

Extremism in the United States:
An Overview of the Trends leading to 2017

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Table of Contents

Introduction	pg 3-4
Overview of Extremist Organizations	pg 5-9
Militia organizations	pg 5-6
White Supremacists	pg 6-7
Wahhabist Extremists	pg 8-9
Anarchists	pg 9-10
Risks and Responses	pg 10-13
Closing Statements	pg 13
Citations	pg 14-15

Introduction:



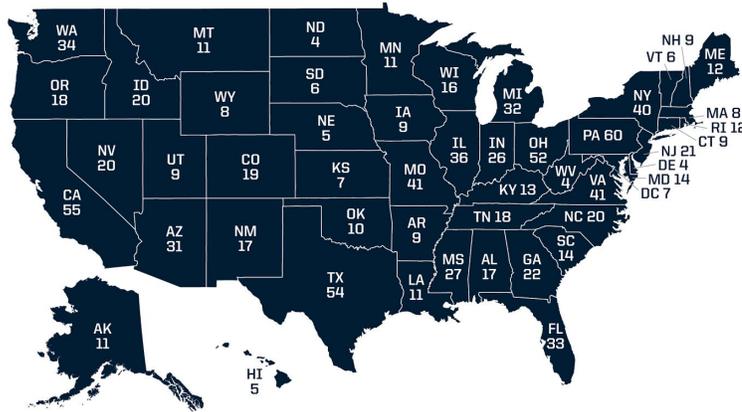
The Wall Street Bombing by Anarchist Terrorists (1920)

Extremism in the politics of the United States has been an issue since the birth of the republic. One might even say that there would be no United States without a healthy dose of extremism against the British colonial rulers. But as America's politics has developed over our two hundred forty year history, political violence and extremism has always reared it's ugly head when times got tough. Political violence is also not a tool used solely by one political party or religious group but by a wide variety of different beliefs and ideologies. Whether that was the August and June bombings by anarchists

in 1919, white nationalists murdering civil rights activists in the South in the civil rights movements of the 50's and 60's, or even as recent as the attempted assassination of Donald Trump by a British national in 2016. American politics have developed over the years to the point where there is no longer the support for violence and extremism in our discourse that we once saw earlier in our history. It was a long and arduous journey to bring American politics down a more civil path, but now some groups reject the idea of peaceful coexistence with other Americans. Now, as we are seeing American politics being pushed further to the extremes of both wings making more people susceptible to joining fringe groups that are only too willing to participate in political violence. In order to better oppose the push to political extremism in this country, one must understand how and why these groups operate. This paper will give an overview of the most dangerous of these fringe groups on both sides of American politics. What are the methods and motivations of these groups and how effective have they been over the years in achieving their political goals? This paper will also look at the responses by American law enforcement and the political establishment to increased political extremism over the last few years and its effectiveness in stemming this rise of extremism.

An Overview of Extremist Organizations:

 ANTIGOVERNMENT 'PATRIOT' GROUPS 2015 // 998 GROUPS



Militia organizations operate in every state in the United States

Anti-Government “Patriotic” Militias:

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there are 998 anti-government “patriotic” militia groups active in the United States as of 2015 (Active). The number of these groups were on the decline up until 2008 when the election of President Obama lead to the resurgence of these organizations. The motivation of these groups is to defend themselves from what they see as a tyrannical government that has overstepped the limits placed on it by the constitution and seek to overthrow the

government in a violent manner (What). In the past these groups have tried attacking symbols of government power or agents of the government. They also try to bait responses from the government by open carrying at political demonstrations and occupying federal land. The most deadly act of domestic terror was undertaken by sympathizers of this movement in the Oklahoma city bombing where one hundred sixty eight people were killed in 1995. The most recent high profile event since then was the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in 2016 that came very close to resulting in a shootout between police and the occupying militiamen (Liebelson).

White Supremacist Extremists:



Although not as relevant as it was in peak membership in the 1920's, the KKK remains a threat in many parts of the country

White Supremacists are one of the most dangerous extremist groups that are active within the United States. These groups include the infamous Ku Klux Klan, racist

skinhead movements and neo-confederate movements in the US. They are motivated by a hatred of other religious minorities or racial groups. White Supremacists believe that the successes of minority groups represents a threat to not only their own success but to their own culture too (White). They often try to oppress minorities politically through violence and intimidation. Historically these groups have held significantly more power over American politics and culture but they have been waning in power over the past several decades. For instance, the Ku Klux Klan has dropped from its height in popularity in the 1920's of around four million members down to only around five thousand today (Ku). Although they are certainly not as relevant today as they once were, White Supremacists have killed more Americans every year since the 9/11 attacks than Islamic inspired extremists have (Plucinska). Some of their methods include the use of threats to frighten minorities, murdering activists and assaulting successful minorities. A popular tactic used by these groups is to try to agitate the general public by holding anti-immigrant or anti-black rallies in areas that will disturb the maximum number of people (What). Due to a decline in membership and the fracturing of white supremacist organizations, many have relied on new media to spread their hateful messages with online papers like "the Daily Stormer" which describes itself as a white supremacist and alt-right website. These websites are used to spread headlines like "Israel Attacks Syrian Army Again – Second Time in Two Days!" accusing the Israeli government of supporting ISIS in their terrorism (Wines).

Wahhabist Extremists:



The Orlando Nightclub shooter pledged allegiance to ISIS before killing 49 innocent people

When Muslims commit acts of terrorism throughout the world, they are often labeled as acts of terror that are the norm for all of Islam. The reality is that these acts are almost universally condemned by American Muslims and Imams whenever they occur. When a Muslim man shot and killed forty nine patrons at an Orlando gay bar, many Muslims went to twitter to condemn the attack calling it un-Islamic (Durando). This begs the question as to why terrorism committed in the name of Islam even occurs at all in the US if the response from American Muslims universally condemn terrorism whenever it occurs? The source of this terrorism comes in large part from Muslims who are not particularly good Muslims. ISIS targets people who do not possess a very good understanding of Islam or the Qu'ran. This allows for ISIS to fool many young men into

believing that terrorism is sanctioned in the Qu'ran by reading selectively from it and ignoring the messages of peace and tolerance that run counter to the interests of the leadership (Koerner). These men then go off to either travel to Syria or try to commit terrorist acts at home. The biggest threat from ISIS inspired extremism is from lone wolf attacks rather than the major cell operations that Al-Qaeda practiced when they were relevant in the early to mid 2000's (Worth).

Anarchists Extremists:



Anarchists will often protest major events like trade talks and international meetings like the G20

Extremist groups are not only a problem on the right of American politics but also a problem that exists on the left too. Anarchists have been a threat in American politics since 1919 in a series of Anarchist bombings targeting high ranking bureaucrats and politicians. Ever since then Anarchists and other leftist organizations have used a mixture of legitimate and illegal tactics to pursue their political goals of anti-globalization

and anti-capitalism (What). Anarchists believe that all laws, governments, corporations, and security forces should be abolished. Because of the radical nature of this change, many anarchists believe that this can only be achieved through violent opposition to the state and to corporations. This is achieved through through a number of means especially through inciting riots, attempting assassinations on police and government officials, attacking symbols of government and corporate influence, and the destruction of private property. One high profile Anarchist attack is the shooting of two police officers in Las Vegas in 2014 (Morlin). Anarchists also associate themselves with anti-police and anti-government protests like in the Ferguson riots or the #OccupyWallStreet movements. Anarchists will usually only target major events that will gain a large amount of national media attention like a major economic summit or a major civil rights protest in response to a national tragedy like a police shooting a minority (Anarchists).

The Risks and Responses:

The largest risks posed by these organizations are not by the groups themselves but the ideas that they represent. While an organization can be broken up, its leaders arrested and civil suits brought up to defund it, the ideas that formed the group in the first place still remain. This is part of the reason why there is always a resurgence of extremist groups throughout history. For instance, the Klu Klux Klan has had two major resurgences, once in 1920 and again in the 1950's after their initial creation. The focus of American anti-extremism measures has been mostly to deal with the very real

physical threats that these groups pose to our security. While this is an extremely important part for our security forces to play, it does not address the issues that drive people to the ideological extremes. These forces are a lack of economic and educational opportunities due to a rapidly changing world.



Global poverty rates have been going down rapidly over the last 50 years and are projected to keep shrinking.

Economists are in agreement that globalization and free trade has led to a massive net gain for the world and for the global poor. Throughout the world, one billion people were dragged out of extreme poverty over the last twenty years (Towards). But one thing that left wing extremists, right wing extremists and many average Americans will agree on is that globalization has only benefited corporations and hurts the little guys. Why is there such a disconnect between the beliefs of the average person and that of accepted economic facts? Well many economists believe that the benefits of globalization are difficult to show compared to the very obvious negative effects that can

be seen in any detroit factory. It is very difficult to comfort a man who lost his job working at a steel mill with the fact that the economy is growing more now than it would have otherwise. And although most jobs have been lost due to automation rather than due to trade, globalization makes for a very good scapegoat to blame for the problems that are facing your country and your community. When these people see the governments that represent them are actively pursuing these policies that many people perceive as opposed to the common man, they get angry and more agitated. This anger and agitation can manifest itself in more ways than just by joining extremist organizations. Often this will manifest itself by people's support for radical political outsiders like Bernie Sanders or Donald Trump. This has lead to a massive political shift to the extremes of both sides of the aisle. By shifting politics to the extremes, American politics become less about compromising with others and create a toxic environment where joining an extremist organization becomes a more appealing prospect.

The solution that is required is not for a withdrawal from the ideas of economic liberalism and free trade that have lead to the rise in the quality of life in human history, but for a better understanding of the problems that we as a society are faced with. There are structural unemployment issues in the United States and the rest of the western world that are not being adequately addressed by those who are in charge. The best way to ensure that we both live in a society that does not allow for people to be seduced by extremist organizations is to ensure that the status quo is working for them too. This likely means more targeted social safety nets like job retraining for those who've lost work due to structural unemployment. American can pay for these programs

with the newfound wealth from globalist policies. Political economist Benjamin Friedman suggests that this response would be the best, noting that poor economic conditions are a good predictor of political extremism “It was not mere happenstance that, for a while, white supremacist groups were more active and visible than at any time since the 1930s, anti government private “militias” flourished as never before” (Friedman). The pursuit of this policy ensures that people are less likely to be forced into a bad situation and a convinced of an evil ideology because they are being fed easy answers to their problems.

Closing Statements:

There are a lot of important points that can be made about extremism and a lot of history to cover. But this is a basic overview of extremism in the United States and how it grows and why it is a danger that needs to be addressed. Extremism is not a problems that is unique to the United States, but the US is in a position essentially end any veneer of political legitimacy it once had. With the proper mix of effective law enforcement, generous social safety nets and education programs extremism can continue the trend downward in popularity that it was following leading into the 20th century. Although extremist attacks and actions are always popular news, they represent a very small threat to the average American. According to a Cato institute study, Americans only have a 1 in 3,609,709 chance of being killed by a foreign born terrorist (Gould). So while it is important to ensure that these groups never gain any real political or cultural relevance ever again in American politics, it is also important to keep

the issues in perspective. If properly managed, extremism can perhaps become a minor issue one day in the near future, or disappear completely.

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