



## A Mixed-Method Analysis of Fatal Attacks on Police by Far-Right Extremists

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### Summary

This study examines how deadly extreme far-right attacks against law enforcement officers develop, transpire, and end, and how event-level processes compare across these homicides under different sets of situational circumstances. Informed by a criminal event perspective, primary risk factors for far-right extremist attacks on police, and how risk factors combine to increase the likelihood of lethal violence against police by extreme far-rightists, are identified. Findings have implications for preventing future violence by domestic violent extremists targeting police officers.

### Methods

Data on 30 cases that occurred between 1990 and 2014 come from the U.S. Extremist Crime Database (ECDB), an open-source database on crimes committed by domestic violent extremists since 1990. Quantitative measures of pre-incident risk factors include the presence of bystanders, weapon type, number of offenders, number of officers killed, and whether the offender was intoxicated at the time the homicide occurred. Attributes of violent transactions and their aftermaths include whether offenders were arrested or killed, whether offenders committed subsequent crimes, and whether offenders fled the scene. A mixed-method design was employed to also qualitatively explore how varying combinations of situated risk factors, or “storylines,” culminate in fatal attacks against law enforcement.

### Results

Quantitative findings largely align with prior research on the nature of fatal violence targeting police more generally. For example, it was found that violence was often triggered by routine police work (e.g., traffic stops). In addition, a qualitative storyline analysis identified four unique sets of motivational circumstances (or storylines) in which law enforcement were killed by far-right extremists: 1) avoiding arrest, 2) mission offenses, 3) defending property, and 4.) defending family.

### Implications

Findings may have important implications for how police are trained to interact with domestic violent extremists. The authors suggest that shows of military-style force may more quickly escalate violence with extreme far-right offenders compared to “softer” approaches. Authors also suggest that detailed documentation of prior threats to police and maintaining close relationships with community stakeholders can help law enforcement to better assess the risks posed by domestic violent extremists.

For more information, see Gruenewald, J., Dooley, K. M. G., Suttmoeller, M. J., Chermak, S. M., & Freilich, J. D. (2016). A Mixed-Method Analysis of Fatal Attacks on Police by Far-Right Extremists. *Police Quarterly*, 19(2), 216–245. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611115623061>