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### Domestic Terrorism: A Review of the Literature

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# Domestic Terrorism

A Review of the  
Literature

Spring 2013

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## *Introduction*

Our examination of domestic terrorism literature resulted in 24 scholarly articles containing original information regarding the definition, prevalence, victims, offenders, *modus operandi* and prevention strategies associated with domestic terrorism. While we incorporate incidents of domestic terrorism throughout the globe, our findings are most closely linked to data found in the United States due to the vast majority of research based and written in the U.S. We begin our review with original definitions of domestic terrorism. The prevalence of domestic terrorism is discussed and includes a description of prevalence was measured. Characteristics of and factors associated with being a victim of domestic terrorism are then reviewed, followed by the characteristics of offenders associated with carrying out the crimes. We describe the *modus operandi* used by different groups of offenders, including information about the geographic distribution, temporal patterns, and other details of domestic terrorism. As a conclusion to the report, we also discuss prevention strategies, policy implications, and other ways to improve outcomes at the individual, community, and societal levels identified by the authors of the articles.

## *Definition and Prevalence*

We reviewed seven articles while pertaining to the definition and prevalence of domestic terrorism, which can be defined as “attacks by citizens against their own country” (Wilcox, Ozer, Gunbeyi, & Gundogdu, 2009, p.345). Domestic terrorism occurs as economic crime, violent activity or far-right extremists, and hate crimes.

Economic crimes are generally motivated by financial gain. Economic discrimination is considered to be the inequality between different cultural groups. Piazza (2011) linked minority discrimination to terrorism (pp.348-350). Minority discrimination may occur for several reasons: political, socioeconomic, or cultural. Socioeconomic discrimination is the factor most strongly associated with domestic terrorism (Piazza, 2012, p.552). When there are fewer economic opportunities for all cultural groups, the country is at an increased risk for a terrorist attack.

Far-right extremist (FRE) crimes are exceptionally dangerous because attacks on victims could lead to murders. Many factors contribute to acts of FREs (e.g., election of an African American president and rising unemployment has created an environment conducive to increasing levels of FRE) (Gruenewald, 2011).

Hate crimes have motivated domestic terrorist acts in the U.S. and abroad. The U.S. Department of Justice states a crime becomes a hate crime when an offender selects his/her victim based on a particular characteristic (i.e., race, ethnicity, sexuality, or religion) and when substantial evidence proves attacks were influenced by hate for the victim(s) (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005, p.8). Hate crimes may victimize people, property, or society (Kercher, Nolasco, & Wu, 2008, pp.5-10).

An example of hate crimes both as domestic terrorism and motivated by domestic terrorism is the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, April 19, 1995. Although the deed was eventually found to be committed by Timothy McVeigh, acting alone, the media initially blamed on Islamic Fundamentalists. This spurred retaliatory attacks by white Americans on Arab communities. Statistics show there were few attacks on Arab communities

prior to the bombing, but afterwards, violence increased nine fold within four days. Numbers declined zero a few days after the assaults on Arab communities (Deloughery, King, & Asal, 2012, p.682).

Of the three main forms of domestic terrorism, hate crimes occur most often. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2011), an average of 195,000 hate crime victimizations occur every year. From 2003 to 2009, the rate of violent hate crimes decreased (from 0.8 per 1,000 to 0.5 per 1,000). The figure, however, does not indicate each year in between and it should be noted the occurrences spiked up to 0.8 in 2005, 2006, and 2007. Between the years 2003 to 2009, 2007 had the highest percent of total victimizations (3.6%) (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011, pp.1-11). The variation in which hate crimes occur is a key reason they warrant attention.

Many factors affect the prevalence of domestic terrorism in different geographical areas. Wealthier countries are more likely to experience terrorist attacks than poorer countries (Piazza, 2012, p.538). Countries with higher levels of economic discrimination within their borders often have higher rates of terrorism (Piazza, 2011, p.342). Those with higher levels of economic discrimination against minorities experience six more incidents of domestic terrorism per year than those with more economic equity in their populations. Increased political participation and age among the population are negative predictors of terrorism, while increased population is a positive predictor (Piazza, 2011, pp.348-350). The presence of particular ethnic groups or religious communities may also cause an increase in terrorist acts because the enclaves create places for individuals to hide, recruit, and plan attacks (Plummer, 2012, p.418).

## *Victims*

Our analysis included six articles where information pertaining to various characteristics of victims of domestic terrorism was discussed. Domestic terrorism can be lethal because it may be the outcome of a well-thought-out plan to harm a massive number of people or the result of an irrational act by an individual. Regardless of the planning (or lack, thereof), the first victim is society. McGarrell, Freilich, and Chermak (2007) provide an interesting example of society being victimized due to domestic terrorism by discussing the impacts of the 9/11 attack on the United States. The victims they say, of the 9/11 attacks are not limited to those who lost their lives or were physically injured, but extend to those who lost family members or friends, had their property damaged, and even those who had their faith in security threatened by these attacks. Another example of society, as a whole, becoming a victim, with the recent mass shootings such as the incidents in the Aurora, Colorado cinema and the Newtown, Connecticut elementary school. These two horrific events have put gun laws in the spotlight, shaken our nation with fear and distrust, and have made us reevaluate what precautions we have, and *ought* to have, in place to prevent events like this from happening somewhere else.

According to Miller (2006), terrorists select their victims for various different reasons. Victims are primarily selected by the amount of media coverage their victimization would attract. Children tend to warrant more media coverage than adults because of the innocence associated with youth. Terrorists desire as much media coverage as possible in order to obtain public sympathy (even though this line of thinking does not make sense to law-abiding citizens). They are usually targets of opportunity (i.e., whoever will be available to increase death tolls) in order to inflict as much pain and panic in society as possible (Miller, 2006, p.123). As long as the

media covers domestic terrorism, it will not stop because media coverage is a form of supporting these acts (Schwartz, 2008, p.181). Due to the fact that the attacks are meant to hurt society, in addition to just the victims, any person is fair game for victimization by domestic terrorist groups.

Victims of far-right extremists are no exception to this logic. Gruenewald (2011) found there are usually no specific victims in crimes perpetrated by far-right extremists. The only specified characteristics, here, are that victims are targeted due to their religious beliefs, sexuality, or nationalities (Gruenewald, 2011, p.184). These three characteristics are likely to cause additional pain and suffering post-victimization. In a study looking at the effects hate crimes have on homosexuals found not only do victims of antigay bias crimes suffer from psychological distress, they suffer significantly more than victims of non-hate crimes (Kercher et al., 2008, p.19). The psychological distress manifests itself as depression, anxiety, anger, post-traumatic stress, self-blame, and problems with self-identity. This victimization often causes problems for the victims in their communities because perceptions of rejection and isolation are intensified (Kercher et al., 2008, p.19).

The U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ) reports since 2000, an average of 195,000 hate crimes are reported annually (2011). The USDOJ interviewed victims from 2003-2009 to learn more about the high frequency. They found 58% of hate crime victims stated they were targeted due to racial/ethnicity bias (30% ethnicity-related); (25% association with a person with particular characteristics - race, religion, or disability) (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011, p.4). It is apparent most victims believe that race is often the motivation for domestic terrorists.

## *Offenders*

We reviewed ten articles and found most social scientists agree that international terrorist groups, (e.g., al-Qaeda), are not the biggest threats to the U.S. Domestic terrorism groups outnumber international groups seven-to-one and are a far larger threat to our country (McGarrell et al., 2007, p.148). While there are many types of domestic terrorist groups, the articles we reviewed mostly discussed right-wing groups (e.g., white supremacists; other hate crime offenders).

Kercher et al. (2008) found of 289 hate crime offenders for 2006 (in Texas), 51% were white, 13.9% black, 1.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.4% multi-racial (p.7). Gruenewald (2011) found the majority of homicide offenders labeled as far-right extremists were [again] predominantly white males. This is in contrast to U.S. average offender characteristics (black male) (p.183). Perpetrators of hate crimes are generally members of majority groups and usually commit crimes against members of minority groups (race, religion, or other defining characteristic) (Deloughery et al., 2012, p.665). Domestic far-right extremists differ in types of groups targeted, organizing principles, ideologies, and types of offenses. Lone wolves and/or unorganized far-right extremists are also likely to commit non-terroristic crimes (hate crimes, tax evasion, small petty crimes). Organized far-right groups are more likely to commit what is considered terroristic crimes (bombing government or other buildings involving political ideologies). Older groups tend to be more violent than newly formed organizations (Chermak, Freilich & Shemtob, 2009, pp.1312-1315).

Far-right extremists are predominately white males, late 20's and early 30's, believing they are protecting their homelands by eliminating minorities. Because of their views toward minorities, they are more likely than other domestic terrorists to attack in groups (55.5%), to target complete strangers (48.4%), and to use weapons (52.4%) (Gruenewald, 2011, pp.177-179).

Many hate crimes are carried out by the White Supremacist Movement, comprised of four key groups: the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), neo-Nazis, Christian identity sects, and white power skinheads (Garland & Simi, 2011, p.500). White Supremacists are organized groups focusing on bringing the white race to power. Members are anti-Semitic, anti-homosexual, oppose interracial relationships, and favor the traditional family structure where the male is the head of the household (Garland & Simi, 2011, pp.500-501). The Aryan nations (neo-Nazis) sometimes join with the Islamic Jihad organizations to push out their common enemy: Jews. They believe Jewish people have conspired to take over the U.S. government and media (Borgeson & Valeri, 2007, p.186).

Mass shootings are also considered domestic terrorism. While not a new form of terrorism, they have become more prevalent in the past couple of decades with attacks on schools, shopping malls, and other public places. In cases of teenagers, especially, when real or perceived long-term humiliation and bullying occurs (say, by jocks), those who are, in effect, outcasts (*not* jocks; unpopular in school) may fantasize about violent retribution against their antagonists. Perpetrators of mass shootings are associated with being outcasts or having been picked on, either by peers in a school shooting situation, or by the government in a government building attack (Tonso, 2009, p.1276).

Once in custody, terrorists are more likely to have serious charges placed against them than general offenders and are twice as likely to be convicted at trial. The average age of convicted terrorists is between 35-40 years old; much older than the average criminal seen in federal court (Shields, Damphousse, & Smith, 2006, p.272). This is not surprising considering the majority of hate crime offenders are over the age of 30 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011, p.8). There is also a positive correlation between the number of charges and the likelihood of conviction (Shields et al., 2006, p.271).

### *Modus Operandi*

We reviewed seven articles with information pertaining to methods used by terrorists and terrorist groups. *Modus operandi* (M.O.) is defined as ways in which criminal acts are carried out. In the U.S., from July 2000 through December 2003, 62% of hate crimes occurred in public areas (commercial areas, parking lots, or streets). Hate crimes occur at least five miles away from a victim's home 28.4% of the time (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005, pp.8-9). This trend continued from 2003 to 2009 with victimizations occurring away from the home 68% of the time (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011, p.5). Domestic terrorist offenders tend to plan attacks, especially hate crimes, for certain times of day. From July 2000 to December 2003, 72% of hate crimes occurred between noon and midnight. The largest majority of violent crimes were likely to occur between noon and 6 p.m. (42.5%) (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005, pp.8-9).

From July 2000 to December 2003, 80% of hate crimes in the U.S. involved violence: 38% involved rape, robbery, injury, or threat with a weapon; and 46% of perpetrators assaulted or intimidated victims without a weapon and without injury (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005, p.3, p.10). From 2003 to 2009, this trend continued with 87% of hate crimes involving violence: 64% involved simple assault, 16% aggravated assault, 8% theft, 6% robbery, and 5% burglary. A weapon was used in 20% of hate crimes report. Most perpetrators operated alone and without a weapon (67.5%) (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005, pp.5-7). The most famous terrorist incident in the U.S., 9/11, involved the hijacking of four passenger airplanes (Tracy, 2012, p.647).

Some of the most infamous terrorist attacks on American soil were committed by American citizens. This includes the Oklahoma City bombing (mentioned above), by Timothy McVeigh; the abortion clinics, Centennial Olympic Park, and bar bombings by Eric Rudolph; and the mass murders in a Jewish community center committed by Bufford Furrow (Borgeson & Valeri, 2007, p.182). Some homicides are considered acts of terrorism or hate crimes when they include both ideologically and non-ideologically motivated homicides such as attacks on abortion clinics, those against governments, or attacks on an individual or a group's race, color, creed, or sexual orientation (Gruenewald, 2011, p.185). Hate group participants pursue the agendas of their groups in various ways. Some limit themselves to lobbying and political activism, while others resort to acts of aggression such as murder and domestic terrorism (Garland & Simi, 2011, pp.500-501). Radical environmental groups, who place their focus on preventing the destruction of the earth, use sabotage as a means to halt companies they believe are damaging the ecosystem from continuing their work. These groups engage in civil disobedience like spiking trees or other acts to further stop environmentally damaging practices. The Earth Liberation Front (ELF) has taken the leap to resorting to arson to make its point (Joosse, 2012).

While the majority of far-right extremist perpetrated (FREP) homicides are committed using firearms, similar to nonaffiliated homicides, FREP homicides also have higher rates of the use of non-firearm weapons. Blunt objects are used 8.2% more frequently and knives are used 5.7% more frequently as weapons in FREP homicides than with non-FREP murders. FREP homicides also have a dramatically higher incidence of multiple offenders: 55.5% compared to just 15.8% in nonaffiliated homicides (Gruenewald, 2011, pp.187-188).

### *Prevention Strategies*

We reviewed seven articles containing information related to strategies to prevent domestic terrorism.

The most effective way to prevent domestic terrorism is to have an effective community policing policy embracing different groups within the community and may assist in keeping people out of terrorist organizations. McGarrell et al. suggest when law enforcement personnel develop strong relationships with community members, they are more likely to gain knowledge of this critical information (2007, pp.151-153). Chappell and Gibson found 85% of police chiefs surveyed believed homeland security and community policing are complementary. Due to its reliance on partnerships with the community in order to gain information, community policing may provide a framework on which to build a homeland security strategy (2009, pp.336-338). While Homeland Security has focused its efforts mainly on outside threats, there are a few divisions



planning for responses to natural and human disasters. This work provides safeguards limiting dangers and provides directives for the government to pursue (Dobel, 2010, p.500).

Another prevention strategy involves police officer training. Kercher et al (2008) say officers should be trained specifically in gathering evidence, identifying witnesses, and avoiding developing biased attitudes (p.20). Los Angeles P.D. uses field identification cards (checklists), thereby preventing officers from interjecting biases into crime scenes or investigations. Use of the cards has also helped evaluate officers and their reactions when investigating hate crimes. Hate crimes often increase after a terrorist attack. This information could help law enforcement agencies plan for the days following an act of terrorism (Deloughery et al., 2012, pp.680-683).

People of a minority population (religious, non-mainstream lifestyles) who believe they have suffered from discrimination are likely to commit acts of terror out of frustration believing their voices are not heard (Piazza, 2011, p. 350). Open dialogue between majority and minority groups could improve understanding ensure minority groups are represented more fairly in the political system (LaFree & Morris, 2012, p. 713). Discourse can also help identify links between criminal activity and terrorist threats (McGarrell et al., 2007, p.152).

Keeping track of terrorist attacks and terrorist group's specific information is key to prevention. Terrorist Organization Profile (TOPS) does just this saves such information in a centralized location. TOPS keeps track of terrorist attacks with specific motives, such as religious groups. The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) maintains basic information (location, type of attack, dates, times) (Deloughery et al., 2012, p.672). Utilizing data gathered by these organizations will help profile terrorists, their activities, and primary targets. It will help identify threats to U.S. citizens and prevent some violent attacks.

A short-term strategy to combat domestic terrorism is within the court system. The courts are able to hold an organization criminally and/or civilly responsible for the actions of one of its members (Garland & Simi, 2011, p.500). Civil courts work well in this regard, as the burden of proof is less than is required in criminal court (Levin, 2007, p.213). When coupled with the PATRIOT Act, courts are even more effective by gathering information on violent groups (Rohlinger, 2009, p.3). Such a retaliatory approach, however, risks inducing terrorist actions and creating an atmosphere of fear, making discrimination against minority groups even more likely.

One of the main themes is that law enforcement plays a significant role in decreasing domestic terrorism incidents by taking an active role in their communities. This is achieved by building relationships with community members, especially those who may be bullied or outcasts. These relationships could help deter someone from being coerced into a terrorist group. Law enforcement and citizens can have a positive impact on communities and help prevent terrorism from happening.

## *Conclusion*

Overall, we have taken an in-depth look into the literature of domestic terrorism. We have identified who is generally targeted in attacks, the groups with whom terrorists identify, how terrorist crimes occur, and how we can work to prevent them. While many victims are still targeted due to race, ethnicity, or religious beliefs, we discovered victims are often targeted based on whether or not they will attract a large amount of media coverage. While we typically

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associate terrorism with groups such as al-Qaeda, we found domestic groups pose just as much threat. Acts of domestic terrorism, such as mass shootings and large scale bombings, are becoming more frequent. We have learned there is not one catch-all solution for preventing terrorism. Government agencies are responsible for intelligence gathering, information sharing, identification, and prevention strategies. Agencies such as Border Patrol are responsible for the protection of the country in terms of maintaining security. In researching prevention strategies, we concluded in order to make greater strides in combating terrorism there must be a continued, cooperative effort between government agencies, law enforcement, and communities. If law enforcement can initiate ties with members of the community, some terrorist attacks could be avoided.

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