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Article
Summary

Patterns of Fatal Extreme-Right Crime in the United States

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Summary

The authors discuss types of extreme-right terrorism in the United States since 1990. They explain that the extreme-right has been among the top threats to American public safety, more so than other far-left or jihadist terrorist groups and target government/law enforcement officials, taking nearly 50 lives in the last 30 years. They define the American extreme-right with the following factors: vehemently nationalistic, anti-global, suspicious of centralized federal government, personal liberty, conspiracy theorists, under threat by a perceived enemy, and belief in an impending threat that must be countered with survivalism or paramilitary action. An important point of emphasis is made that the mainstream Christian or conservative right are not included in this definition. Focusing specifically on homicide, the authors found that there was an average of eight homicides per year committed by extreme-right actors over the three decades of research and killed more people in a 15-year span between September 11, 2001 and 2016 with 158 killed in 89 homicides.

Methods

The authors used the Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) which was used as the primary source for contextualizing violence from the extreme-right. Data were also provided by the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and from watch groups the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), and the Rick Ross site, as well as the Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) which are all open source, helping to gain information on domestic extremists. The data provided by the ECDB also revealed that the highly populated states of California, Texas, and Florida were among the leaders in ideologically motivated homicide.

Results

The data provided by the ECDB also revealed that the highly populated states of California, Texas, and Florida were among the leaders in ideologically motivated homicide. Multiple attackers tended to target homeless people, sexual, gender and ethnic minorities while lone actors targeted government officials or abortion clinics. Multiple casualties were not the norm, but the most common victims tended to be racial or ethnic minorities at 51%, government officials at 16%, homeless people at 13%, and those belonging to the LGBTQ+ community at 11%. Over 50% of extreme-rightist homicide was firearm related. The researchers give these data visual representation through use of bar graphs, both three and two dimensional. The researchers also revealed that the majority of offenders were white, about 30 years old, poorly educated, and likely to have a prior criminal record.

Implications

Implications include recognizing becoming a terrorist as a social process and what factors are specific to extreme-right radicalization. Additionally, the relationship between violent and non-violent crime can be expanded upon by the ECDB and used in finding patterns in non-violent offending that could lead to terrorist attacks by extreme-right actors. Furthermore, the data is limited to completed fatal strikes and needs expansion based on failed or foiled attacks, and finally the similarities and differences between extreme-rightist and other extremists to aid in researching reasons for radicalization.

For more information, see Freilich, J. D., Chermak, S. M., Gruenewald, J., Parkin, W. S., & Klein, B. R. (2018). Patterns of fatal extreme-right crime in the United States. Perspectives on Terrorism, 12(6), 38-51.