucks game. Meanwhile, to attend a Minnesota Twins or Timberwolves game, it is just over a 90 mile drive.

On the other hand, Wisconsin's residents are known for their strong following of the Green Bay Packers. These fans also express strong animosity towards the Minnesota Vikings to the west and the Chicago Bears to the south, but where in the state is the animosity greatest toward each team?

Does distance influence a person to be a fan of, say, the Vikings over the Packers, simply because they live closer to Minnesota? Or do professional sport loyalties go beyond the restraints of geographical distances?

Overall, we engaged in this research to explore the minds and actions of fans when presented with different loyalty opportunities. Through this study, we intended to better understand not only fans here in Wisconsin, but also how distance vs. loyalty plays a role in all fan bases.

Methodology

This project was completed in three main phases: data collection, data analysis, and data display.

Data Collection

1. Created and distributed survey on UW-Eau Claire Qualtrics survey builder
2. Allowed three weeks for survey to be taken by community members
3. Downloaded 1,929 completed responses in an excel file

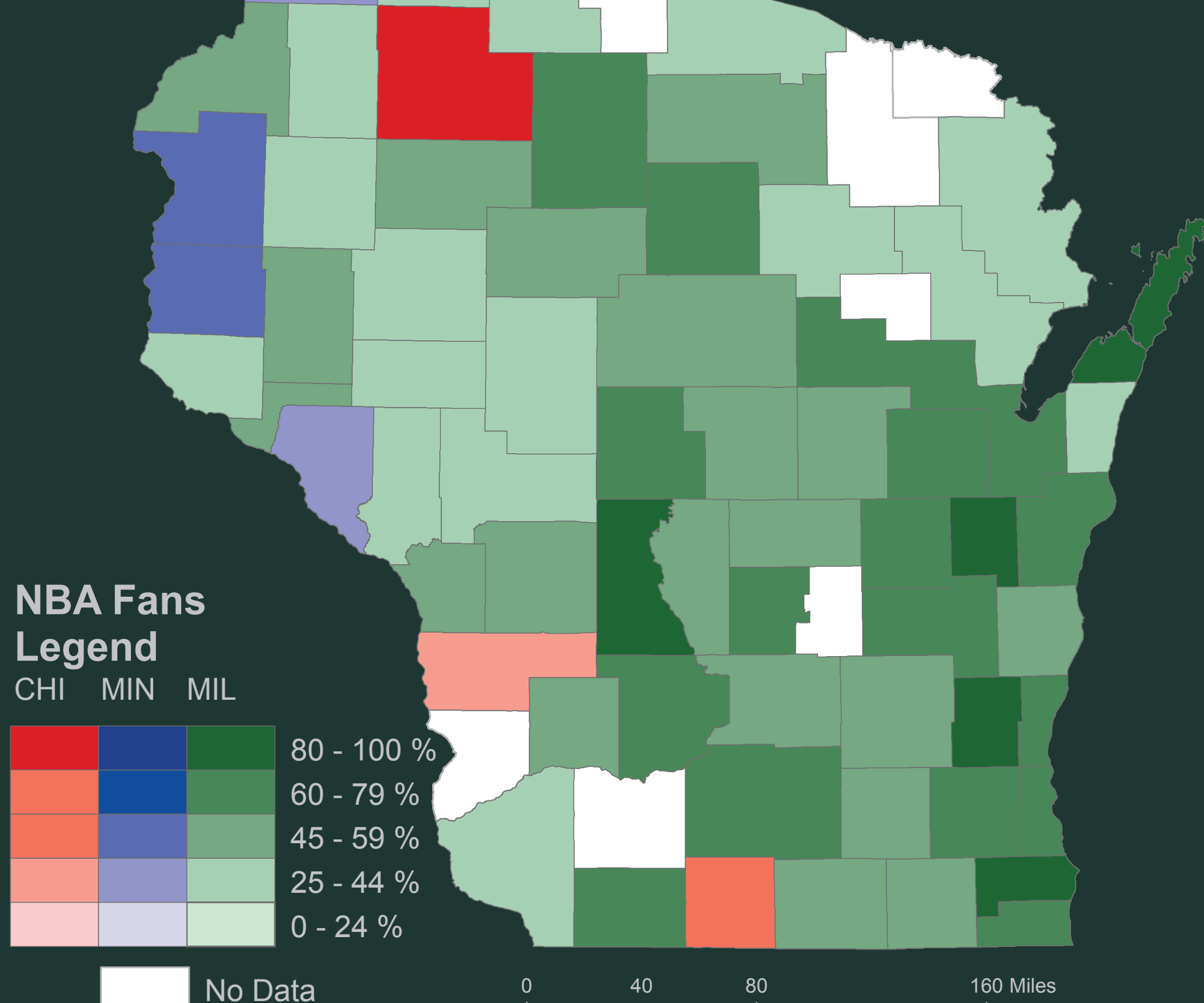
Data Analysis

4. We brought the excel table into a map analysis program called ESRI ArcMap
5. We linked the individual responses with their home county
6. From there we began to look at the spatial distribution of Wisconsin fans within the state.
7. We added up all the responses in each county for each team and compared the total team count, to the total responses per county. This allowed us to tell how loyal a county was to a certain team.

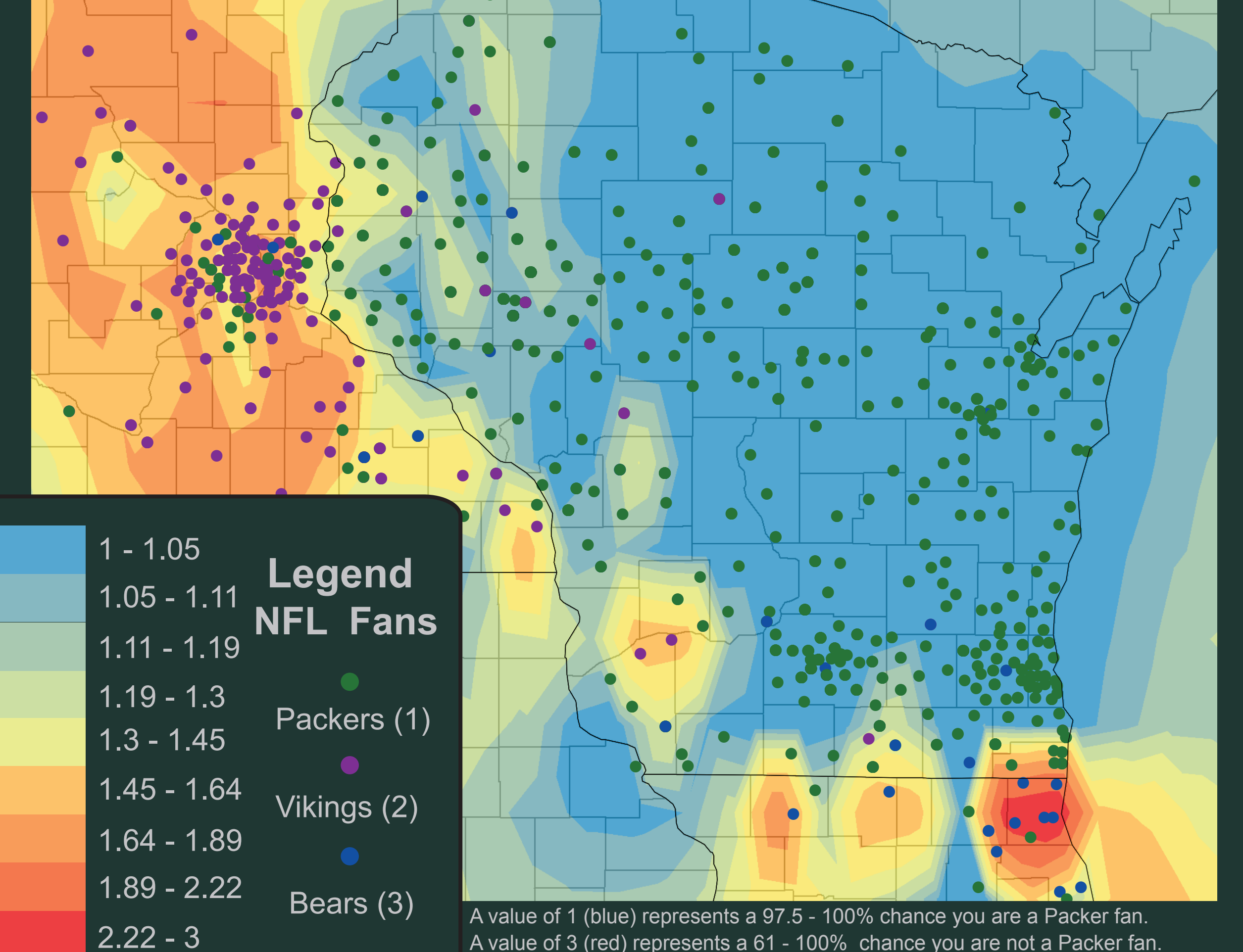
Data Display

8. We then created a map for each sport and assigned percentage attributes to each county.
9. Displaying our data this way created a visual interpretation to better examine where regional 'fandom' hubs in the state occurred.

National Basketball Association Fandoms

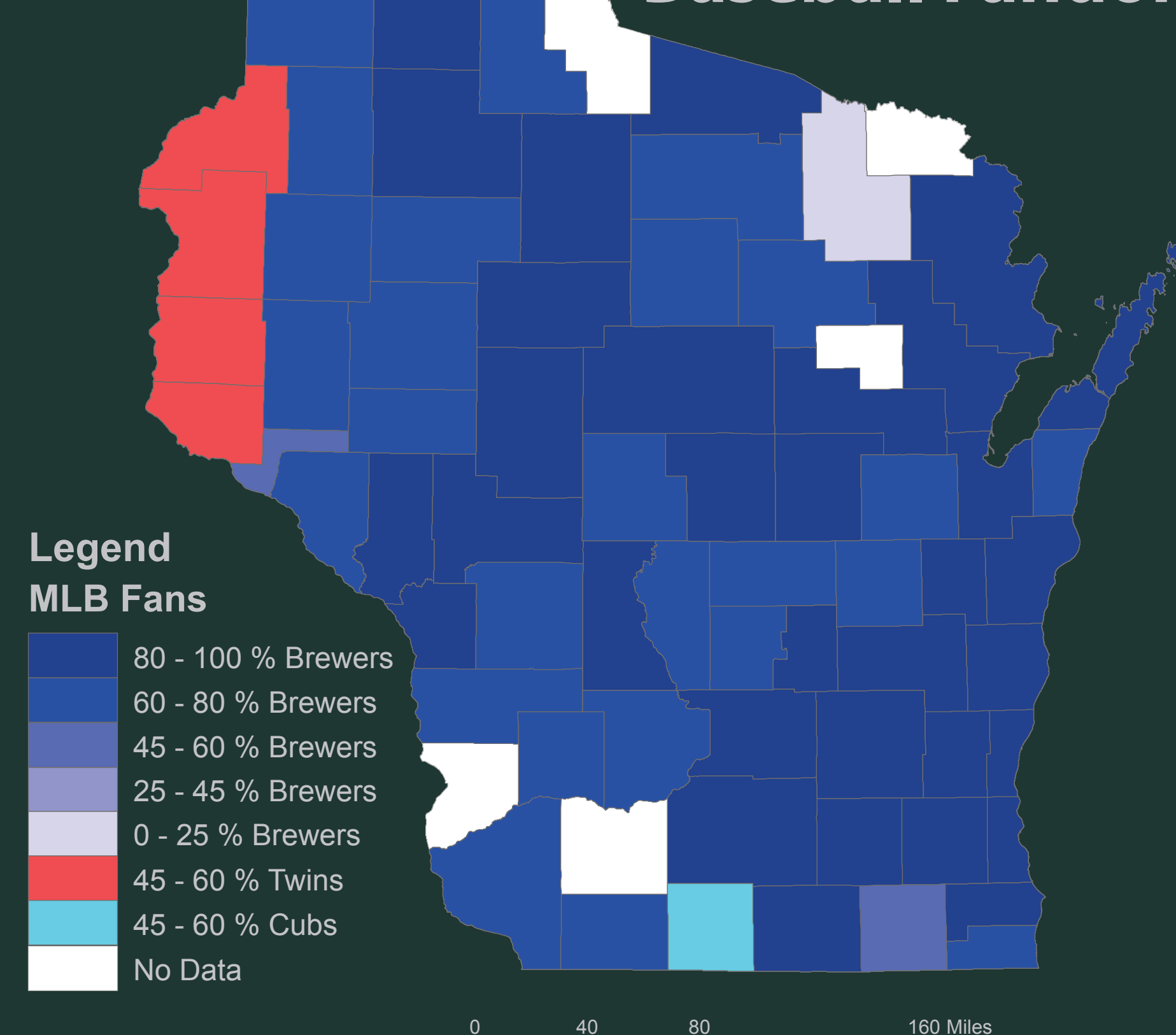


National Football League Fan Distribution

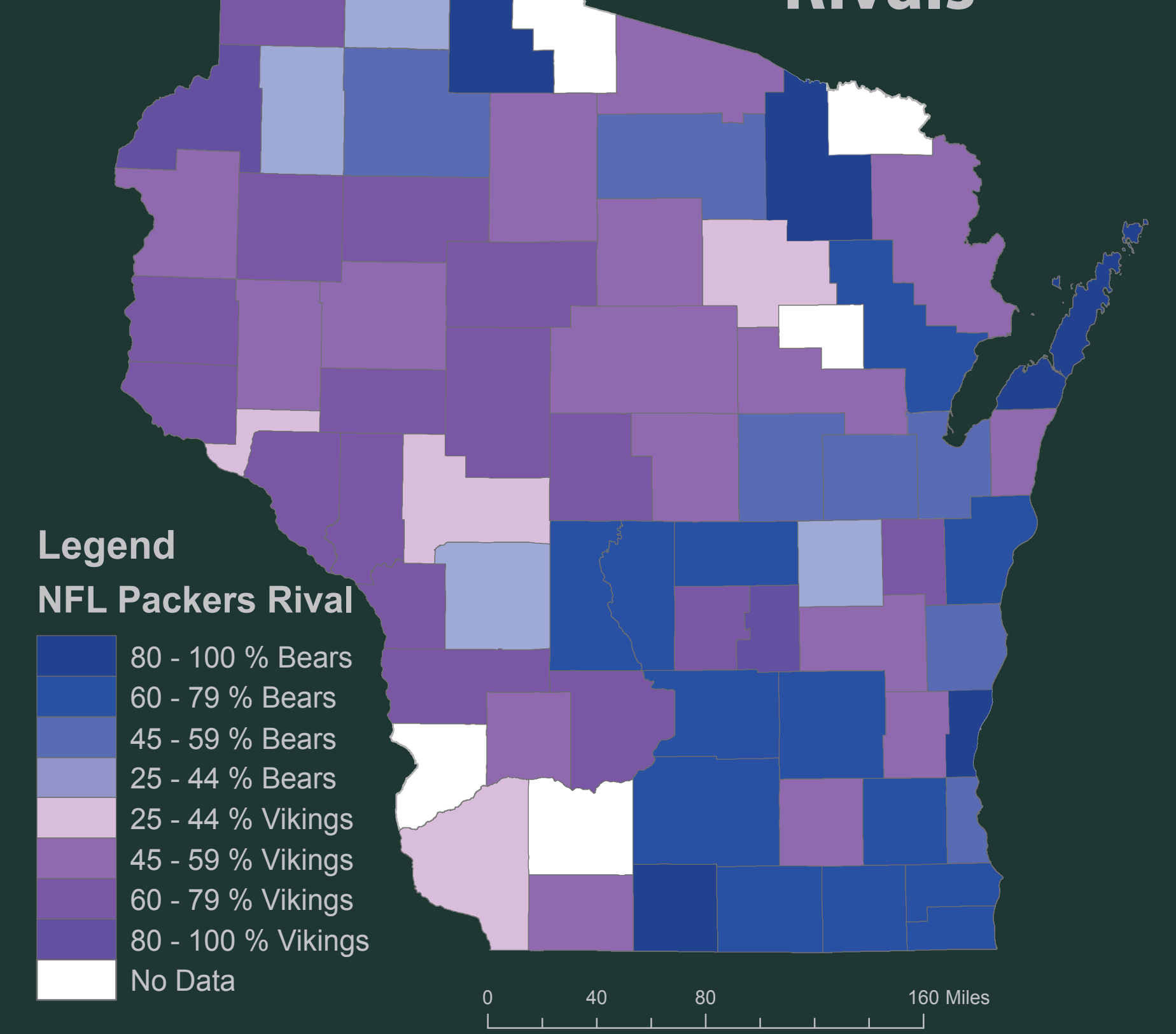


A value of 1 (blue) represents a 97.5 - 100% chance you are a Packer fan. A value of 3 (red) represents a 61 - 100% chance you are not a Packer fan.

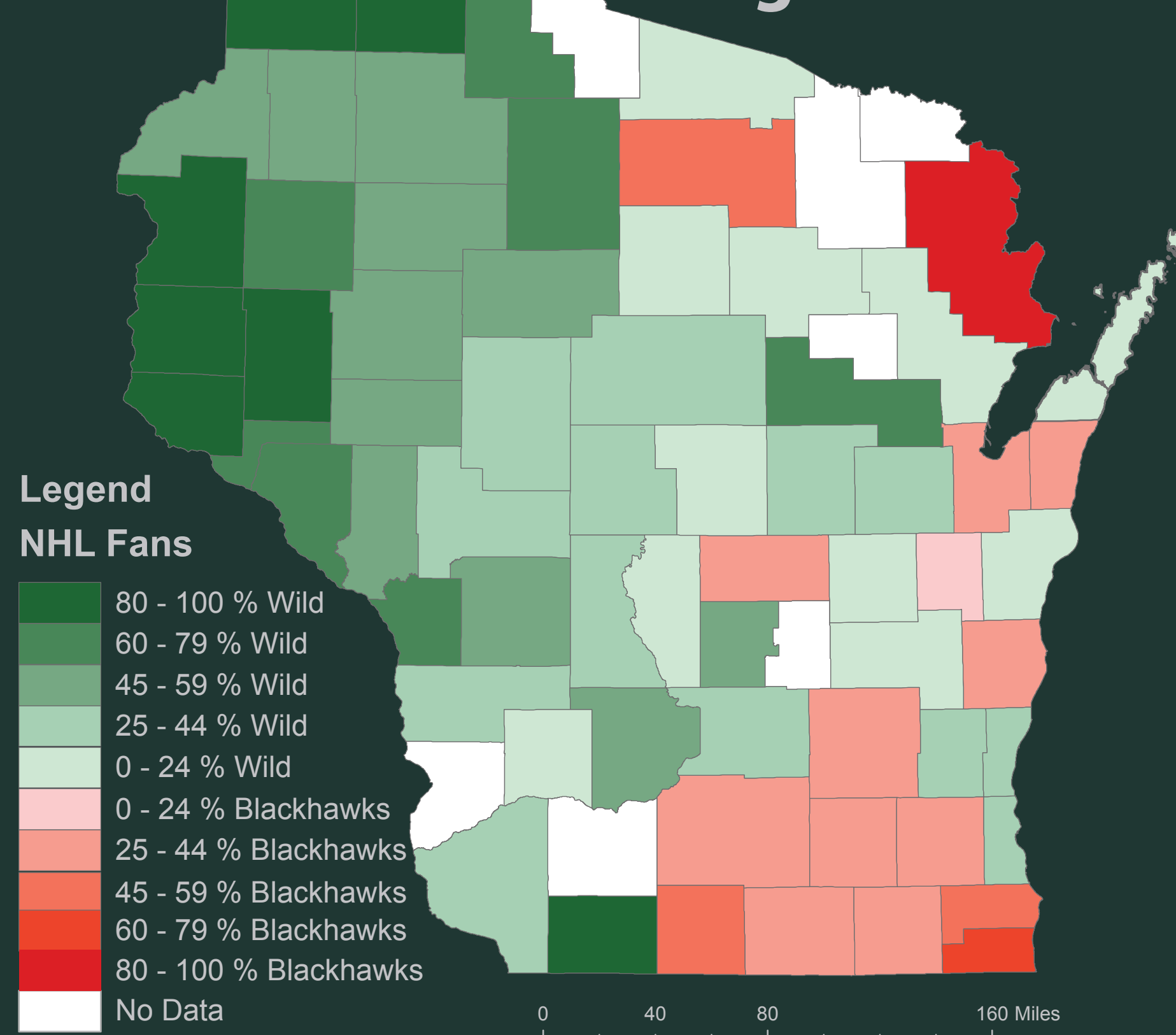
Major League Baseball Fandoms



Packers Biggest Rivals



National Hockey League Fandoms



Discussion

Choropleth maps were created to display the survey results for the NBA, NHL, NFL, and MLB. A map of Packers fans was not created because they were the majority in every county. Jackson County had the lowest percentage of Packer fans at 57%.

These fandom maps reveal that distance to a team's home city is a prominent factor in determining a person's preference for a sports team. A line in the southeastern portion of the state distinguishing between fan ideals can be seen in the NHL Fandoms and Packers' Biggest Rivals maps.

The respondents in Burnett, Polk, St. Croix, and Pierce counties had a strong attachment to Minnesota rather than Wisconsin franchises. This is particularly evident in the MLB, NHL, and NBA fandom maps.

Kriging is a geostatistical interpolation technique used to predict the value of a variable. This map shows the expected affiliation an area would have to a team based off of the survey results. In this case, the blue represents areas of Packer fans, while the yellow, orange, and red areas show where Vikings or Bears fans are expected to be.

Acknowledgements

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