Patterns of Fatal Extreme-Right Crime in the United States

by Joshua D. Freilich, Steven M. Chermak, Jeff Gruenewald, William S. Parkin, and Brent R. Klein

Abstract

This article examines ideologically motivated extreme-right fatal attacks in the United States since 1990. Aligning with this Special Issue's theme, our discussion centers exclusively on the unique threats posed by the extreme-right. We first define the American extreme-right movement and provide a brief review of the major data sources that are available to study extreme-right violence in the U.S. Subsequently, we review the growing number of studies that provide spatial, temporal, and other findings on the incident, offender, and victim levels for ideologically motivated extreme-right homicides. We conclude by outlining the implications of our findings and note directions for future research.

Key Words: American Terrorism; Extreme-Right Violence; Extremist Crime Database; Extreme Right Homicides

Introduction

This article examines ideologically motivated extreme-right fatal attacks in the United States since 1990. We discuss key incident, offender and victim characteristics of homicides, particularly spatial and temporal patterns. Importantly, we identify how these findings engage with existing theory and gaps in the relevant literature. The need for better data and how future research can begin to overcome this particular limitation is addressed. We limit our focus to the extreme-right because the correlates of spatial variation in attack location, temporal patterns, victim and target attributes, weapon types, and other factors often differ, depending upon terrorist ideology.[1] For example, Freilich et al. have found that extreme-rightists are "older, and more likely to be male, religious, poorer and less educated and to operate in rural areas in the U.S. compared to far-left terrorists."[2] We also center our discussion exclusively on the unique threats posed by the extreme-right to align with the theme of the Special Issue.

The American extreme-right has consistently been one of the top threats to public safety over the last 50 years. Conversely, the levels of activity of both the far-left and radical Islamist (or jihadist) have fluctuated. Smith's foundational study on terrorism in the U.S. demonstrated that the extreme-right was active in the 1960s, 1970s, and in fact, was the most deadly movement operating in the 1980s.[3] Jihadists committed almost no deadly strikes prior to 1990 before increasing their level of violence that resulted in the horrific 9/11 attacks in 2001 and over 15 fatal incidents in the United States in 2002.[4] Though the far-left was very active in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the movement's level of deadly activities fell in the 1990s and 2000s, before reemerging in the last four or so years.[5, 6]

The extreme-right's level of fatal attacks, however, has remained mostly stable throughout this period of more than 50 years and law enforcement has invariably rated them a strong threat to public safety.[7] Research has also found extreme-right presence in most states.[8] Freilich et al.'s survey of American state police agencies showed that almost all agencies rated jihadists as the top national security threat, but the extreme-right was also seen as posing a significant danger.[9] Carter et al. subsequently discovered a wide variation in which groups are perceived to be a serious terrorist threat.[10] Law enforcement was much more concerned about extreme-right sovereign citizens, Islamist extremists, and extreme-right militia/patriot group members. This study also found that the major concerns of law enforcement have changed considerably over time. In the early to mid-2000s, the main concern was Islamist extremists. In 2013 and 2014, findings revealed that law enforcement's top concern was extreme-right sovereign citizens.

In his study of modern terrorism, Hewitt found that the extreme-right claimed over 250 lives between 1978 and 2000.[11] Our own research based on the U.S. Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) has shown that while jihadists have committed over 50 ideologically motivated homicide incidents that claimed over 3,000 lives since 1990, extreme-rightists in that same period committed over 210 ideologically motivated homicide events that took over 450 lives.[12] Thus, jihadists claimed more victims, while the extreme-right committed more attacks. This pattern has continued. For example, in 2017, extreme-rightists committed eight fatal attacks (claiming nine lives), while jihadists executed five deadly attacks (taking 17 lives) and far-leftists committed four fatal incidents (resulting in seven deaths).[13]

Despite the frequency of extreme-right violence, the majority of terrorism studies examine jihadists, both international and homegrown, including Al Qaeda and ISIS supporters and other foreign terrorist campaigns (e.g., IRA, ETA, etc.).[14] In addition, many studies of America's extreme-right crimes have relied on anecdotal or case study analyses with data and method limitations. Most of the frequently cited works on the crimes of the extreme-right continue to be written by journalists.[15]

The extreme-right tends to target specific categories of people and pose a special danger to law enforcement and government officials. Since 1990, extreme-rightists have killed almost 50 police officers in the line of duty. For instance, in 2014 a zealously extreme-right and anti-government husband and wife assassinated two Las Vegas police officers. Nonetheless, the largest category of extreme-right homicide victims has been racial and ethnic minorities, typically African Americans and Latinos.[16] One example is the massacre in an African American Church in South Carolina in June 2015 that took the lives of nine congregants. President Obama, America's first African American President, was the target of numerous plots by neo-Nazis, skinheads, and others to assassinate him during his term in office.

The following section begins by defining the American extreme-right movement. We then provide a brief review of the major data sources available to study extreme-right violence in the U.S. Subsequently, we review the growing number of studies that have relied on the ECDB to provide spatial, temporal, and other findings on the incident, offender, and victim levels for ideologically motivated extreme-right homicides. We conclude by outlining the implications of our findings and suggest directions for future research.

Defining the American Extreme-Right

As is the case for defining terrorism more broadly, there is a wide variety of definitions used to describe right-wing extremism and there is no universally accepted definition. Mudde finds that "to the extent that a consensus of opinion among the scientists concerned with this field[exists], it is confined to the view that right-wing extremism is an ideology that people are free to fill in as they see fit."[17] We therefore draw upon our systematic review of studies published on the topic of right-wing extremism, including several studies offering typologies and definitions to operationalize extreme-right terrorism.[18] More specifically, we define

American extreme-rightists as:

> "… fiercely nationalistic (as opposed to universal and international in orientation), anti-global, suspicious of centralized federal authority, reverent of individual liberty (especially their right to own guns, be free of taxes), believe in conspiracy theories that involve a grave threat to national sovereignty and/or personal liberty and a belief that one's personal and/or national "way of life" is under attack and is either already lost or that the threat is imminent (sometimes such beliefs are amorphous and vague, but for some the threat is from a specific ethnic, racial, or religious group), and a belief in the need to be prepared for an attack either by participating in, or supporting the need for, paramilitary preparations and training or survivalism. Importantly, the mainstream conservative movement and the mainstream Christian right are not included."

Of course, not every extreme-rightist adheres to all of these ideological tenets. While this definition may capture violent right-wing extremism in the U.S. since 1990, we also recognize that the broader extreme-right movement has evolved while the salience of some ideological beliefs has shifted over time.[19] It will be important to consider whether amendments to this definition are needed, for instance, to account for a growing infatuation with Russia and other foreign extreme-right governments. As anticipated by Kaplan and Bjorgo, we should be watchful of the extreme-right's romanticization of Putin's Russia and whether the movement's extreme nationalism is being overtaken by a more globalist preoccupation with race.[20]

Data Sources on American Extreme-Right Violence

The primary source of data for contextualizing extreme-right violence in the current study is the open source U.S. Extremist Crime Database (ECDB).[21] The ECDB has data on offenders, incidents, victims, and targets of domestic terrorism, including fatal attacks and failed and foiled plots by extreme-rightists. Cases are included in the database regardless of jurisdiction, encompassing federal, state, and non-tried cases. For a case to be included in the ECDB, two criteria must be satisfied. First, *behaviorally,* a homicide or plot must have been committed or attempted in the U.S. Second, *attitudinally,* at least one of the suspects must have committed the homicide or plot to further their extreme-right belief system.

Other publicly available sources provide information on extreme-right violence in the U.S., and we relied on these sources, among others, when creating the ECDB to identify cases. Three sources in particular, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the American Terrorism Study (ATS), and Hewitt's chronology utilize the FBI's terrorism definition or policies.[22] The FBI defines terrorism as "the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives."[23] FBI designated terrorism cases often include offenders engaged in more extended planning to attack the American government or society more broadly, and thus may exclude extreme-right attacks targeting racial or other social minorities, which are often triggered situationally by presented opportunities as opposed to long-term planning. Unlike designated terrorism cases, non-FBI investigated ideologically motivated attacks are not prosecuted federally, but are instead tried on the state level. While the FBI's approach is beneficial because it establishes boundaries, many extreme-right crimes are overlooked. Since the FBI has historically required that acts of terrorism be committed by groups, crimes committed by lone individuals unaffiliated with an organization have in the past been excluded from official lists of terrorism. This led Riley and Hoffman to conclude that the FBI's terrorism definition was too narrow. [24]

The ATS was created by pioneering terrorism researcher Brent Smith and has in the past been conducted in cooperation with the FBI's Terrorist Research and Analytical Center. The database includes federally indicted persons as a result of an FBI Counterterrorism Program investigation. Information collected primarily from federal indictments, trial transcripts, and docket information by the ATS has been used to answer important questions about the adjudication of terrorists as well as the temporal and geospatial patterns of terrorist behavior.[25] Though the ATS has publicly available data on federal terrorism ranging from the late 1970s to 2017 that are formatted for statistical use, state-level extreme-right terrorism cases are excluded from the database. Terrorism researcher Christopher Hewitt created his chronology of American terrorism since the 1950s, combining information from multiple sources, including other chronologies, the FBI's annual reports, watch groups, and journalists.[26] Unfortunately, the FBI ceased publishing its annual *Terrorism in the United States* reports in 2005, and Hewitt's chronology ends in 2004. Further, the FBI reports and Hewitt's chronology are narratives not formatted for statistical analysis.

Another prominent source of terrorism data, known as the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), tracks terrorism events worldwide. LaFree and Dugan created the GTD from the Pinkerton Global Intelligence Services (PGIS) data that relied on wire services, U.S. and foreign government reporting, newspapers, and other information from PGIS offices and clients.[27] The GTD is publicly available and is formatted for statistical use. Scholars interested in American terrorism could extract these cases, and it is possible to focus specifically on American

extreme-right violence by limiting the data to just those cases.[28, 29] However, the GTD also excludes many extreme-right ideologically motivated attacks, such as those resulting from presented opportunities (e.g., skinhead spontaneously murders an African American) as opposed to pre-planned strikes.[30]

Domestic extremism watch-groups also provide information on right-wing extremism in the U.S. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), and the Rick Ross site, for example, publish chronologies on extreme-right violence. These reports are sometimes broad, including non-ideologically motivated cases, are in narrative format, and are freely accessible to the public on an ad hoc basis. Since the ADL and SPLC publish the reports to further their watch-group roles, some have criticized them for bias and utility as a sole source of information on domestic extremism.[31]

Another source of open source terrorism data known as the Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) includes information on a sample of radicalized persons in the U.S.[32] It includes extreme-rightists as well as jihadists, far-leftists, and single issue extremists. Like the ECDB, PIRUS captures basic demography, and includes violent and non-violent perpetrators. PIRUS also captures key risk factors. Unlike the ECDB, PIRUS is limited to individuals and does not possess incident-level data. It has recently become publicly available.
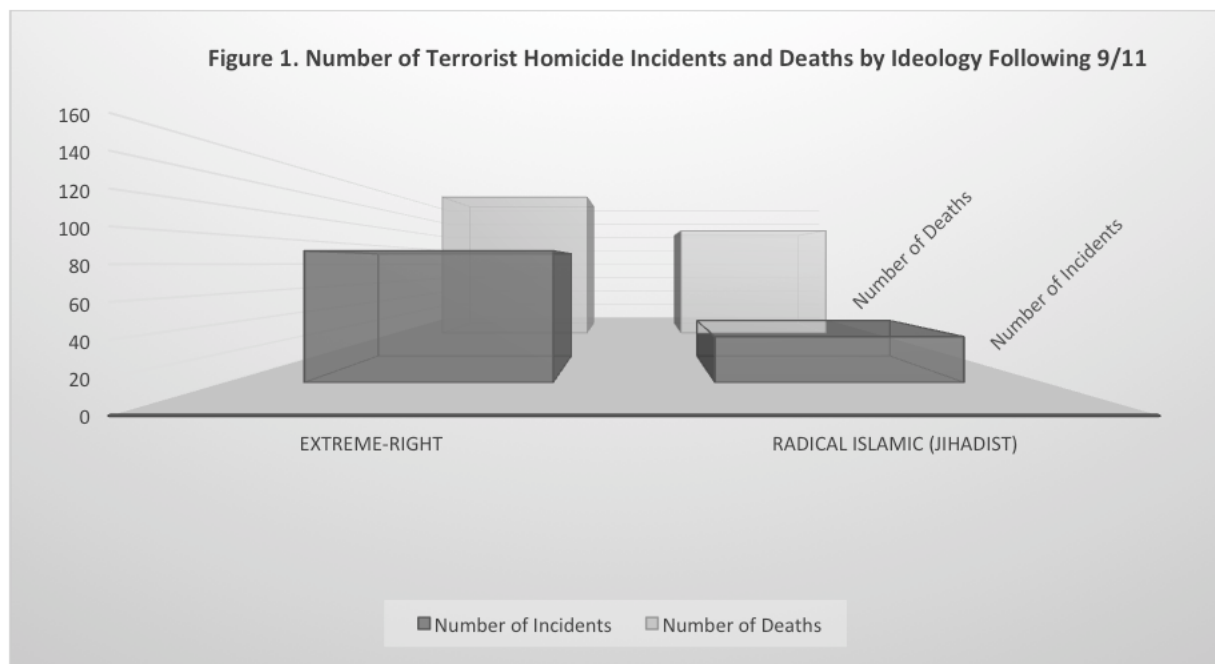
Extreme-Right Homicides in the United States

While the most visible manifestation of extreme-right activities include rallies and various online activities, deadly violence targeting social minorities and government actors remains the most public of their criminal activities in the U.S. Though studies of extreme-right crime and terrorism are not new, what is known about extreme-right homicides has increased over the last decade due to a series of empirical studies that analyze data from the ECDB.[33, 34] Our review turns to this growing body of research, focusing on key attributes of situational contexts, offenders, and victims of ideologically motivated, fatal extreme-right violence.

Temporal and Geospatial Context of Extreme-Right Homicides

Studies have shown that homicides committed by extreme-rightists in the U.S. have occurred every year since 1990 when the ECDB began tracking these events, significantly outnumbering attacks perpetrated by other terrorist movements.[35] As shown in Figure 1, extreme-right terrorists killed 158 people in 89 homicides between September 12, 2001 and 2016, while jihadists killed 119 people in 31 homicides in the U.S. during the same time period.[36]

Over the last three decades there have been, on average, nearly eight extreme-right homicides per year. If we exclude the single most deadly extreme-right attack, the Oklahoma City bombing that killed 168 victims in 1995, an average of approximately 11 victims have been killed in these ideologically motivated extreme-right homicides every year. Despite reports of elevated extreme-right activity in the U.S. around the election of President Donald Trump, data reveal nine deaths in eight homicides in 2017.[37, 38] Though average, this figure represents a 100 percent increase from 2016; the same increase was observed during President Barack Obama's first year in office.

Figure 1. Number of Terrorist Homicide Incidents and Deaths by Ideology Following 9/11

Prior research has also examined where violent extreme-right homicides tend to occur. ECDB data indicate that the highly populous states of California, Texas, and Florida were the top three states in terms of the number of ideologically motivated homicides.[39] Smith's foundational study of domestic terrorism discovered that extreme-right American terrorism is a relatively more rural phenomenon compared to other forms of terrorism.[40] More recent research has found that extreme-right homicides occur more often in the Western and Southern regions of the U.S., and in relatively more rural counties in comparison to left-wing and jihadi terrorism.[41] Counties harboring known hate groups are also significantly more likely to experience extreme-right homicides.[42] At the municipal level, Gruenewald and Pridemore found that just over 50 percent of extreme-right homicides occurred in small towns and mid-sized cities with total populations of less than 100,000.[43] As for situational attributes, research by Parkin et al. showed that the most frequent places where these homicides occurred include businesses, churches, and schools (29%), private residences (25%), remote areas (21%), and in open streets (21%).[44]

Extreme-Right Homicide Incident Attributes

Since the early 1990s, extreme-right leaders have advocated for "leaderless resistance," or the creation of covert and independent cells absent any hierarchical command and control structure.[45] The operational advantages of this organizational model are that it allows for extreme-rightists to commit crimes upon their own volition without the need for communication, within and between groups, which may be intercepted by law enforcement. Leaderless resistance also protects the movement from group infiltrators, including government informants.

Prior research has used ECDB data to examine co-offending patterns of extreme-right homicide offenders, with Gruenewald and Pridemore finding that approximately 50 percent of extreme-right homicides between 1990 and 2008 involved multiple offenders, significantly more than the average homicide in the U.S. during that time period (11%).[46] Other research examining lone actor terrorism by Gruenewald, Chermak and Freilich found that extreme-right homicides involving single offenders could be categorized into attacks perpetrated by *loners* who have no extremist group affiliations and operate alone (41%), *lone wolves* who have extremist group affiliations yet operate alone (27%), and *wolf packs* who have extremist group affiliations and choose to operate with one or two others (32%).[47] They also found differences between the various categories of extreme-right lone actors who commit homicide. While loners disproportionately select targets that include abortion providers and government officials, wolf packs more commonly target homeless persons and sexual orientation and gender identity minorities. While extreme-right loner attacks have remained stable over time, lone wolf and wolf pack attacks have decreased since the 1990s. A follow-up study by Gruenewald, Chermak, and Freilich compared

unaffiliated loners to other extreme-right homicide offenders, finding that loners were older, significantly more likely to be single (including separation or divorce), more likely to have a prior military background, more suicidal, more likely to target multiple victims, and generally less involved in the broader extreme-right movement.[48]
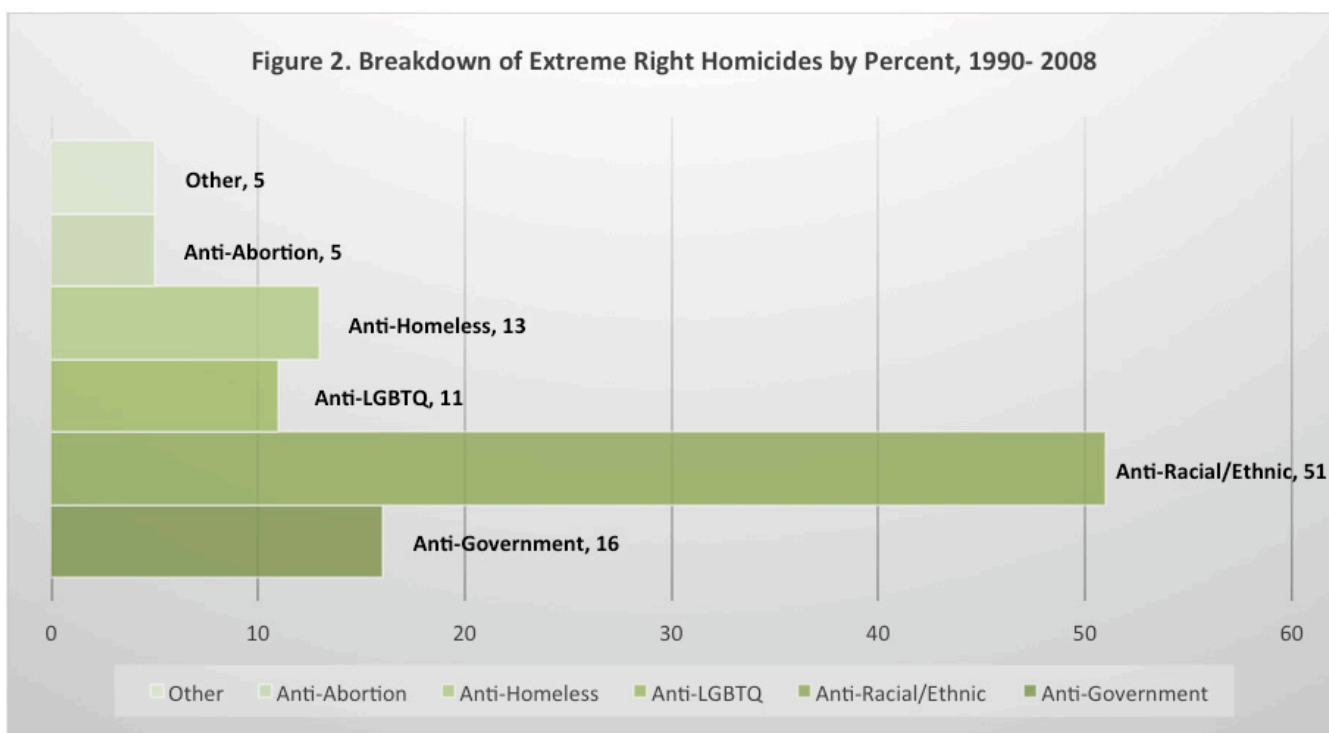
Only a minority of extreme-right homicides involve multiple casualties. Nonetheless, Gruenewald and Pridemore found that 16 percent of extreme-right homicides involved multiple victims between 1990 and 2008, concluding that multiple victimization was significantly more common in extremist homicide than the average homicide (4%) in the U.S.[49] During this time period, research found that the most common targets of ideologically motivated extreme-right homicides included racial and ethnic minorities (51%), government representatives (16%), homeless persons (13%), and the LGBTQ community (11%) (see Figure 2).[50]

In addition, Parkin et al. found that nearly 30 percent of extreme-right homicides involve non-fatal victimization. [51] Whom extreme-rightists choose to target also varies significantly from the average homicide, with up to 80 percent of ideologically motivated extreme-rightists targeting persons previously unknown to them.[52] Recent examinations of ECDB data report that fewer extreme-right homicides target strangers (66%), though this is likely due to an inclusion of non-primary offenders in the analysis. Regardless, extreme-right homicides, like other forms of terrorism, are distinguishable from typical forms of lethal violence that usually involve victims who are friends, acquaintances, and persons otherwise known to offenders.

Recent analyses of ECDB data suggest that over 50 percent of extreme-right violence ending in death is firearm-related. Again, weapon use by extreme-rightists significantly varies from the average homicide. Gruenewald and Pridemore found that, between 1990 and 2008, approximately 53 percent of ideologically motivated extreme-right homicides were perpetrated with guns in comparison to 73 percent of all homicides, generally.[53]

Extreme-Right Homicide Offender Attributes

Extreme-right homicide offenders are overwhelmingly white males who adhere to beliefs of white supremacism (approximately 80%). Though over half of all homicide offenders in the U.S. are non-white, comparative analyses of ECDB data have found that approximately 98 percent of extreme-right homicide perpetrators are white.[54] Prior studies have also shown that federally indicted far-right terrorists tend to be slightly older than other types of domestic terrorists.[55] Likewise, ideologically motivated extreme-right homicide offenders average about 30 years of age, which does not significantly differ from the average homicide offender.[56]

Figure 2. Breakdown of Extreme Right Homicides by Percent, 1990- 2008

- Other, 5
- Anti-Abortion, 5
- Anti-Homeless, 13
- Anti-LGBTQ, 11
- Anti-Racial/Ethnic, 51
- Anti-Government, 16

Legend: Other · Anti-Abortion · Anti-Homeless · Anti-LGBTQ · Anti-Racial/Ethnic · Anti-Government

Recent research on extreme-right homicide also sheds light on the backgrounds of offenders beyond demographic characteristics. Supporting prior research on far-right terrorism, analyses of ECDB data reveal that extreme-right homicide offenders are less educated than eco-terrorists and religious terrorists.[57] More specifically, ECDB data show that only 24 percent of extreme-right homicide offenders have some college education, compared to 45 percent of jihadi terrorists and 77 percent of eco-terrorists in the U.S.[58] In addition, about 25 percent of extreme-right homicide offenders are married, which is comparable to other terrorist offenders in the U.S. In regard to criminal behavior, over half of extreme-right homicide offenders have prior arrest records, and are significantly more likely to have criminal histories compared to other types of domestic terrorists (i.e. eco-terrorists, jihadi terrorists).

Extreme-Right Homicide Victim Attributes

The ECDB also collects information on the victims of extreme-right homicides, who have also been the focus of previous research. Like extreme-right homicide offenders, victims of these violent attacks are overwhelmingly male (90%), more so than the typical homicide victim in the U.S., though this finding does vary by type of victim.[59, 60] Unlike extreme-right homicide offenders, less than 50 percent of extreme-right victims are white, significantly less than the typical homicide victims in the U.S.[61] This aligns with findings that racial and ethnic minorities have been the most frequently targeted victims of extreme-rightists over the past several decades.[62] The racial statuses of extreme-right homicide victims do, however, vary by type of attack, as nearly 90 percent of government-related targets were white and all abortion-related targets were white. In regard to age, victims of extreme-right homicide are on average 37 years old, somewhat older than the typical homicide victim in the U.S.[63]

Law enforcement victims of extreme-right homicide have received increased attention by media and researchers alike.[64] Using data from the ECDB, a study by Gruenewald, Dooley, Suttmoeller, Freilich, and Chermak examined 30 cases of law enforcement officers who were killed by extreme-rightists between 1990 and 2014. [65] Most officers were employed by state and local police agencies and all were intentionally targeted and killed in the line of duty. Attacks were the result of routine police work with over 90 percent of law enforcement ultimately dying of gunshot wounds. Officers were attacked most often by surprise, without any observable warning signs of danger. The circumstances in which police officers have been killed by extreme-rightists in the U.S. include situations of avoiding arrest, defending property, defending family, and anti-law enforcement mission offenses. Extreme-right homicides involving law enforcement victims compare differently when juxtaposed with other types of fatal extreme-right attacks. For instance, the majority of officers were killed by anti-government extremists (63%), such as sovereign citizens, as opposed to white supremacists. Police officers killed by extreme-rightists were often targeted by offenders with known prior arrests for violent crimes, and nearly 40 percent of fatal anti-law enforcement attacks were committed by offenders who had previously made violent threats against government officials, including judges, police officers, and other public officials.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although research has already provided several important insights into the characteristics of far-right offending in the U.S., there is much work left to be done on this topic. In this section, we conclude our review with a few suggestions for future scholarship. First, researchers need to assess the nature of preparation for extreme-right offending to investigate how offenders learn how to commit their acts and how they acquire the necessary skills. We suspect that different types of terrorist acts require different knowledge bases and different expertise. So, how do offenders acquire this information, and from whom? Addressing such questions requires recognizing that becoming a terrorist is a social process. Therefore, future research should look to established theories such as social learning theory (SLT) and social network approaches to help explain the ideological and behavioral processes involved in radicalization toward violent terrorism.[66, 67] Rather than develop a general theory of radicalization, researchers should identify the unique structural positions and socialization processes of American extreme-right terrorists from those of foreign extreme-rightists and other types of terrorists[68]. Illuminating processes for learning about terrorism through planning and preparatory activities will inform

more nuanced, crime-specific counterterrorism programs and practices.

Second, research to date has primarily focused on violent crimes and related activities, but a better understanding of financial crimes and the relationships between violent and nonviolent crimes should be explored. Historically, terrorism databases have been limited to completed violent acts committed by non-state actors. But, in recent years, and armed with increased government funding, scholars and others have expanded terrorism databases to include foiled plots, tracked non-terrorist, non-violent financial schemes, and created counter-terrorism databases chronicling government interventions against terrorism. These enhanced data collection efforts allow for the empirical investigations of heretofore unexplored questions, including some of these outlined here. The ECDB, for example, includes substantial information about non-violent offenders involved in financial schemes that are used to fund organizations and criminal acts. Future researchers should use these data to explore patterns in non-violent offending by extreme-rightists who subsequently commit terrorist attacks.

Third, our current investigation is limited to completed fatal strikes, but after the 9/11 terrorist attacks American law enforcement – including the FBI, state, and local police – placed great stress on identifying and thwarting terrorism in the U.S. The few studies looking at foiled plots have tended to examine jihadist plots, and no study to our knowledge has explored the spatial-temporal, incident, and offender attributes of unsuccessful extreme-right terrorism in the U.S. As noted, previous research has also been undermined by the difficulty in obtaining official data on extreme-right foiled plots. In effect, social scientists and practitioners have much to gain in learning from the characteristics of planned and unsuccessful extreme-right attacks. Situational crime prevention and proactive policing strategies, for instance, have increasingly been used to combat terrorism. Scholars could test the efficacy of these approaches by examining whether they are more likely to have been used in foiled terrorism incidents compared to successful/completed attacks. These analyses may provide important insights into what counter-terrorism methods and policies are most effective in keeping the nation safe.[69]

Fourth, while a significant amount of research has been done to reveal how extreme-right homicide offenders are similar to, and different from, other extremists, we must not lose sight that only a relatively small portion of extreme-rightists ever turn to violence. It is therefore critical for future research to move beyond simply providing descriptive findings and to test theoretically derived hypotheses about why some extremists radicalize to violence, while the vast majority do not; and why some places are more likely to experience extreme-right violence.

As one explanatory approach, researchers could assume that all extreme-rightists are rational actors and that certain situational circumstances are simply more conducive to committing violence than others. Recent studies of violent hate crime using open-source data can provide direction for applying tenets of environmental criminology and interactionist perspectives to understand how certain sets of conditions influence extreme-rightists to view violence as an appropriate response to their situated circumstances.[70, 71, 72] Conceptualizing extreme-right violence as criminal events unfolding over time and space could allow researchers to build theories about how dynamic interactions between extremists and their surroundings lead to violence, and to test theories about what situational factors are most important for situationally inducing violence.[73]

Others have in the past applied Social Identity Theory to hate crimes against perceived others, or members of out-groups, committed in defense of offenders' social groups (or in-groups).[74, 75] This perspective could be more directly applied to forms of extreme-right violence. In one study, for instance, Glaser, Dixit, and Green interviewed participants of extremist online forums and found that participants were more likely to advocate violence when threats were made against their racial group (e.g., interracial marriage).[76] Because social identity theory does not explicitly explain why only a small number of individuals who adhere to extreme-right beliefs progress toward violence, Allison advocates for applying identity fusion theory to bias-motivated violence.[77, 78] This theory suggests that it is not only perceived threats to a salient group identity that leads to extreme violence, but defensive violence is more likely when an offender's personal identity is strongly fused with group identity. Such highly fused individuals are unique in that they feel a visceral oneness with their dominant social identity status and fellow social group members, maintaining an enhanced sense of duty to

defend both their self and social group from perceived threats. In this way, identity fusion theory could help to explain why relatively few extreme-rightists elevate to the level of commitment required to perpetrate violence, and why some offenders are triggered to commit violence by both personal and social attacks.

Future researchers may also want to apply Sampson and Laub's developmental social control theory to extreme-rightists who commit violence and those who do not as a way to better understand how certain turning points along an extremist's trajectory might lead to, or away from, violent offending.[79] This perspective provides a set of constructs that could be adapted and allow for empirical tests of hypotheses about the onset, persistence, maintenance, and desistence from offending. For instance, researchers could test whether theoretically relevant turning points, such as changes in marital status, military involvement, and employment status, are more or less likely to lead extreme-rightists to commit ideologically motivated violence. While collecting life history data from interviews with violent and non-extremists would be ideal for this type of research,[80] open-source data may also be used to attain background information on social patterns over life course trajectories.

Researchers should also extend scholarship on the extreme-right by applying macro-level theories to where extremist violence is more likely to occur. Cross-nationally, some studies find an inverse relationship between factors such as economic prosperity and terrorism, while Krueger and Maleckova and others have found little direct relationship between them.[80, 81] State and community-level findings regarding the effects of socio-economic conditions on terrorism are also mixed. Although some prior studies have found that states with higher levels of social disorganization (e.g. in the form of unemployment) are more likely to experience hate crime, others have found that more organized and affluent communities experience higher levels of hate crime. [82, 83] More relevant to the current research, one previous study by Freilich et al., tested the applicability of several macro-level theories, including relative deprivation and social disorganization, for explaining where extreme-right homicide is more likely to occur.[84] While finding similarities in the county-level correlates of extreme-right homicide and regular (non-extremist) homicide, they also found that different causal mechanism were responsible for explaining where these two forms of violence were more likely to occur. For a more refined understanding of where extreme-right crimes are expected to occur, future research needs to extend macro-level explanations beyond homicide to include non-violent crimes (e.g., financial schemes) and non-criminal extremist activities (e.g. protests).

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