

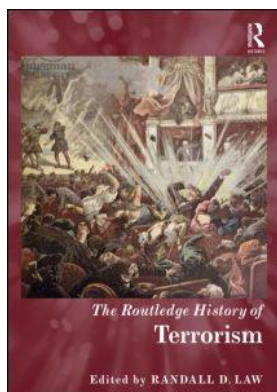
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Part IV

RECENT DECADES

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CONTEMPORARY DOMESTIC TERRORISM IN THE UNITED STATES

Carolyn Gallaher

We can learn a good deal about how Americans understand terrorism by the adjectives we place in front of it. When scholars, pundits, and everyday citizens modify terrorism with adjectives like “homegrown” or “domestic,” they signal that terrorism, in its most essential form, is something that happens “over there,” “outside” American borders. Likewise, when journalists and pundits describe terrorism occurring in the US as “attacks on American soil,” they suggest the terrorism in question is an aberration by virtue of its location. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, commentators started modifying terrorism more frequently with adjectives such as “Islamic” or “Middle Eastern.” The adjective assured us that even if the terrorists lived here, they were not from here or like “us” (citizens of a presumably Christian nation).

Despite the assumption that terrorism happens over there, and that when it does happen here, it is wrought by foreigners, American history provides countless examples to the contrary (in this volume see Chapters 6, 9, and 10 by Matthew Jennings, Thai Jones, and R. Blakeslee Gilpin, respectively). Violence meant to terrorize, or otherwise cow an opponent with different political aims, is as much a part of the American political landscape as primaries, debates, and conventions.¹

In this chapter, I explore so-called domestic terrorism. Before proceeding, however, a few definitions are in order. Although terrorism is a deceptively simple concept – presumably a “you know it when you see it” phenomenon – there are a multitude of debates² about how to define it (see Randall D. Law’s introduction to this volume). Here I use a simple definition. Terrorism is the use of violence or the threat of violence to meet a political objective, albeit with one important caveat. Unlike other forms of political violence, terrorist violence is focused (whether by purpose or necessity) on people not intimately or often even tangentially involved in the political issue at hand. Indeed, the terrorizing of innocents is the crucial thing that distinguishes terrorism from other forms of violence – spilling innocent blood is seen as necessary, or inevitable, to secure political victory. The term domestic terrorism refers to terrorist violence that occurs within a country rather than across its borders and in cases where the perpetrator and the victim live in the same country. The intended audience of domestic terrorism is usually a domestic audience as well (e.g., the US government or a group the perpetrator wants to intimidate). However, the audience can also be international inasmuch as domestic terrorists often want their attack to embarrass a domestic target on the international stage.

The goal of this chapter is to provide a panoramic view of domestic terrorism in the US since 1970, with a particular focus on definitional debates and key patterns across the period. Other chapters in this volume cover domestic terrorism in earlier periods of US history. The

remainder of this chapter is organized in the following manner. I begin with a brief appraisal of the terrorism literature. I then discuss three key debates that drive the literature on domestic terrorism. In the third section I overview key patterns in domestic terrorism and discuss changes in them over time, using a wide array of examples in illustration.

A vast literature and a very brief summary

Thousands of articles and books have been devoted to the subject of terrorism. Not surprisingly, the ground covered is immense. The literature can be categorized in various ways. Some scholarship is regional in nature – i.e., works that look at terrorism in the Middle East,³ Asia,⁴ Central Asia,⁵ or Latin America.⁶ There are even entire bodies of literature devoted to particular terrorist groups. The literature on Peru's Sendero Luminoso is so immense it constitutes its own field of study – Senderology.⁷ Other scholarship is focused on ideological variants of terrorism, such as right-wing terrorism.⁸ Some terrorism scholarship is associated with particular theoretical stances, such as rational choice, liberal interventionism, and constructivism.⁹ There are even debates about whether terrorism has changed so much in the last few decades that it amounts to something new.¹⁰

Although the definition of terrorism does not include geographic limits, most American scholarship is, as I suggest in the introduction, focused outside of the US. The literature on domestic terrorism is, therefore, much smaller and less readily categorized than the wider literature. In the discipline of history, for example, Beverly Gage observes that domestic terrorism has only been covered in a scattershot fashion (usually tracking current event trends), and what is covered is often of limited depth. As she notes:

But even into the 1990s, there was little effort to assess these events [terrorist attacks in the US] in the context of domestic political trends or even U.S. foreign policy; nor was there much attempt to integrate them into historical debates about the nature of American national identity, social conflicts, and political traditions.¹¹

There are a number of reasons for the disparity. When compared to many other countries in the world, for example, the US has had relatively little terrorist violence. The US has not experienced any guerrilla wars or insurgencies within its borders since the Civil War. Although guerrillas and insurgents are not necessarily terrorist organizations, they often adopt terrorist tactics over time. The Shining Path in Peru and the Basque separatists in Spain both began as classic guerrilla groups but soon employed tactics that killed innocent civilians and threatened others not willing/able to submit to their demands.

After Timothy McVeigh bombed the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma in 1995, US law enforcement officials began paying closer attention to domestic terrorist groups. However, that focus was diverted after nineteen men, fifteen of them Saudi nationals, hijacked four planes on September 11, 2001, hitting the World Trade Center towers in New York, the Pentagon in Virginia, and a field in Pennsylvania.¹² Given the anxiety about the “other” engendered by the attack – as well as the government's response to it – most law enforcement and scholarly attention shifted quickly to focus on terrorism committed by foreigners in the US or against US targets abroad. When domestic terrorists (i.e., people from the US) are examined, they tend to be terrorists embracing foreign ideologies. Much less attention is given to terrorists who are from the US and who are motivated by domestic ideologies rooted in American history and given form through its culture or regional cultures within it.

The limited and disparate work on domestic terrorism has important implications for how we understand domestic terrorism. Most importantly, there is a general fuzziness that surrounds the concept. In the next section, I highlight this fuzziness by examining three debates within the field of scholars and practitioners dealing with domestic terrorism. The nature of these debates suggests that there is not even a basic agreement on what constitutes a domestic terrorist.

Debates within the field of domestic terrorism

Where does ideology end and terrorism begin?

The first debate centers on the criteria used to define a person or group as a terrorist or terrorist group respectively. In the domestic context, this debate has focused on the question of whether espousing a hate-filled ideology is sufficient basis for using the terrorist label. Some argue that the terrorist label should be reserved for those who have actually committed a terrorist act. Others argue for a broader definition, noting that hateful ideologies – i.e., ones that subject an entire group of people to suspicion and hate because of biological traits, such as skin color, and/or cultural traditions, like religion or dress – create a discursive space for justifying and encouraging terrorist violence. As such, the groups built up around these ideologies can rightly be labeled as terrorists. In the US, this debate has tended to play out in policy conversations about right-wing ideology.

Although this debate has simmered for decades, it became a headline issue in the spring of 2009 when an internal Department of Homeland Security (DHS) intelligence assessment was leaked in the media.¹³ Although the title of the report did not describe right-wing extremist groups as terrorists, the executive summary did:

The DHS/Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) has no specific information that domestic rightwing terrorists are currently planning acts of violence, but rightwing extremists may be gaining new recruits by playing on their fears about several emergent issues. The economic downturn and the election of the first African American president present unique drivers for rightwing radicalization and recruitment.¹⁴

The report engendered a quick and angry response by self-described right-wing commentators and bloggers. On her self-named blog, Michelle Malkin wrote a post on April 14, 2009, describing the report as “one of the most embarrassingly shoddy pieces of propaganda I’d ever read out of DHS.” In a blog posting on The Liberty Papers two days earlier, Stephen Gordon argued that the assessment “targets most conservatives and libertarians in the country,” observing that “all it takes to fit the terrorist profile is to have general anti-government feelings or prefer local/state government to federal control over everything.” Critics also took issue with the report’s warning that right-wing extremist groups might actively recruit veterans that were “disgruntled, disillusioned, or suffering from the psychological effects of war.”¹⁵ And, they were especially angry that the report cited Timothy McVeigh as an example. As the American Legion explained in a blog post on April 16, 2009, about the initial report and secretary Janet Napolitano’s subsequent apology, “To continue to use McVeigh as an example of the stereotypical ‘disgruntled military veteran’ is as unfair as using Osama bin Laden as the sole example of Islam.”

The furor led the Department of Homeland Security to officially recall the report, even though the secretary had been briefed on the report before its release, and it had already been sent to fusion centers¹⁶ and selected law enforcement agencies across the country. The report's main author, Daryl Johnson, left the department in 2010. In 2011, he gave an interview to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) defending the report's findings and condemning its critics for politicizing the issue.

I'd also like people to know that we were not directing LEOs [law enforcement officials] to do anything. We were prohibited from doing so. All we could do was say there is a trend emerging, and if you have these folks in your jurisdiction, perhaps you should think about how you are using your resources.¹⁷

He also rebuffed the charges that the report was aimed at conservatives. As he told Heidi Beirich at SPLC, "they [my critics] would have been shocked to know that I personify conservatism. I'm an Eagle Scout. I'm a registered Republican. I'm Mormon."¹⁸

While the furor over the report, as well as Johnson's public discussions of it, focused on whether the report was partisan in nature, Johnson did address the wider question of interest here: was it appropriate to label anti-government groups on the right as terrorists when they had not been involved in any acts of violence? Indeed, though the report he helped author never included a working definition of the term "right-wing extremism," Johnson acknowledged in the interview that his group intentionally used a broad working definition of the term, which allowed them to discuss a variety of right-wing groups and movements, not all of which had been involved in recent criminal or terrorist activity. Explaining the internal review process for the report, for example, he noted:

One office [inside DHS] raised issues – the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties [CRCL]. At the time, we weren't required to give them the report, but my boss thought we should run it past them. They had edits, but the main issue related to the definition of right-wing extremism. That office wanted a narrow definition limited to violent groups and individuals. Our subject-matter experts and management felt the definition needed to be broader. Under CRCL's definition, if you were in the Klan, burned crosses, had a terrorist in your house and donated money to groups advocating violence, you still would not qualify as a right-wing extremist.¹⁹

While the furor has largely subsided over the recalled report, many groups still use the terrorist label to describe groups that have not committed any crime. In its most recent (2013) annual publication *The Year in Hate and Extremism*, for example, the Southern Poverty Law Center used the words "terror," "conspiracy," and "political violence" interchangeably to label the right-wing extremist groups it tracks.²⁰

Healthy debates about terminology can be good. Efforts to sharpen or change the meaning of a category can, for example, be useful when the previous definition no longer captures the behavior it is meant to describe. For law enforcement purposes, there is also some benefit to having broad categories because more potential cases can be tried under them.²¹ However, the flexibility of the categories we use to capture certain kinds of violence make counting and tracking domestic terrorism difficult. If there is not clarity or agreement on who is being counted, then it is hard for a researcher to combine existing datasets or to use a dataset whose definition does not match his/her own.

What counts as domestic?

Another line of debate concerns how to define the parameters of the domestic. In particular, while scholars and experts tend to agree that a terrorist act is domestic if it is committed in the US by someone from or living in the US, there is no consensus on whether that person's ideology must also be "homegrown."

In many ways this is a new debate. It is a product of the conceptual confusion that ensued in the wake of 9/11. Before it, ideology was not a factor in distinguishing the domestic from the international. Rather, the question hinged on geography – where the attack occurred (at home or abroad) and where the person or group that directed it came from (home or abroad). For example, the FBI's 1999 definition of terrorism, excerpted below, makes no mention of the terrorist's ideology or origin:

Domestic terrorism is the unlawful use, or threatened use, of force or violence by a group or individual based and operating entirely within the United States or its territories without foreign direction committed against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.²²

The 1994 definition of international terrorism is equally silent on the geographic origins of ideology. As above, the geography of the attack and the attackers are central.

International terrorist acts occur outside the United States or transcend national boundaries in terms of the means by which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to coerce or intimidate, or the locale in which the perpetrators operate or seek asylum.²³

In response to the 9/11 attacks, the US launched its "global war on terror." This war upended the unspoken geography that underpinned American notions of domestic (and international) terrorism. Americans were suddenly confronted with the fact that a terrorist act with mass casualties could not only occur at home but be launched by foreigners who were living/working/studying in our country. Suddenly, the lines between "us" and "them" and "here" and "there" were blurred. They grew even blurrier when American citizens were implicated in terrorist activity inside the US that explicitly invoked the ideology of al-Qaeda, the organization behind the 9/11 attacks. A year after the 9/11 attacks, for example, an American-born citizen named José Padilla was arrested for plotting a dirty bomb attack in the US. Other attacks followed. In 2009, an Army psychiatrist named Nidal Hasan went on a shooting rampage at Fort Hood to avenge American violence in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In a discursive sense, people like Padilla and Hasan are categorically troubling. Although both were American citizens, they justified their attacks using foreign ideology. Indeed, it was not their anger at the US government that made them stand out – plenty of US domestic terrorists have targeted the US government – but rather the "foreignness" of the ideologies they used to defend their actions.

In response to this discursive unease, there were calls to refine definitions of domestic terrorism to account for terrorists influenced by foreign ideology. The impetus behind these calls did not, however, emerge from scholarly quarters. Rather, it came from the US government and, within it, the newly created Department of Homeland Security. Although

DHS's mandate was to track all threats to the domestic sphere, it was clear that the new agency would focus on individuals and groups inspired by al-Qaeda. And that focus would require disaggregation of the data on domestic threats to account for differences between those influenced by domestic ideology and those driven by foreign ideology. The result was a new category of domestic terrorism – homegrown violent extremism. DHS and the FBI made the category official in 2011:

DHS and FBI define an HVE as a person of any citizenship who has lived and/or operated primarily in the United States or its territories who advocates, is engaged in, or is preparing to engage in ideologically-motivated terrorist activities (including providing support to terrorism) in furtherance of political or social objectives promoted by a foreign terrorist organization, but is acting independently of direction by a foreign terrorist organization.²⁴

Supporters of the new categorization argue that Americans have categorized terrorism incorrectly for far too long. Erroll Southers, for example, points to two common mistakes. First, Americans tend to look at terrorism as something that happens “over there” or that it is otherwise an anomaly inside the US. Unfortunately, this view blinds us to the fact that “dogmatic zealotry has embedded itself into the fabric of communities throughout the United States.”²⁵ As an example, he points to the initial search for the perpetrators of the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013. Officials originally thought a Saudi national with shrapnel wounds was a likely suspect. It soon became apparent, however, that the true perpetrators – Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev – were “homegrown.” Although they were born in Chechnya, both grew up in the US. In this regard, the category of homegrown violent extremism is important because it forces us to look at home for the source of threats. As Southers argues, “the origin of the ideology is irrelevant . . . what matters is where it was embraced.”²⁶

The second mistake is to treat terrorism as a uniform phenomenon. There is no single terrorist threat, so there can be no unitary approach to combating it. Southers argues, for example, that developing threat profiles within the category of homegrown violent extremists is crucial so that law enforcement officers know the complexity of the phenomena they are meant to track and ultimately counter.²⁷ For those interested in stopping the HVE threat, the most important thing to understand is the multitude of ways that people are radicalized, rather than the ideology that frames their radicalization.

The concept of radicalization is fairly new in terrorism studies.²⁸ The literature used to explain individual participation in terrorism as the result of macro-level factors such as poverty, limited avenues for political expression, or cultural values. Radicalization was embraced in the immediate post-9/11 atmosphere when attempts to explain terrorist motivations using these variables were often equated with support for such groups. As Peter Neumann, one of the founders of contemporary radicalization studies explains:

In the highly charged atmosphere following the September 11 attacks, it was through the notion of radicalization that a discussion about the political, economic, social and psychological forces that underpin terrorism and political violence became possible again.²⁹

Despite the growing acceptance of the HVE category (and the attendant focus on radicalization) across US government agencies, the shift is not without criticism. As a person who

has studied the US patriot movement,³⁰ for example, I disagree that ideology is what distinguishes terrorists like Hasan and the Tsarnaev brothers from terrorists like Timothy McVeigh. In fact, on the face of it, these three attacks have a number of things in common. All three perpetrators acted as “lone wolves,” and all three appeared to have been motivated to some extent by a desire to enact revenge against the US government. The primary difference between these attacks is the scale of violence. McVeigh killed many more people (168) than either Hasan (thirteen) or the Tsarnaev brothers (three) did, suggesting that tactical sophistication was the primary dividing line between them. In this light, categorizing Hasan and the Tsarnaev brothers differently from McVeigh seems less about empirics than politics. That is, the HVE designation reifies the foreign heritage of Hasan and the Tsarnaev brothers even though it is not a trait that empirically distinguishes their attacks from those of other domestic terrorists. It also encourages Americans to continue seeing terrorism as something that happens “over there” or that is imported from abroad. In so doing, it diverts our attention away from the long-standing use of terrorism by American citizens drawing on American ideologies.

A related critique concerns the growth of counter-radicalization programs to thwart HVEs. While critics agree that the concept of radicalization *was* useful in creating a space to talk about the “why” behind terrorist attacks, a veritable industry of experts has emerged to deal with HVEs, and their practices are often quite problematic.³¹ In particular, counter-radicalization singles out a subset of domestic terrorists for special scrutiny that other equally dangerous groups do not receive. In his study of Britain’s Prevent Violent Extremism program, Paul Thomas notes that the program was monocultural because it focused almost exclusively on Muslim youth.³² Moreover, the monocultural nature of the program tended to work at cross-purposes with the program’s stated goal. Specifically, instead of mitigating the alienation that many Muslim youth in Britain feel, it ended up reinforcing their differences from the British mainstream. Likewise, Arun Kundnani argues that the Muslim-centric focus of counter-radicalization programs have opened Muslim communities up to surveillance by government officials, scholars, and other experts. This scrutiny has, in turn, contributed to an erosion of trust between Muslims and the wider communities in which they live. Many Muslims feel like they are considered “suspect” simply because they are Muslim.³³

Can we categorize violence fueled by bigotry as terrorism?

In October 2012, Wade Michael Page entered a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, and started shooting. He killed six people before turning the gun on himself. Although the investigations into Wade’s motives were complicated by his suicide, Wade’s history with white supremacist groups and the white power music scene suggested that he was motivated by hatred of non-white racial groups. Although US Attorney General Eric Holder initially labeled the shooting a hate crime,³⁴ the police investigating the scene described it as “a domestic terrorist-type incident.”³⁵

The different labels suggest another unanswered question within the scholarly and policy circles focused on domestic terrorism. Indeed, though most definitions of domestic terrorism cite terrorists as having “political” motivations, there is no agreement on what constitutes “politics.” Classic notions of politics revolve around matters of governance – how an economy should be organized, what rights citizens will have, and how crimes will be adjudicated. In the context of terrorism, this view of politics would see the terrorist desire to replace a sitting government or get it to do (or stop doing) something as political.

However, “identity politics,” which can be broadly defined as the politics of defending or advocating for groups defined by a shared identity (e.g., religious, ethnic/racial, etc.), casts a broader definitional net. In this conception, politics also involves questions over cultural and social dominance. In the context of terrorism, groups defending a given ethnic group – or, more precisely attacking all other ethnic groups – would be viewed as political, even if the attackers made no claim on formal government power. Claudia Card observes that scholars using the first definition of politics to define terrorism (she calls this the coercion model) do not typically view hate as part of the equation. Indeed, when innocents are killed, they are more often than not viewed as “throwaways,” as pawns whose death will coerce the group’s primary target.³⁶ Moreover, terrorist political rationality – evidenced by the clear articulation of a goal to take over government – means they can be negotiated with. By contrast, scholars who adopt the second view (Card refers to this approach as the group target model) think hate – and the related racial, cultural, and social dimensions – is often a vital part of the terrorist logic because it is about establishing dominance over a particular group. As such, hating and attacking another group can be political.

This debate is more than scholarly. Formal definitions of “hate crime” and domestic terrorism do not offer much clarification. Although hate can be the motivating factor in a hate crime or domestic terrorism event, the distinction used by the FBI – individual malice for a hate crime and ideological malice for terrorists – can be difficult to delineate on the ground.³⁷ In the Oak Creek case, for example, sorting through a dead perpetrator’s motives is as much an art as a science. Nor is there a clear agreement on what the balance between individual malice and malice driven by ideology would need to be to select the “proper” category for a given perpetrator.

Recent patterns in domestic terrorism

Given the debates outlined above, it is difficult to discuss patterns in domestic terrorism using quantitative data without making definitional sacrifices. And because there are no consensus standards for defining domestic terrorism, most databases will include or leave out instances that a particular author or analyst would otherwise include. However, the databases that do exist can serve as a broad guide for looking at patterns of contemporary terrorism. In this section, I rely on two databases for quantitative data, the Global Terrorism Database³⁸ and the Homegrown Threat Database.³⁹ The first database (1970 to present) includes terror acts committed by so-called traditional⁴⁰ terrorists and HVEs. The second database, which also includes traditional terrorists and HVEs, is smaller in temporal scope. It only includes terrorist acts between 2000 and 2013. I also rely on individual, often ethnographic, work to lend texture to some of the statistical patterns.

A politics with limited appeal

In a relative sense, the US has been lucky. Although terrorism has been a part of the political landscape since the country’s inception, citizens have not routinely resorted to terrorism to meet their political goals. This is not to suggest that the violence that has occurred is excusable or can be dismissed as a marginal phenomenon. Even one act of terrorism is too much. However, a quick survey of the Global Terrorism Database⁴¹ demonstrates that the North American region has, since 1970, been spared the scale of terrorism found in other regions.⁴² Between 1970 and 2012, for example, North America has had fewer incidents (2,896) of

terrorism than Western Europe (15,115), Sub-Saharan Africa (8,175), Central America and the Caribbean (10,567), South America (17,997), and the Middle East and North Africa (23,118). And, though the US has more incidents (2,242) than many of its fellow NATO members – Germany (542), France (1,101), Italy (1,413) – it ranks below both Great Britain⁴³ (3,267) and Spain (2,752). The number of US incidents also pales in comparison to developing countries that have had civil wars or other lengthy insurgencies, such as Peru (5,408) and El Salvador (3,699).⁴⁴

Terrorist incidents in the United States have also involved relatively few deaths. Between 1970 and 2012, just over ninety percent of attacks involved no fatalities (1,986).⁴⁵ Of the attacks that did involve fatalities (197), ninety-six percent involved ten or fewer people. Only four attacks involved more than 100 fatalities – the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and the attacks on the Pentagon and two World Trade Towers on 9/11.⁴⁶ When non-fatal injuries are examined, a similar pattern emerges. Casualties per attack tended to be only slightly higher than fatalities. Just over eighty-eight percent of incidents (1,923) involved no injuries, and ninety-three percent of attacks that did involve injuries (248) involved ten or fewer people.⁴⁷ When compared to patterns in global terror attacks, these numbers suggest that attacks in the US are less intense, as measured by human toll. Indeed, only fifty-seven percent of total global terror attacks involved no fatalities (the percentage for attacks with no injuries is 69.5 percent), and in attacks that did, 90.7 percent involved ten or fewer fatalities (the corresponding percentage for injuries is 78.7 percent).⁴⁸ These data suggest that most domestic terrorists focused their attacks on property⁴⁹ (e.g., police patrol cars, buildings) or were unable/unwilling to successfully carry off attacks involving large numbers of people.

Incidents of terrorism in the United States are also on the decline. In 1970, for example, there were more than 450 recorded cases of terrorist attacks. After the early 1970s, the number of incidences decreases sharply; after 1977, the number of recorded cases never exceeds 100. In 2012, there were thirteen recorded cases.

The numbers are also low if we narrow our focus to incidents of domestic terrorism in the Homegrown Threat Database (recall that this dataset includes traditional terrorists and HVEs). This database indicates that between September 11, 2001, and June 17, 2013, there were 309 individual indictments against domestic terrorism suspects. Just under half of these (178 indictments or forty-six percent of the total) involve citizens influenced by domestic ideologies. This translates to an average of fifteen so-called traditional domestic terrorist attacks a year. And the total number of people killed by domestic terrorists between 2000 and the present was twenty-nine. These are low numbers. Consider, for example, that an average of fifty-three people are killed a year by lightning strikes in the US.⁵⁰

Shifting patterns

During the forty plus years covered by the Global Terrorism Database, there have been a number of shifting patterns. To demonstrate these, I will take a snapshot of patterns from the decade of the 1970s and compare them to more recent decades. In the 1970s, domestic terrorism exhibited several key characteristics. First, most terrorist attacks (where a perpetrator is known) were associated with a group. Second, it was a busy decade for domestic terrorism. Fifty-eight percent of all terrorist attacks occurring in the US in the Global Terrorism Database occurred during the 1970s. It was, in a sense, domestic terrorism's heyday, even if the death toll was fairly low (156). Indeed, the total number of

terrorist-related fatalities in the 1970s is less than the total number of people killed in either the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing or the attacks on 9/11.

During the 1970s, a slightly greater share of terrorists can also be classified as left-wing than right-wing. Although the political categories of “left” and “right” are themselves fungible, they are a useful, if imperfect way to capture political variation within the universe of domestic terrorism. Typically, right-wing politics refers to groups who support limited government involvement in the economy and traditional social hierarchies of race, tribe, sect, gender, etc. Left-wing politics refers to groups who believe government intervention in the economy is necessary to ensure a more level playing field between social and cultural groups. Left-wing groups also support expanding/improving the participation of minority or stigmatized groups in social, economic, and political life.

In the 1970s, left-wing terrorist groups were strongly focused on oppression and the US’s role in perpetrating it at home and abroad. The Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional, a terrorist group devoted to securing independence for the island of Puerto Rico, was involved in eighty-one terrorist incidents between 1970 and 1979. Likewise, the New World Liberation Front (NWLFF), which was devoted to “liberating” African Americans from conditions of oppression, engaged in eighty-five terrorist incidents during the same time period. NWLFF, which was largely active in the San Francisco Bay area, focused on bombing property associated with individuals or companies seen as oppressing minorities. They also firebombed police cars. The Weather Underground also organized against what it saw as US oppression at home and abroad. The Weather Underground’s stated goal was to overthrow the US government, and most of their forty-one attacks were lodged against government buildings. In 1972, for example, the group placed a bomb in a women’s restroom at the Pentagon to protest the US government’s bombing of Hanoi. However, the group was also involved in one of the era’s more peculiar crimes, when it helped break Timothy Leary, a psychologist and advocate of LSD therapy, out of a California prison in 1970.

There were, of course, right-wing groups active during the 1970s as well. The Jewish Defense League⁵¹ was involved in forty-four acts of terrorism in that decade. The group’s primary targets were neo-Nazis and Arab Americans. It also attacked the property of Arab governments inside the country. The right-wing group Omega-7, formed by Cuban exiles, was engaged in twenty-three terror attacks during the 1970s. The group attacked people and property associated with Cuba as well as American citizens seen as supporting the Castro regime.⁵² During the 1970s, the group killed one person and injured four. The nascent anti-abortion movement also began to engage in terrorism during this decade. Nine attacks against abortion providers or property where abortions were provided occurred during the 1970s.

Today, the character of domestic terrorism is quite different. A primary difference is that acts of terror have declined significantly from their 1970s heyday. Attacks between 2000 and 2011, for example, only account for nine percent of total terror attacks since 1970. However, the largest death toll is found in the contemporary period. There are a number of potential explanations for the larger death toll, including a growing technological sophistication (e.g., larger bombs) and recognition that a twenty-four-hour news cycle requires more carnage to get attention.

A second difference is that attacks are increasingly launched by individuals who are not directly connected to any group. Between 2000 and 2010, thirty-two percent of attacks in the Global Terrorism Database were by people “with no apparent affiliation to a known extremist group.”⁵³ Two terrorists personify this move away from group-sanctioned terrorism.

Timothy McVeigh, the perpetrator of the Oklahoma City bombing, worked with one accomplice and was not a formal member of any militia groups, though he is believed to have attended militia meetings in Michigan and read militia/patriot literature. Likewise, Nidal Hasan, the Army psychiatrist who shot and killed thirteen people at Fort Hood in 2009, is known to have developed sympathy for radical interpretations of Islam but is not believed to have been directly affiliated with any group.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the 9/11 attacks, which were perpetrated by a group of mostly Saudi nationals working for al-Qaeda, radical Islamism and salafi jihadism are behind a growing number of domestic terror threats. (For more details on Islamism/jihadism see Chapters 18, 17, and 22 by Cook, Calvert, and Gartenstein-Ross, respectively, in this volume.) According to the Homegrown Threat Database, for example, fifty-four percent of domestic terror attacks between September 11, 2001, and June 17, 2013, were conducted by “jihadist” terrorists.⁵⁴ While these data are suggestive, a note of caution is warranted. In particular, the Homegrown Threat Database includes attacks that were not seen to fruition. Moreover, when the database compares “deadly” attacks across groups, the number of attacks by “jihadists” (twenty) is actually one-third smaller than the number attributed to “right wing” groups (twenty-nine).

Some scholars also argue that the concentration of domestic terrorist activity not perpetrated by radical Islamists and jihadists has shifted from the left to the right on the political spectrum.⁵⁵ The Homegrown Threat Database indicates that between 2000 and 2013, seventy-six percent of all domestic terrorists (i.e., “traditional” and HVEs) may be classified as right-wing. Many of these terrorists are associated with either white supremacist or militia/patriot groups. Although outsiders often see these groups as synonymous, there are important differences between them. White supremacist groups place the racial dominance of whites at the top of their agenda. Most militia/patriot groups, by contrast, do not openly advocate for the dominance of one racial group over another. Although most patriot groups have an all-white membership, minorities are not usually prevented from joining militias. Militia/patriot groups are primarily concerned with fighting the “new world order,” which they define as an international conspiracy, aided and abetted by US government officials, to erode the sovereignty of the United States. Other right-wing attacks are associated with the anti-abortion movement, though these attacks are linked to individual activists rather than specific anti-abortion groups. Of the nineteen attacks against abortion-related targets between 2000 and 2011 in the Global Terrorism Database, for example, none was associated with an anti-abortion group.

Terrorism from the left remains, however, an important part of the domestic terrorist scene. The Homegrown Threat Database notes, for example, that seventeen percent of domestic terrorist cases involve animal rights and environment-focused groups. Two of the biggest groups in action today are the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and the Earth Liberation Front (ELF). The ALF, which was founded in 1976, advocates the ideas of Peter Singer, whose touchstone book, *Animal Liberation*, first published in 1975, argues that animals should have the same rights as humans.⁵⁶ ALF’s mission is to destroy the capacity of organizations that abuse animals. Activists typically target animal-holding facilities; after freeing animals, the group inflicts damage to the property.⁵⁷ The Earth Liberation Front, founded in 1992, deploys a similar approach to ALF. The group targets businesses that it thinks are contributing to the destruction of the environment. They often target building sites in environmentally sensitive areas.⁵⁸ ALF and ELF have also worked together. In 1997, the two groups set fire to Bureau of Land Management property in Oregon reserved for wild

horse corrals. In the Global Terrorism Database, the ALF and the ELF are responsible for eighty-seven terrorist acts (thirty-seven by ALF and fifty for ELF) between 2000 and 2010.

Discursive shifts

To some degree, all terrorists cite oppression to justify their actions. However, if we look at domestic terrorism in the US and confine it to groups that are not connected to radical Islamism/jihadism, discourses around who is doing the oppression and how they are doing it have changed. These changes broadly reflect the emergence of globalization and the new anxieties it has produced. We can see this trend by examining who terrorists target, and how conceptualizations of the “who” have changed over time.

Although the government is a consistent rhetorical and physical target throughout the period covered here, how terrorist groups view the government has varied over time. In the 1970s, the US government was depicted by terrorists across the political spectrum as a menacing, unchecked force. In the domestic sphere, it could oppress minorities and women (a concern of left-wing groups) as well as fetuses (the fear of right-wing groups). In the foreign realm, it could start wars and abuse peasants and other poor people with little regard for domestic or international laws. Today, terrorists on the left and right still see the government as a powerful entity, but they no longer see its power as unchecked. Indeed, a central point of the militia/patriot movement during the 1990s was that the US was slowly divesting its sovereignty to global institutions. As such, while militia and patriot groups described government agents as jack-booted thugs, they believed their thuggish behavior could be traced to the fact that the US government was no longer controlled by Americans, but rather by supranational organizations like the UN.⁵⁹

Likewise, when animal rights groups attack slaughterhouses or government labs, they situate their attack in a wider corporate context. Indeed, in this manner, US laws meant to protect animals or accord them humane treatment are poorly enforced because the US government is seen as beholden to wider corporate interests. Carl Boggs, who studies and advocates animal rights from a self-described “critical left” perspective, refers to this center of power as “the corporate-imperial order,” signifying that something greater than the state is holding the oppressive reins of power.⁶⁰

Domestic terrorism going forward

Although the patterns suggested here are provocative and certainly useful for those interested in stopping terrorist attacks, our ability to fully understand domestic terrorism is limited by our inability to define what we are talking about. Of course, definitional muddiness is not confined to domestic terrorism. Debates about what does and does not constitute an act of terror are just as strong in circles looking at international terrorism. However, in the domestic sphere, these debates matter because the denominator (or total cases) is quite small. If we take a broader definition of what constitutes domestic terrorism, for example, our denominator can more than double. Adding attacks against property, for example, increases the numbers. So, too, does adding HVEs.

The fact that the terrorism denominator is not fixed also suggests that in many respects “terrorism” is a discursive strategy. That is, the ability and power to name someone (or his/her group) as a terrorist is a powerful thing. We can ruin or protect people simply by how we label them. The fact that corporate crackdowns on American labor unrest – some

of the bloodiest episodes in American history outside of the Civil War – are never discussed in the context of terrorism also suggests the terrorist label is value laden. Indeed, though I have not discussed state terrorism in this chapter, Chapters 7, 11, and 24 by Miller, Hagenloh, and Griffin, respectively, make it clear in this volume that the state (ours and others) can conduct terrorism or support entities that do. The data presented here, then, are more than an objective presentation of facts and patterns. They are also mirrors that show us what the powerful hold dear and who they believe threaten it. In this regard, the old saw that one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter captures the fact that political, social, and economic interests govern even our most sacred categories.

Notes

- 1 Catherine McNicol Stock, *Rural Radicals: Righteous Rage in the American Grain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); and Beverly Gage, "Terrorism and the American Experience: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 98, no. 1 (2011): 73–94.
- 2 Richard Jackson and Samuel Sinclair, eds., *Contemporary Debates on Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
- 3 Mahmood Mamdani, "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism," *American Anthropologist New Series* 104, no. 3 (2002): 766–75; and Konstantinos Drakos and Ali M. Kutan, "Regional Effects of Terrorism on Tourism in Three Mediterranean Countries," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 47, no. 5 (2003): 621–41.
- 4 Zachary Abuza, "Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Financial Network of Al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiya," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 25, no. 2 (2003): 169–99.
- 5 Ceryn Moore, "Suicide Bombing: Chechnya, the North Caucasus and Martyrdom," *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 9 (2012): 1780–807; and Valery Tishkov, *Chechnya: Life in a War-torn Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
- 6 Andreas Feldmann and Maiju Perälä, "Reassessing the Causes of Nongovernmental Terrorism in Latin America," *Latin American Politics and Society* 46, no. 2 (2004): 101–32.
- 7 Cynthia McClintock, "Why Peasants Rebel: The Case of Peru's Sendero Luminoso," *World Politics* 37, no. 1 (1984): 617–36; David Scott Palmer, "Rebellion in Rural Peru: The Origins and Evolution of Sendero Luminoso," *Comparative Politics* 18, no. 2 (1986): 127–46; Carlos Ivan Degregori, *Las Rondas Campesinas y la Derrota de Sendero Luminoso* (Lima: IEP Ediciones, 1996); and Orin Starn, *Nightwatch: The Politics of Protest in the Andes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). See Chapter 19 by Jennifer S. Holmes on Latin American terrorism in this volume.
- 8 Daniel Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door: The Militia Movement and the Radical Right* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002); and Daryl Johnson, *Right-wing Resurgence: How a Domestic Terrorist Threat is Being Ignored* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012).
- 9 For a rational choice perspective, see Martha Crenshaw, "The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice," in *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, ed. Walter Reich, 7–24 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998). For a liberal interventionist perspective, see Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 2003). For constructivist accounts, see James Horley and Ian McPhail, "What's in a Name? Interpreting Terrorism from the Perspective of Personal Construct Theory," in *Engaging Terror: A Critical and Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. J. Haig et al., 119–28 (Boca Raton, FL: Brown Walker, 2008); and Rainer Hülse and Alexander Spencer, "The Metaphor of Terror: Terrorism Studies and the Constructivist Turn," *Security Dialogue* 39, no. 6 (2008): 571–92.
- 10 For an argument that contemporary terrorism is different from earlier epochs, see Ian O. Lesser, Bruce Hoffman, John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, Michele Zanini, and Brian Michael Jenkins, *Countering the New Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1999); and Alejandra Bolanos, "The 'New Terrorism,' or the 'Newness' of Context and Change," in *Contemporary Debates on Terrorism*, ed. Richard Jackson and Samuel Sinclair, 29–34 (London: Routledge, 2012). For an opposing view, see Isabelle Duyvesteyn, "How New is the New Terrorism?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27, no. 5 (2004): 439–54; and Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Leena Malkki, "No: The Fallacy of the New Terrorism Thesis," in *Contemporary Debates on Terrorism*, 35–42.

- 11 Gage, *Terrorism and the American Experience*, 79. For an important exception to this trend see Michael Fellman, *In the Name of God and Country: Reconsidering Terrorism in American History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
- 12 Jerome Bejlopera, *American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013).
- 13 Office of Intelligence and Analysis Assessment, *Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment* (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, 2009). This report was produced for law enforcement personnel and not designated for widespread, public release. The report is no longer available on the DHS website, but a full copy is archived on the Federation of American Scientists' website at: www.fac.org/irp/eprint/rightwing.pdf (accessed July 18, 2014).
- 14 Office of Intelligence and Analysis Assessment, *Right Wing Extremism*, 2.
- 15 Office of Intelligence and Analysis Assessment, *Right Wing Extremism*, 7.
- 16 Fusion centers are designed to bring together law enforcement officers from different agencies (e.g., Customs and Border Patrol and the Drug Enforcement Administration [DEA]) and scales (e.g., federal, state, and local) to combat sophisticated criminal activity such as terrorism or drug trafficking. Fusion centers are primarily organized to share intelligence, but some also encourage joint operations. Although fusion centers were in existence before 9/11, their numbers increased substantially after it. By 2008, the Department of Homeland Security was funding 58 new or retooled fusion centers. For more detail, see Torin Monahan and Neal A. Palmer, "The Emerging Politics of DHS Fusion Centers," *Security Dialogue* 40, no. 6 (2009): 617–36.
- 17 As quoted in Heidi Beirich, "Inside the DHS: Former Top Analyst Says Agency Bowed to Political Pressure," *Intelligence Report*, no. 142 (Summer 2011), www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2011/summer/inside-the-dhs-former-top-analyst-says-agency-bowed (accessed July 18, 2014).
- 18 As quoted in Beirich, "Inside the DHS."
- 19 As quoted in Beirich, "Inside the DHS."
- 20 Mark Potok, "The Year in Hate and Extremism," *Intelligence Report*, no. 149 (Spring 2013).
- 21 Bejlopera, *American Jihadist Terrorism*, 41–2.
- 22 Federal Bureau of Investigations, *Terrorism in the United States 1999: Thirty Years of Terrorism, a Special Retrospective Edition* (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice), ii.
- 23 Federal Bureau of Investigations, *Terrorism in the United States 1999*, ii.
- 24 Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigations, *Use of Small Arms: Examining Lone Shooters and Small-unit Tactics: Joint Intelligence Bulletin*, August 16, 2009, 3.
- 25 Southers made this comment in an April 17, 2013, blog post on ElsevierConnect.
- 26 Erroll Southers, *Homegrown Violent Extremism* (Amsterdam: Anderson Publishing, 2009), xi.
- 27 Southers, *Homegrown Violent Extremism*, 115–17.
- 28 Peter Neumann, "Introduction," in *Papers from the First International Conference on Radicalisation and Political Violence*, ed. Henry Sweetbaum, 1780–807 (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2008).
- 29 Neumann, "Introduction," 4.
- 30 Carolyn Gallaher, *On the Fault Line: Race, Class, and the American Patriot Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).
- 31 Arun Kundnani, "Radicalisation: The Journey of a Concept," *Race and Class* 54, no. 2 (2012): 3–25.
- 32 Paul Thomas, "Failed and Friendless: The UK's 'Preventing Violent Extremism' Programme," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2010): 442–58.
- 33 Kundnani, "Radicalisation," 19.
- 34 Eric Holder, Speech Given at Oak Creek Memorial Service, August 10, 2009, www.justice.gov/iso/opa/ag/speeches/2012/ag-speech-1208101.html (accessed July 18, 2013).
- 35 Michael Yaccino, Michael Schwirtz, and Marc Santora, "Gunman Kills 6 at a Sikh Temple Near Milwaukee," *New York Times*, August 5, 2012.
- 36 Claudia Card, "Recognizing Terrorism," *Journal of Ethics* 11, no. 1 (2007): 4.
- 37 Bejlopera, *American Jihadist Terrorism*, 71, 125.
- 38 The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, Global Terrorism Database [Data File], 2012. Available online at: www.start.umd.edu/gtd (accessed July 12, 2013).

- 39 New America Foundation and Syracuse University. The Homegrown Threat Database: Homegrown Terrorism Cases, 2001–2013, 2013. Available online at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20131218083954/http://homegrown.newamerica.net/> (accessed July 18, 2013).
- 40 My use of the word traditional here refers to people/groups inspired by ideologies that are domestic in origin or were brought to the US decades if not centuries ago and retooled for American grievances.
- 41 The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, “Global Terrorism Database.”
- 42 It is worth noting that between 1850 and 1930s, there was more terrorist violence in the US than in most other countries in the world. White supremacist violence related to the Civil War and its aftermath (such as Klan-related violence and systematic lynching) explains why the US was at the top of the list for much of the period. See Chapter 10 by R. Blakeslee Gilpin on white supremacist terrorism in this volume.
- 43 The data for Great Britain includes Northern Ireland.
- 44 These numbers were calculated using the START database’s online search (available at: www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/). The database defines terrorist acts using three criterion: (1) “the act must be aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal”; (2) “there must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (or audiences) than the immediate victims”; and (3) “the action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities, i.e. the act must be outside the parameters permitted by international humanitarian law (particularly the admonition against deliberately targeting civilians or non-combatants).”
- 45 This percentage figure was not calculated using the total number of attacks (2,242) in the denominator because the START database lists fifty-nine attacks with an unknown death toll. My denominator (2,183) does not include these fifty-nine attacks.
- 46 Although we tend to think of the 9/11 attacks as one attack occurring in multiple places, the START database includes a separate entry for each place/building effected (e.g., each of the twin towers is given its own entry).
- 47 This percentage figure was not calculated using the total number of attacks (2,242) in the denominator because the START database lists seventy-one attacks with unknown injuries. My denominator (2,171) does not include these seventy-one attacks.
- 48 Like the percentage calculations for the US, I do not include the total number of worldwide attacks in the denominators for global fatalities and injuries – that is, I removed attacks where fatalities and injuries respectively are unknown.
- 49 Some people do not believe that attacks against property should be described as terrorism. However, most databases in the US include these attacks; without them there would be very few data points to consider. Moreover, a number of groups attack both property and humans through the course of their existence, so including both sorts of attacks allows for a fuller picture of a group’s activities.
- 50 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, “Lightning Safety,” www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/fatalities.htm (accessed July 18, 2013).
- 51 Although the Jewish Defense League could be described as a left-wing group, I designate it as a right-wing group because the FBI categorizes the group as right-wing (FBI 2001).
- 52 Harvey, Kushner, *The Encyclopedia of Terrorism* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 272.
- 53 The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, “Global Terrorism Database.”
- 54 New America Foundation, “The Homegrown Threat Database.” This database defines a jihadist terrorist as someone who was “indicted on terrorism-related charges or killed before an indictment could be handed down” and “subscribe[d] broadly to the ideology of Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda.” This definition is essentially synonymous with “radical Islamism.”
- 55 New America Foundation, “Homegrown Threat Database.” See also Daryl Johnson, *Right-wing Resurgence*, x.
- 56 Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2009).
- 57 Kushner, *The Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 33–4.
- 58 Kushner, *The Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 112.

59 Gallaher, *On the Fault Line*, 16–18.

60 Carl Boggs, “Corporate Power, Ecological Crisis, and Animal Rights,” in *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*, ed. John Sanbonmatsu, 71–90 (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011).

Further reading

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