

Domestic Terrorism in the United States

Executive Summary

Core Finding

Right-wing extremism dominates U.S. ideologically motivated killings since 1990, accounting for over 520 deaths across 227 incidents — significantly exceeding left-wing (78 deaths, 42 attacks) and other categories. Plot timelines have compressed from years to weeks, online ecosystems reinforce identity over tactics, and veterans appear disproportionately in right-wing leadership roles.

Key Statistical Comparisons

Metric	Right-Wing	Left-Wing	Interpretation
Share of extremist homicides (since 1990)	Dominant	~20% relative	Massive lethality gap
Lone-actor prevalence	High (90/100)	Moderate (55/100)	RW favors individual operators
Protest-linked incidents	Lower (45/100)	Higher (90/100)	LW clusters around demonstrations
Veteran leadership	Highest (100/100)	Low (25/100)	RW leverages military skills
Election-cycle surges	Very high (95/100)	Moderate (60/100)	Elections trigger RW mobilization

Actor Profiles

Right-Wing

- Ideologies: White supremacy, anti-government militias, conspiracy theories (Great Replacement, election fraud)
- Tactics: Firearms attacks, mass shootings, targeted violence
- Targets: Government/law enforcement, religious venues, LGBTQ sites, racial minorities
- Structure: Lone actors or small cells with veteran leadership
- Online behavior: Identity signaling spikes after shocks (elections, attacks), OPSEC discussions

Left-Wing

- Ideologies: Anti-fascism, environmental activism, labor rights
- Tactics: Arson, sabotage, vandalism, property destruction
- Targets: Corporate infrastructure, government property during protests
- Structure: Affinity groups, black bloc, protest networks
- Online behavior: Surges tied to protest waves, police violence incidents

Critical Trends

Plot Longevity Collapse

- 1970s: Median ~6 years from first act to arrest
- Mid-1980s: ~3 years
- Early 2000s: ~3 months
- Implication: Compressed detection windows favor simpler, faster attacks

Veteran Involvement

- Veterans transfer planning discipline, weapons proficiency, and mission identity
- Higher rates in right-wing leadership positions
- Transition stress and loss of purpose exploited by recruiters
- Prevention opportunity: Support during separation/reintegration

Online Dynamics

- Forums reinforce identity and belonging more than tactical innovation
- Low network density but high redundancy = resilient echo chambers
- External shocks (elections, attacks, trials) trigger posting surges
- Semiotic markers (slogans, memes, handles) serve as commitment signals

Protective & Risk Factors

Protective (Lower Violence Risk)

- Marriage and stable relationships
- Steady employment
- Community ties and structured purpose

Risk Amplifiers

- Identity fusion with extremist groups
- Echo chamber exposure
- Elite cue uptake (political rhetoric)
- Veteran status without transition support
- Supervision violations with extremist markers

Methodology & Data Sources

Primary Datasets:

- PIRUS (Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States)
- BIAS (Bias Incidents and Actors Study)
- GAO oversight reports
- CSIS trend analyses
- ADL homicide tracking

Analytic Approach:

- Pattern and trend analysis
- Cross-ideology triangulation to counter confirmation bias
- Longitudinal plot-longevity studies to address survivorship bias
- Multi-decade baselines to counter availability bias
- Individual-level pathway analysis to avoid ecological fallacy

Four Future Scenarios

1. Escalation

Signposts:

- RW: Lone-actor firearms prep, militia events near civic/faith venues, elite-cue meme surges
- LW: Downtown protest calendars, campus encampments, blockade logistics

Risk Indicators:

- Short procurement cycles
- Site reconnaissance
- Travel clusters toward targets
- Supervision violations with extremist markers

2. Stabilization

Signposts:

- Declining propaganda volume after shocks
- Fewer weapon arrests near soft targets
- Permitted marches with de-escalation agreements
- Lower identity-signaling tempo

Requirements:

- Symbol-literate supervision
- Veteran transition support
- Evidence-based threat assessments

3. Diffusion

- Hybrid ideologies blending anti-government, racial, conspiratorial frames
- Mixed-affiliation online handles
- Low-innovation but high-resilience networks
- Campus-to-city tactic transfer

4. Oppression (Unlawful State Response)

- Mass surveillance of protesters/journalists
- Politicized intelligence assessments
- Punitive funding cuts to opposition cities
- Military-style crowd control for peaceful assemblies

Trump Administration Patterns (2017–2021, 2025–)

Against Left-Wing Activity:

- Designated NYC, Portland, Seattle as 'anarchist jurisdictions' (2020)
- Deployed DHS agents, Border Patrol tactical units in unmarked vehicles (Portland 2020)
- Lafayette Square forcible clearing for photo op
- Federal charges against 200+ protesters (2020)
- DOJ explored sedition charges
- DHS intelligence pressured to inflate 'antifa' threat
- September 2025: Declared 'antifa' a 'major terrorist organization'
- June 2025: Federalized California National Guard (2,000 troops) to suppress LA immigration protests; federal judge ruled deployment violated Posse Comitatus Act

Regarding Right-Wing Activity:

- 'Very fine people on both sides' (Charlottesville 2017)
- Mass pardons for January 6 defendants including Proud Boys, Oath Keepers
- DHS intelligence reports suppressed white supremacist threat assessments
- Canceled CVE grants targeting neo-Nazi rehabilitation
- No 'anarchist jurisdiction' labels for militia strongholds
- 'LIBERATE MICHIGAN' tweets encouraging armed statehouse protests

Actionable Recommendations

Early Detection

- Monitor identity-signaling bursts after elections, trials, mass-casualty events
- Track procurement and reconnaissance signatures
- Build symbol literacy into supervision and probation systems
- Focus on bridge actors in low-density online networks

Prevention

- Veteran transition programs offering purpose and peer support
- Employment and family stabilization resources
- Community partnerships during separation windows
- Rapid interdiction protocols for simple-plot signatures

Exit Support

- Treat extremist identity as relapse-prone addiction
- Trigger mapping and management
- Alternative identity development
- Sustained aftercare beyond one-time deradicalization

Oversight & Transparency

- Protect threat assessments from politicization

- Maintain inspector general independence
- Public reporting aligned with relative lethality data
- Court challenges to unlawful deployments

Geographic Risk Factors

Right-Wing Higher Risk Zones

- Suburban/exurban counties near changing metros
- High polarization + demographic change intersections
- Areas with militia/sovereign-citizen presence
- High firearm prevalence states

Left-Wing Higher Risk Zones

- Dense urban cores
- University centers
- Logistics corridors during protest periods

Shared Risk Periods

- Election months (especially disputed elections)
- High-profile trials
- Police-violence incidents
- Policy shocks (immigration raids, pandemic restrictions)

Critical Gaps & Biases

- Public Visibility Bias: Spectacular incidents overrepresented; low-level violence undercounted
 - Survivorship Bias: Analysis focuses on caught actors, missing latent networks
 - Political Bias: Media/policy framing emphasizes certain threats while neglecting others
 - Data Inconsistencies: Varying definitions of 'extremism,' 'domestic terrorism,' 'hate crime'
 - Intelligence Politicization: DHS whistleblower revealed pressure to downplay white supremacist threats
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Bottom Line

Domestic terrorism prevention requires abandoning profiling shortcuts in favor of pathway-based triage, rapid interdiction keyed to compressed timelines, veteran-centered support systems, and relapse-aware exit programs. Right-wing lethality dominance demands proportionate resource allocation, while left-wing protest surges require de-escalation protocols over militarized response. Transparent, depoliticized threat assessments remain essential to counter disinformation and maintain public trust.

Report Date: 2025 | Source: Treadstone 71 analytical assessment drawing from PIRUS, BIAS, NIJ, CSIS, GAO, ADL datasets

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