

# The Correlates of Right-Wing Extremism

by

Christopher W. Young and Michael D. Tucker

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## Dedications

For my mother, Dr. Joan Tucker, whose unwavering intellect, and compassion inspired me to seek understanding in the most complex of human behaviors. Her tireless dedication to education and social justice taught me that even the most difficult subjects can be approached with grace and compassion. And for my children, Michael Charles, Isabelle Elizabeth, and Hannah Joan, my greatest motivation and hope for a future defined by justice, empathy, and curiosity.

Michael Damian Tucker

I dedicate this book to the young men who live lives of extreme challenge, where homes are not filled with love and kindness, where the way of life is to compete and fight for every inch of what life offers. To those suffering from loneliness, mental illness, or depression, and to those raised in cults who have experienced faith and religion as tools of control, I pray that God opens a path of light and touches your minds and hearts so you can learn that death and destruction are not the only way forward. May the Lord bless your life today in hopes that your path ahead can be illuminated with hope, peace, and kindness.

Christopher Warren Young

To Olivia Lizotte, Vincent Leppard, and Christopher James Young, thank you for your research help and your dedication to accuracy. We wish you success in your education and continued pursuit of excellence. As you progress, always look for problems you can solve through demanding work and your intelligence. Please do not shy away from challenges; instead, see them as opportunities to gain experience and succeed.

Michael Damian Tucker  
Christopher Warren Young

## Section 1

We divided this book into two sections. Section 1 provides an overview of key topics related to the nature, definition, history, and future of right-wing extremism in the United States. We designed this book to serve as an accessible introduction rather than an in-depth analysis, making it ideal for readers who are eager to understand this critical subject quickly. In this section, we examine what right-wing extremism is, explore its history and roots in the U.S., consider how extremism has evolved, and discuss the triggers or reasons that motivate individuals and groups to engage in right-wing political violence. Although this section focuses on the right-wing as defined here, we believe much of the content also relates to the actions of the left-wing. This introductory edition will be expanded with additional content in future editions. Our goal is to provide just enough information in this first edition to help readers grasp the most essential topics within the broader subject of American extremism. The content primarily focuses on the United States, with only a few references to other regions where extremism is present.

Section 2 is a retrospective biographical study of twenty-nine right-wing extremists. Regarding Section 2 and the biographical analysis, Section 1 provides context for the physical, environmental, and psychological factors discussed in that section. Section 2 culminates with the development of a right-wing extremist profile.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

*“On a warm peaceful April morn,  
It came without warn,  
The ultimate hate storm.....  
That day the devil has his will,  
His trumpets of hell pierced the still,  
His manifest of hate he came to reveal”.*

Excerpt from A Manifesto of Hate<sup>1</sup>

### **The Awful Day**

It was a peaceful spring morning on April 19, 1995, when Edye Raines dropped off her two precious children Chase and Colton Smith, at America’s Kids Day Care, found just inside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. Only about eighteen hours earlier, Edye purchased her new home, a symbol of hope and a bright future ahead. She envisioned a day full of promise—picking up her boys early in the afternoon to start painting their new house, creating happy memories to last a lifetime. But that hopeful morning swiftly turned into one of the most devastating tragedies in U.S. history. On that day, Chase, and Colton, along with 166 others, including nineteen innocent children, would never return home. Two misguided political extremists, driven by hateful, extremist ideologies, committed an act of cowardice that claimed 168

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<sup>1</sup> Spirited Horse LLC. (2023). Oklahoma City Bombing: Murrah Building Bombing, *A Manifesto of Hate*.<http://spiritedhorse.com/OKCBombing.cfm>.

innocent lives. The pain and loss from that day linger in the collective memory of a nation, a heartbreaking reminder of how fragility and violence can shatter even the most hopeful beginnings.

Following this cowardly act, the United States united as a nation, despite the deep sorrow felt by many families who lost loved ones and by the broader Oklahoma community. It is this remarkable resilience of the Oklahomans affected by the tragedy that we dedicate this book and all future editions to. We hope that some of our work, included here and in later editions, will serve as a tool to help prevent such unnecessary evils in the future. We only wish that if we can bring about some positive change through this book—so that young mothers like Edye Raines and the families of the 168 people who died that day are spared from such devastation—our efforts will not be in vain.

## **The Devils' Face**

In September 1994, a former decorated U.S. Army soldier, along with another less-than-stellar soldier and friend, began planning a malicious act to blow up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Their motivation was rooted in defiance against the U.S. government, which they believed was infringing on individual rights and freedoms. They thought the government was neglecting the needs of white Americans and soldiers, and they subscribed to a broader conspiracy theory that the U.S. government was trying to set up a communist regime. Over the course of eight months, these men plotted, schemed, and worked diligently toward the devastating event that occurred on April 19, 1995. They carefully timed their purchases of the heavily regulated



ammonium nitrate fertilizer, used fake names to buy equipment, and robbed a local quarry for blasting caps. Besides lying and disguising themselves to buy fertilizer and fuel, they also planned how to enter Oklahoma City with minimal notice and devised a plan for a getaway vehicle to transport Timothy McVeigh out of Oklahoma with as little a trace as possible.

Then, on the morning of April 19, 1995, Timothy McVeigh parked his rented Ryder truck outside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City. Inside the truck was a 7,000-pound bomb made from a mixture of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil. At approximately 9:02 am, McVeigh detonated the bomb. Soon afterward, McVeigh got into a 1977 Mercury Marquis and drove north on I-35 toward Kansas. About an hour and a half later, McVeigh was stopped by a patrol officer for not displaying a license plate. During the stop, the officer noticed an unregistered firearm, which led to McVeigh's arrest. Approximately 48 hours later, the FBI named McVeigh as one of the individuals responsible for the bombing. Shortly afterward, Terry Nichols was charged as an accomplice in the case. Years after the case, McVeigh and Nichols were found guilty of multiple counts. McVeigh was ultimately executed, whereas Nichols received a life sentence in a maximum-security prison, where he is still to this day.

## **The Questions We Ask Ourselves**

When examining the lives of McVeigh and Nichols, it is difficult for a rational person not to ask questions, such as "what triggers a person to engage in such violence?" or "was there something mentally or emotionally wrong with these two men?" Other questions that might come to mind include, "Can we identify

differences in McVeigh and Nichols compared to the rest of the population? What made them different?" The two primary questions we seek to answer in this book are.

- (a) "Can we identify political extremists, such that we can classify them as right-wing or left-wing, so that we can study them more effectively?
- (b) Can we identify discrete personas, motivations, childhood upbringings, physical, mental, or emotional differences so that we can isolate such evils, in advance of them occurring?"

Basically, we wanted to find out if we can create a profile of what a right-wing extremist's life might look like, how they may behave, what common traits they share, whether they are mentally ill, suffer from depression, plan their attacks, or act spontaneously, and which political ideologies they support, among other questions. These questions fuel our passion for authoring this book, and they are the ones this book aims to answer. While this book primarily focuses on political extremists often called right-wing extremists, we plan to follow up with a similar study of the left-wing.

Almost everyone familiar with the Oklahoma City Bombing would agree that arresting McVeigh and pinpointing him as the main culprit was, without question, a matter of luck. Would law enforcement have eventually caught him if he had not been pulled over for a traffic violation? Possibly—but the odds favored McVeigh escaping. Concerning future political violence, this book looks to give law enforcement and policymakers some hope by finding variables that may help find right-wing political killers

more quickly, based on logic and rationality derived from the profile correlates we discuss here.

## **The General Outline**

The book explores American right-wing extremism (RWE), aiming to develop a comprehensive profile of individuals associated with it. The book is divided into two main sections: an overview of essential topics related to RWE in the United States (Section 1) and an ex-post biographical study of twenty-nine right-wing extremists (Section 2).

### **Section 1**

In Section 1, Chapter 2, we criticize traditional definitions of right-wing extremism (RWEM), right-wing radicalism (RWR), and right-wing extremism (RWE), arguing that they lack nuance and do not capture the complex nature of extremist behavior. Existing definitions, often given by scholars, media, and government sources, are criticized for failing to distinguish between right-wing and left-wing violence, for confusing support for a single right-wing policy with acceptance of all right-wing views, for overlooking the positive aspects of right-wing ideas, and for ignoring that extremist behavior may be an innate, evolutionary response to biological, environmental, and social stimuli. We suggest that extremist reactions could be socially and biologically evolutionary, driven by a genetic desire for continued existence. We also note that the study of political violence in the United States is still in its initial stages, hampered by definitional challenges and limited research on the actions of extremists themselves.

Chapter 3 explores the link between religion and extremist behavior. It argues that while religion can be used as a means of control, individuals also intentionally choose their religious ties in search of purpose and a sense of belonging. Right-wing extremists, through self-selection, tend to join religious groups that support their worldview, sometimes amplifying existing biases and hatreds. These groups, which we refer to as "r-cults" (merging traits of religion, cult, and social clubs), often serve as moral authorities that promote or endorse actions in response to threats, such as cultural changes or government failures. R-cults frequently foster division, oppression, bias, and hatred (such as racism, antisemitism, xenophobia), which extremists may see as their duty or a response to perceived threats to their way of life. Chapter 3 also emphasizes the potential influence of psychological factors, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) symptoms and obsessive passion (OP), on radicalization. It suggests that higher levels of religiosity may be associated with OCD symptoms, leading to an excessive focus on religious or political thoughts, a sense of urgency to take responsibility, poor insight, and an overwhelming need to respond.

Chapter 4 introduces and then expands on David Rapoport's four-wave framework of global terrorism and Jeffrey Kaplan's concept of a Fifth Wave. It uses these frameworks to explain and predict extremism in the United States. The chapter aligns Rapoport's anarchist wave, anti-colonial wave, new left wave, and religious wave with the development of right-wing extremism in the U.S.—highlighting similarities between the global evolution of terrorism and the rise of extremism in this country. It then presents an analysis showing that within the United States, a fifth wave of extremism is appearing, similar to Kaplan's explanation, focused

more on tribal behaviors and identities and genocidal acts of violence, all in hopes of bringing about some form of end-time prophecy.

Chapter 5 explores the history of right-wing extremism in the United States, tracing it back to the country's early days. This chapter identifies the main right-wing extremist groups, with the Ku Klux Klan being the largest and most influential, rooted in white supremacy. Other groups discussed include the Skinheads, Sovereign Citizens, Christian Identity, Posse Comitatus, and several lesser-known organizations.

Chapter 6 explores "triggering events," defined as significant occurrences or changing conditions perceived as political, social, or economic threats to a group or individual. These events act as catalysts that amplify existing grievances, frustrations, and deeply held beliefs among Right-Wing Extremists (RWEs). RWEs often develop a strong anti-government sentiment, viewing even legitimate government actions as existential threats to their beliefs and authority. Triggering events serve to validate grievances, confirm the presence of a threat, reinforce extremist ideology, act as personal turning points, and catalyze existing processes. They are viewed as calls to action, ranging from attending rallies to committing violence like the Oklahoma City Bombing. For extremist groups, these events serve as a powerful unifying force, strengthening solidarity and acting as recruitment tools. They evoke strong emotional responses—fear, anger, rage—among radicalized members, justifying acts of aggression and violence against perceived enemies. Triggering events also intensify a deep desire for vengeance and retribution. Importantly, many mainstream citizens might not even realize these events have

occurred or see them as minor, unlike extremists who view them as significant threats.

## **Section 2**

Chapter 7 outlines the method used in our biographical study. Unlike earlier research that mainly focuses on group-level extremism, this study examines the personal behaviors, traits, and life experiences of individual RWEs. The method involves a retrospective biographical analysis of twenty-nine RWEs. We categorize the RWE population, focusing on those RWEs who committed violence before 2000 and those after. This division is based on the rise of Internet communications (which became prominent after 1998) and online gaming, modes of communication frequently used by RWEs after 2000. We also suggest that the emergence of social media has influenced the spread of extremism. The study encompasses fifty-six variables, including ideological affiliation, age, gender, anti-government stance, criminal history, and family dysfunction, among others. These factors are primarily organized into a binary matrix, indicating their presence (1) or absence (0) in each RWE's life. As you will see in the Matrix, located at the back of this book, some variables are not binary and include dates or specific descriptors. These variables are minimal but do not lend themselves to binary coding. If data was not available we left the matrix blank, and it is indicated with a black box.

Chapter 8 provides a summary profile for 16 RWEs who committed a violent act before 2000. Each profile highlights the RWE's life and examines relevant factors for the overall analysis. Chapter 9 offers a summary of the remaining RWEs who

committed some form of violence after 2000. The same approach used in Chapter 8 to summarize the RWEs' lives is applied in Chapter 9. Although Chapters 8 and 9 are detailed, the profiles are summaries of the RWEs' lives. To keep the text concise, we believe a summary provides enough information to help you see connections between the RWEs and each variable individually.

Chapter 10 is the most important chapter in this book, as it summarizes the data, establishes relationships between the correlates and the RWE, and compares the RWE to the general population. At the end of Chapter 10, we present what we believe is the first academically developed profile of a RWE. We purposefully avoided any arbitrary statistics or complicated quantitative analysis - hoping to give the reader the nuts and bolts of what is evident within the data.

Chapter 11 wraps up this book, reiterates the benefits of the current research, and points out the limitations of the present study. We propose additions to the research that we believe are necessary to further develop a comprehensive profile.

## Chapter 2

# The Nature of Extremism

*"I am afraid of definitions, yet one is almost forced to make them.  
One must take care, too, not to be inhibited by them".*

Robert Delaunay

### Introduction

The above quote is from the artist Robert Delaunay, who, early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, redefined the ideas of Pablo Picasso and many artists of his time. Most artists alive during Delaunay's era believed that artistic *form* was the essence of art. Delaunay was one of the first abstract artists to disagree with Picasso and the broader artistic establishment, arguing that *color* is just as important as *form*. Delaunay suggested that a new perspective within the art world was seriously needed, and he challenged the establishment and the conventional ideas of his time. In many ways, this chapter embodies Delaunay's spirit.

Here, we review, analyze, and challenge various word identifiers commonly associated with classifying people or groups termed right-wing. We are not accepting the historical definitions or uses of the terms right-wing extremism ("RWEM"), right-wing radicalism ("RWR"), right-wing extremist ("RWE"), or other similar terminology.<sup>1</sup> We propose a new definition and approach

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<sup>1</sup> We suggest that many aspects of this paper concerning the right wing also apply to the left wing.



to examining the reactions of extremists and radicals. We suggest and later analyze that extremist behavior is an effect or response to biological, environmental, and social stimuli, unlike most current research, which implies a minimal *causal conscious response*. We propose that extremist *reaction* may be socially and biologically evolutionary because it is innate to the human species, perpetuating the genetic desire for continued existence.

We argue that the historical definitions of the right-wing communicated by academics, mass media, and the government lack considerable nuance. In particular, the historical descriptions of RWEM, RWR, and RWE do not:

- (a) clearly define the differences between right-wing and left-wing violence.
- (b) The definitions are unsuccessful in understanding the differences between a person who may accept a single right-wing policy or idea and another person who may take all or almost all right-wing views.
- (c) The definitions fail to delineate a standard set of right-wing policy ideas, frequently highlighting only anti-social ideas while overlooking some positive ones.
- (d) The definitions express only criticism of people associated with the right wing and fail to consider the possible benefits of specific right-wing ideas.
- (e) The definitions often fail to thoroughly delineate violent RWE reactions to the reactions of the RWR, who often debate and discuss similar ideas peacefully.
- (f) The historical definitions do not consider the possibility that extremist behavior is evolutionary, an innate

reaction to stimuli within the political and socio-economic matrix.

- (g) Last, most importantly, literature fails to correctly articulate the reason for the increase in right-wing (and left-wing) violence.

To address the above shortcomings, we first deconstruct the historical definitions of RWEM, RWE, and RWR and then reconstruct a new meaning, taking into consideration biological and evolutionary game theories. First, we classify RWEM, RWE, and RWR as the “Right Wing”. We do not include in our analysis members of society who are right-leaning or have a minor inclination to Right-Wing policies or ideas.

In addition to defining these terms, we hope to explain why RWEM, RWRs, and RWEs are more visible and active today than at almost any time in recent history. To understand and convey the rise of extremism in the United States, we lever Richard Dawkins’ evolutionary framework, first developed in the book *The Selfish Gene*. At the end of this chapter, we hope to answer the following questions:

- (a) What are RWEM, RWE, and RWR, and do these terms differ?
- (b) Is there any reasonable explanation for the rise in RWEM in the United States, and what does this mean for the broader society today and longer term?

Although our characterization of the RWEM focuses on the United States, we believe aspects of our definition and ontology are expressed in RWEs and RWRs globally.

## Chapter Outline

This chapter will progress in the following manner. First, we present historical definitions and references to RWEM, RWE, and RWR.<sup>2</sup> We examine the uses of these terms by the media, government, and the academic community. Next, we define the terms *extremism*, *extremist*, *radical* and *right-wing*. We then present Dawkins' evolutionary framework, suggesting that the cause and rise of RWEM, RWR, and RWEs in recent decades are related to group and self-preservation.<sup>3</sup> We also recommend that although the term right-wing is globally accepted, it is a poor labeling when trying to understand the behaviors of radicals and extremists. Before concluding, we present a new ontology for what we define as a RWEM social sub-species, connecting the reactions of extremists to groups and self-preservation.

## Definitional Criticisms

### General Lack of Nuance in Definitions

In American society today, the terms RWEM, RWR, and RWE have been hard to comprehend, due to the numerous inconsistent and biased definitions used by the media, government, academics, and other organizations. Take, for instance, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security ("DHS"), which issued a 2009 report that defined RWEM as a group of people who hate certain religions, races, and ethnic groups yet also advocate for the rejection of

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<sup>2</sup> We do not provide every definition, or even most of the definitions for RWEM, RWE, or RWR, because most academicians agree that a proper definition does not exist.

<sup>3</sup> We also suggest that the rise in LWEM, LWE, and LWR is associated with a similar evolutionary process.

government authority.<sup>4</sup> Later in the same year, DHS added to its definition of RWEM. This time, the DHS wrote that RWEM groups oppose abortion and immigration.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the *U.S. Department of Defense, in its December 2021 Report on Countering Extremist Activity Within the Department of Defense*, suggests that RWEM activities are those that engage in unlawful force and violence to deprive individuals of their rights under the U.S. Constitution, or the law of the United States and or any State, Commonwealth, Territory, or the District of Columbia, or any political subdivision thereof.<sup>6</sup> From the view of the DHS and or the Department of Defense, one can see that these definitions are so broad that they provide almost no value in defining the nuanced actions of someone who aligns themselves with the right wing. One can easily argue that the definitions provided by the DHS and DOD can also relate to those on the left wing. For instance, research suggests that left-wing extremists often dislike the behaviors of capitalists or fundamentally conservatively religious people, such

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Homeland Security. (2009). Right-Wing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment.

<sup>5</sup> Hudson, A. (2009 May 5). Homeland Agency Pulled Back Extremism Dictionary: Black Power, White Supremacists, Abortion Foes Make List. *Washington Times*. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/may/05/homeland-pulled-back-extremism-dictionary/> ; Levine, M. (2009 apr 14). Homeland Security Warns of Rise in Right-Wing Extremism", *FOX News*, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/first100days/2009/04/14/homeland-securitywarns-rise-right-wing-extremism/>

<sup>6</sup> Department of Defense, Report on Countering Extremist Activity Within the Department of Defense (Department of Defense, 2021).

as Christians, Jews, or Muslims.<sup>7 8</sup> Many left-wing extremists despise the notion of the “right to life,” “national heritage,” and “prayer in schools.” It seems that left-wing policies deprive people of certain rights, reject government authority, and show displeasure toward religion. Are both sides not similar with respect to these reactions?<sup>9 10</sup>

### Biased Media Portrayal

To further this argument, consider how RWEM is portrayed in significant media outlets such as *The Washington Post*, whereby multiple authors suggest that RWEM comprises chiefly white supremacists, anti-Muslim, and anti-government groups.<sup>11</sup> From a more academic perspective, Professor Ibram Kendi of Boston University insinuates that RWEs mainly incorporate the United

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<sup>7</sup> Gray, F (2022). Why progressives cannot tolerate Christians: Roe v. Wade and the rise of revolutionary secularism. *The Spectator*, May 10, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Brandt, M. J., & Crawford, J. T. (2016). Answering Unresolved Questions About the Relationship Between Cognitive Ability and Prejudice. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 7(8), 884-892. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550616660592>.

<sup>9</sup> Also see, Nacos, B. L., Shapiro, R.Y., and Bloch-Elkon, Y. (2020). Donald Trump: Aggressive Rhetoric and Political Violence. *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 5: 2–25. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26940036>. In this article the authors suggest that the right-wing is antisemitic, yet we see today that much of antisemitic hate is coming from groups normally aligned left.

<sup>10</sup> For further reading on antisemitism and the left-wing, see: Hirsh, D. (2017). *Contemporary left antisemitism*. Routledge; Fine, S., Fine, R. and Fine P. (2018). *Antisemitism and the left: On the return of the Jewish question*. Manchester University Press; Norwood, S.H. (2021). Left-Wing Antisemitism in the United States: Past and Present. <https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/special-publication-1310211-1.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> O'Harrow, R., Ba Tran, A., Hawkins, D. (2021). The Rise of Domestic Extremism in America. *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2021/domestic-terrorism-data/>.

States Republican party and include primarily white people.<sup>12</sup> Yet contrary to Professor Kendi's contentions, *The New Times* and *Politico* represent that RWEM has recently proliferated amongst Black and Hispanic conservatives.<sup>13</sup><sup>14</sup> Also, Pew Forum Research suggests that younger Black voters now align more with republicanism and conservatism in the United States when compared to earlier periods. Others indicated that RWEM comprises exclusively people who align with racial hate groups such as Skinheads and the Ku Klux Klan ("KKK").<sup>15</sup> Yet, again, is it not true that anti-white and anti-Semitic groups such as Black Separatists and the New Black Panther party align with the left? This line of argument further suggests that the historical definitions used to lasso the boundaries of RWEM are elusive because similar activities are also found on the left.<sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Kendi, B. X (2022 apr 6). The Danger More Republicans Should Be Talking About. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/04/white-supremacy-grooming-in-republican-party/629585/>

<sup>13</sup> Medina, J. (2022). The Rise of the Far-Right Latina. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/06/us/politics/mayra-flores-latina-republicans.html>

<sup>14</sup> Martinez, M. (2023 mar 10). Republicans are winning more Latino votes. But rising turnout still benefits deems *Politico*.

<sup>15</sup> Baldoza, A. C. (2009). Assessing Domestic Right-Wing Extremism Using the Theory of Collective Behavior. *Naval Post Graduate School*.

<sup>16</sup> Please note that this statement does not suggest that some extremist groups do not align with some form of racial superiority/supremacy. Further, we are not implying that hate is acceptable by the left or the right but only identifying that hatred is not a delineator between left and or right-wing extremism.

<sup>17</sup> In their article Patterns of Fatal Extreme-Right Crime in the United States, the authors suggest similar attributes of extremism as suggested by Koselleck and Auger. Our criticisms included in this chapter also apply. Freilich, Joshua D., Steven M. Chermak, Jeff Gruenewald, William S. Parkin, and Brent R. Klein. "Patterns of Fatal Extreme-Right Crime in the United States". *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no. 6 (2018): 38–51. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26544642>.

## **Intolerance is Not a Differentiator of the Right Wing**

When considering RWEM from the academic view, Koselleck suggests that the term extremism embraces anti-establishment movements, which understand politics as a struggle for supremacy rather than as peaceful competition.<sup>18</sup> Koselleck argues that extremism exists at the periphery of societies and seeks to conquer the average by fear. Extending his ideas, he suggests that the RWEM organization divides fellow citizens and foreigners into friends and foes, with no room for diversity of opinions and alternative lifestyles. Koselleck writes,

Extremism is, due to its dogmatism, intolerant and unwilling to compromise...Where extremists gain state power, they destroy social diversity and seek a comprehensive homogenization of society based on an often faith-based ideology with apocalyptic traits. At the societal level, extremist movements are authoritarian; if in power, extremist rulers tend to become totalitarian.<sup>19</sup>

Further, considering Koselleck's definition, could a logical person not say the same about left-wing extremism in the United States, such that it looks to abolish gun ownership or the rights of families to allow their children to pray in schools? What about some of the extreme left who call for abolishing capitalism and a move toward

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<sup>18</sup> Koselleck, R. (2010). Sozialgeschichte und Begriffsgeschichte. In: R. Koselleck (Ed.), Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache. Frankfurt a.m.: Suhrkamp, pp. 9 – 31.

<sup>19</sup> Reinhart Koselleck. Sozialgeschichte und Begriffsgeschichte. In: R. Koselleck (Ed.), Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2010, pp. 9 – 31.

socialism?<sup>20</sup> Is socialism, by definition, the homogenization of society based on income or wealth? So, for the same reason that Koselleck suggests that RWEM is intolerant and unwilling to compromise, the same could be said for the LWEM. Therefore, his definition, like so many other definitions, is ineffective.

### **Violence is Not a Differentiator of the Right Wing**

Coming from a different position, Vincent Auger writes that RWEM is not simply identifiable by their cause(s) but has one common feature among all groups: *violence*.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, Auger's reference to right-wing violence fails for the same reason as Koselleck's. Violence is not exclusive to the right wing, as the left wing also takes violent action. It is hard to forget the riots and violence occurring after the wrongful death of George Floyd, the eruption of Antifa nationally, the creation of the crime-ridden autonomous zones, and the death of five Dallas police officers at the hand of Micah Xavier Johnson, a black gunman linked to the New Black Panther Party, the Nation of Islam and Black Riders Liberation Party.<sup>22</sup> Violence is not exclusive to the right or to the left but is universal and, therefore, not a distinctive feature of RWEM.

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<sup>20</sup> One can look at Antifa, or the Earth Liberation Front as example or more broadly toward Black Bloc movement. See the Counterterrorism Project for additional information about these groups and others.

<sup>21</sup> Auger, V. A (2020). Right-Wing Terror. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 14/3, pp. 87-99.

<sup>22</sup> Subramanian, C. (2016). Are US black separatist groups on the rise. BBC News, July 11, 2016.



## Overlapping But Not Universal Ideas

In anticipation of understanding RWEM, Cas Mudde, in a relatively older yet important study, surveyed numerous other articles that attempted to define the term RWEM.<sup>23</sup> At the time his article was written, he concluded that there were at least 58 features to describe RWEM.<sup>24</sup> He also discovered that certain features such as nationalism, xenophobia, racism, anti-democratic sentiment, and a call for a strong state were commonly identified among RWEM groups.<sup>25</sup> Yet, despite Mudde's earlier research, he, Hainsworth, and Carter argued that there is no satisfactory definition of extremism, mainly because it is hard to identify the prevailing variables among extremist groups identified as right-wing.<sup>26 27 28</sup>

## Identifying Extremist and Radical Extremism

Perhaps what can help Auger's argument is to suggest that RWEM is not violent unto itself; instead, the RWE engages in violence. The RWE goes beyond rhetoric and discussion and reacts, which may cause short-term physical and emotional harm to society. We believe that the significant difference between someone who aligns

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<sup>23</sup> Although this article is from 1996, the consensus remains the same: there is no universal acceptance of what it means to be a RWE, and there are no universal variables to describe it.

<sup>24</sup> Mudde, C (1996). *The War of Words Defining Extreme Right Party Family*. *West European Politics*, (19/2), 225-248.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 225-248.

<sup>26</sup> Carter, E. (2005), *Party Ideology of the Extreme Right*, in Peter H. Merkl and Leonard Weinberg (eds.), *Right Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century*.

<sup>27</sup> Hainsworth, P. (2008). *The Extreme Right in Europe*. Taylor and Francis.

<sup>28</sup> Carter, E. (2005), *Party Ideology of the Extreme Right*, in Peter H. Merkl and Leonard Weinberg (eds.), *Right Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century*.

with extreme right-wing ideas and someone who is an RWE is that the RWE has already engaged in political, social, or cultural violence because of their interpretation of their social condition.<sup>29</sup> We anticipate that the RWE has historically aligned with RWEM in some capacity, but RWE is often the most extreme of any member or participant in an RWEM group. We further suggest that the RWR participates in RWEM yet is an individual who has not yet engaged in direct violence toward others but is just shy of reaction to the social condition. The RWR may be someone who, under certain conditions, may engage in some form of immediate response.

### **What is Right or Left-Wing Policy or Ideas?**

However, it is also important to note that RWE, RWR, or other members associated with RWEM, in all probability, have some beliefs and ideologies that contain views that are not necessarily aligned with conservative positions. As explained above, people usually do not agree universally on all beliefs, and the same holds for what has historically been defined as the right wing. Many people who classify themselves as right-wing or conservative may also share ideas that align with a liberal or central position and vice versa.

To clarify the previous point, the *American National Election Survey* asks American citizens many questions regarding their beliefs.<sup>30</sup> When asked if the U.S. Government should be smaller,

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<sup>29</sup> We believe the same holds for the left wing. The main difference between the extremist, left or right, is simply that the extremist has engaged in violence already.

<sup>30</sup> American National Election Studies (ANES) is a not-for-profit organization that gathers data from voters leading up to national elections.

approximately 47% of self-classified conservative respondents chose yes, while only 23% of liberal respondents agreed. Based on this question, is it fair to suggest that a smaller government is a conservative idea because more conservatives say yes than liberals? Yet, note that only a minority (less than 50.0%) of self-classified conservatives take such a position. Should a conservative viewpoint be recognized when more than 50% agree? Consider another question on the survey. Do you favor or oppose term limits?<sup>31</sup> Approximately 72% and 79% of liberals and conservatives agree with establishing term limits, respectively. Based on this question, is this a conservative idea because more agree with it, compared to liberals, or is this a position that both agree with? To further explore this nuance, assume that one person agrees strongly that the U.S. Government is too large, yet they do not have a strong position on term limits. Is this person conservative or liberal? This person agrees more with conservatives concerning government size yet aligns more with liberals for term limits. This analysis can be extended to now include beliefs on abortion, prayer in schools, federal spending, equal rights, and the list goes on. We anticipate many people will have some ideas that align with conservative (right), while others align with liberal (left). The previous two questions highlight something of fundamental importance that has not been adequately addressed in extremist literature – what is a conservative versus a liberal position? When does an idea become conservative or liberal? It becomes recognizable from this argument that without defining a metric or measure to determine a liberal versus conservative position, the idea of classifying people into left and right groups appears eristic.

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<sup>31</sup> Data included in these questions come from the 2008 ANES database.

## Common Agreement and Action

With the risk of belaboring the previous argument yet slightly adjusting the perspective, assume one of the authors authoring this chapter aligns primarily conservatively and believes that the United States government is too large and ineffective. Suppose this same person is also genuinely an environmental protectionist – traditionally a liberal idea.<sup>32</sup> Suppose this person rallies at political environment meetings and may even act at sit-ins or protests government or business actions that harm the environment. Accept that this person engages in some form of physical violence against a party or business that shows perspectives counter to the movement in which he aligns.<sup>33</sup> Should this person be arrested for his actions at the environmental protest, how would he be classified by the media, government, or the academy? Is this person a left-wing extremist, even though he mostly aligns with conservative views? A betting person would argue that should a media story break, the person would be labeled by such media as a left-wing extremist. To extend this analysis, look at the US Capitol Riots, which from almost any media outlet classified as a RWEM act. Was every person who stormed the Capitol a person of extreme right-wing views? Of course, they were not. Take, for instance, John Sullivan of Utah, a liberal activist, Black Lives Matter (“BLM”) proponent, and founder of Insurgence USA. Sullivan participated and was later arrested for his actions at the Capitol. Sullivan is allegedly a left-wing radical who has historically called for action and an overthrow of the U.S. Government, particularly under the leadership of Donald

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<sup>32</sup> Liberals have consistently pushed for better environmental protection than conservatives, as evidenced by the last 20 years of ANES data.

<sup>33</sup> This is for illustrative purposes only.

Trump.<sup>34</sup> Concerning the Capitol insurgence, Sullivan's views, although coming from a radical left-wing perspective, aligned with the ideas of the right-wing groups, such as the Boogaloo Bois, Proud Boys, and Oath Keepers, on this given day. Can we say that Sullivan is an RWE, and his views align with the right wing? Probably not.

Similarly, during BLM protests in 2021, the right-wing group Boogaloo Bois had members attend these protests not to incite violence but to show solidarity toward BLM's dislike of the US government. Justin Mishler of Illinois, a member of the Boogaloo Bois, suggested that he attend the BLM protests not to cause problems but rather to offer support in the movement against what he calls an oppressive US government. Based on the current literature and definitions of RWEM, many people would jump to the conclusion that BLM rallies are filled with exclusively left-wing radicals, which is not always true – as shown here. In this instance, we see a common idea shared between the far right and the far left. Perhaps, as later analyzed in this chapter, the RWE and LWE, or more broadly speaking, extremists in general, have many political and socio-economic ideas that are common among them. Perhaps

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<sup>34</sup> BLM John Sullivan of Salt Lake City Utah from Insurgence USA We Are About to Burn This Shit Down? (720p 60). <https://archive.org/details/blm-john-sullivan-of-salt-lake-city-utah-from-insurgence-usa-we-are-about-to-bur>

there is something biological, psychological, or evolutionarily familiar among them?<sup>35 36</sup>

Based on this argument, there is no such thing as an RWE, or LWE per se, but rather a person who reacts violently to political or socio-economic stimuli (“triggering event”). This violent reaction may align with the beliefs of those who align right or left. Still, this action must not define the person as right or left wing, as this creates confusion within society as to the proper identification of the violent person. In the case above, one of the authors writing this chapter aligns primarily right of center. Yet, if he were to engage in a violent action associated with a left-wing idea, he would most likely be improperly classified as an LWE. This definitional concern is significant because it distorts the historical record and future databases that assist academics and governments in their efforts to understand the causal relationships between violence and position.

## Pro-Social Ideas

In addition to all the above, we suggest further that many right-wing ideas (and left-wing ideas) are often pro-social in the sense they are altruistic. However, the benefits of these ideas are not

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<sup>35</sup> For additional reading, see McClosky, Herbert, and Dennis Chong. “Similarities and Differences Between Left-Wing and Right-Wing Radicals”. *British Journal of Political Science* 15, no. 3 (1985): 329–63. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400004221>.

<sup>36</sup> For additional reading on the similarities between the right and left, with a view outside of the United States, see Krouwel, Andre, Yordan Kutiyski, Jan-Willem van Prooijen, Johan Martinsson, and Elias Markstedt. 2017. “Does Extreme Political Ideology Predict Conspiracy Beliefs, Economic Evaluations and Political Trust? Evidence From Sweden”. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 5 (2), 435-62. <https://doi.org/10.5964/jpspp.v5i2.745>.