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The Universal Language of Hatred: The Unlikely Union of Islamic and Right-Wing Extremism

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, the Western world has come to terms with the sobering reality that terrorism is an indubitable threat. Beneath the cover of internet anonymity, lurking in the shadows of small towns, right-wing extremism has flourished. Some describe right-wing extremism as the “new wave” of terrorism and are quick to dismiss and forget the unremitting Islamic extremist threat. However, this disassociation is unjustified and unfounded. Islamic and right-wing extremism are inextricably interconnected, with their similarities vastly outweighing their differences. This thesis investigates those remarkable similarities in an attempt to dismantle the misguided mentality that places these sects into separate spheres. Islamic and right-wing extremism share significant aspects of ideology, radicalization/recruitment, and attack tactics and strategies. These similarities also explain and inspire real-world collaboration and intersection. This phenomenon includes cases of Islamic and right-wing extremists conspiring together and instances of individuals subscribing to both ideologies. Above all, this thesis concludes that Islamic and right-wing extremism represent two sides of a singular threat borne of hatred and fear. These sects share the same core beliefs and reaffirm that warped ideology in an isolated, delusional community until lashing out in a violent rage. Ultimately, segregating Islamic and right-wing extremism into separate “issues” is detrimental to effective counterterrorism. Recognizing these similarities and synthesizing the separate but comprehensive research on both can provide a unified and robust solution to combatting their violent extremism.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

September 11, 2001: The worst day in recent American history. Citizens of the United States watched in horror as two planes struck the twin towers in New York City, a third plane hit the Pentagon, and a fourth plane crashed in the fields of Pennsylvania. The terrorist attacks on 9/11 became the deadliest to ever occur on American soil, killing almost 3,000 people (BBC, 2011). A single day is all it took to make Americans feel unsafe in their country, plagued by the idea of an outside threat coming to destroy their way of life. A single day is all it took to alter the counterterrorism landscape and public opinion for the next two decades.

The response to violent Islamic extremism in the U.S. was colossal and enduring. With public support, U.S. counterterrorism efforts were aimed almost exclusively at combating Al Qaeda, ISIS, and other foreign Islamic extremist groups (Hennigan & Bergengruen, 2020). In fact, from 2002 to 2017, the U.S. government spent \$2.8 trillion on “counterterrorism” funding (Donheiser, 2018). Despite these massive expenditures and a cooling-off period of almost 20 years, a study by the Pew Research Center shows that 73 percent of U.S. adults still rank counterterrorism as a top priority (Gramlich, 2018). However, the same year as Pew’s study, violent right-wing extremists committed every single terrorism-related murder in the United States (Anti-Defamation League, n.d.e). Moreover, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) compiled a data set of 893 terrorist attacks from 1994 to 2020, and right-wing extremism accounted for the majority of all terrorist incidents in the U.S. (Jones et al., 2020a). No matter the source, the figures overwhelmingly reveal a robust escalation of right-wing extremism.

This data would shock most Americans, and it creates many critical questions. Have Americans (and the rest of the West) wasted trillions of dollars and hours chasing after the wrong threat? This emphasis, bordering on obsession with foreign Islamic threats left a vast gap in the knowledge surrounding domestic, right-wing terrorism; therefore, researching the growing problem of right-wing extremism is necessary and essential. However, the segregation in the research of these two groups remains the underlying issue. We need to eradicate the archaic philosophy that places Islamic and right-wing extremism into separate spheres. Utilizing two decades of counterterrorism research and policy begins with recognizing and understanding the similarities between two of the largest terrorist ideologies in the world.

This thesis is unique in its comprehensive synthesis of research regarding both Islamic and right-wing extremism. Throughout the next few chapters, I will demonstrate that despite the lack of discourse, Islamic and right-wing extremism have more in common than not.

Representing two sides of the same hyper-conservative coin, the universal language of hatred that drives Islamic and right-wing extremists to commit unspeakable acts of violence is the same (Laaroussi, 2019). Moreover, analyzing similarities between the two could offer insight into the future terrorist threat landscape. The data indicates that right-wing extremism is increasing, and Islamic terrorism will remain a significant threat (Jones et al., 2020b). With this knowledge, existing counterterrorism and deradicalization strategies from Islamic extremism could be applied to the far-right. Ultimately, understanding the similarities and interactions between these groups can lead to comprehensive and successful approaches in preventing their violent acts.

Therefore, a successful analysis commences with the research question: What are the similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism that guide the intersection/collaboration of these ideologies, groups, and individuals? The hypothesis tested in this thesis attempts to



explain these similarities with research and contextual examples. The hypothesis states: Islamic and right-wing extremism have similarities in ideologies rooted in prejudice, hyper-conservatism, and distorted religion; radicalization strategies that target young, vulnerable men; and attack strategies that hinge on self-sacrificing individuals to achieve maximum fatalities. These similarities explain situations in which extremists from each sect have collaborated with each other and instances where individuals have subscribed to both ideologies.

### **Definitions, Assumptions, & Scope**

To begin, experts, media, governments, and even the public extensively debate classifications and definitions in the field of terrorism. Because no universal specifications exist, there is often disagreement as to which events or individuals “qualify” under terrorism, extremism, and so on. In order to avoid confusion for the examples I select, I will adopt explicit definitions. However, because some resources utilize different terminology, I will use certain terms synonymously. Therefore, “jihadist” is equal to an Islamic extremist, and “far-right” or “radical right” refers to the movement that encompasses right-wing extremism.

The definitions are as follows:

**Violent extremism:** “Encouraging, condoning, justifying, or supporting the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals” (FBI, 2015).

**Terrorism:** The use or threat of violence in order to achieve political goals and create a lasting psychological impact on the larger population (FBI, n.d.c).

**Domestic terrorism:** Terrorism committed usually by citizens or residents of that nation in order to coerce government policy or the civilian population of the nation in which the terrorist act is committed (RAND Corporation, n.d.).

**Islamic extremism:** A group of ideologies that encompass the idea of Islam being the one true religion that society and government should follow. Muslims have the duty to enforce and defend this belief through violent means, specifically against the West (Hamid & Dar, 2016).

**Right-wing extremism:** Social, religious, and political movements that radically extend beyond mainstream conservatism. This term encompasses various ideologies, such as white supremacy, anti-abortion, anti-immigrant, anti-government, anti-LGBTQ+, anti-Muslim, anti-feminism, and so on (ADL, n.d.c).

**White supremacism:** The belief that the “white race” exists in a class above all other inferior racial, ethnic, and cultural groups (especially Black and Jewish people). Groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis also utilize this ideology to advocate for the removal/separation of these non-whites from society (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.d).

**Alt-Right:** The “alternative-right” is a classification of ideologies that fall under right-wing extremism but reject traditional conservatism and accept some recent advances in society and technology. The core ideology espouses that the white, Christian community is under attack by liberal ideas and multicultural forces (SPLC, n.d.a).

Furthermore, my analysis will include assumptions and generalizations to avoid valid but cumbersome and minute details immaterial to the hypothesis. Firstly, I assume extremism, violent extremism, and terrorism exist on a continuum. In order to become a violent terrorist, one

must first subscribe to or sympathize with the extremist ideology. Therefore, some of my sources may draw from studies on extremists that did not necessarily commit terrorist acts. Although every group or individual extremist holds slightly differing beliefs, I utilize many generalizations. For instance, many far-right groups are vehemently anti-LGBTQ+. However, famously self-described “white supremacist” Richard Spencer has promised an acceptance of gay individuals in the “white ethnostate” that will emerge post-race-war (Lough, 2018). Therefore, while acknowledging that there are differences, I will be making many generalizations on the ideologies attributed to extremist classifications to apply my conclusions to a broader spectrum.

Finally, I will be narrowing the scope of the issues I examine and the analysis I present. Terrorism has seeped into nearly every continent globally, with Islamic extremism afflicting communities from Africa to Asia and North America. However, right-wing extremism has become more of a “Western phenomenon” that primarily appears in the United States, Europe, Australia, etc. Therefore, in order to appropriately compare both Islamic and right-wing extremism effectively, my examples of Islamic extremism will have a lopsided focus towards their relation/effects in Western countries. Specifically, I will analyze Islamic extremism within a domestic terrorism lens as those are the current greatest threats. This means that although most Islamic extremism has a foreign origin or inspiration, my analysis will focus on groups operationally or ideologically related to Western countries.

## **Methodology**

To fully encapsulate the wealth of existing literature on Islamic and right-wing extremism, this thesis combined two types of qualitative methodologies. First, this thesis utilizes

a modified version of comparative analysis to explore the patterns of similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism. While a typical comparative analysis renders both similarities and differences, this research takes a different approach. This thesis excluded the differences and gleaned solely the similarities amongst the literature on Islamic and right-wing extremism. This hyper-selective approach narrowed the scope of the research to appropriately answer the first part of the research question. Second, a case study analysis facilitated an in-depth investigation of the complex interactions between Islamic and right-wing extremists. While the comparative analysis offered a broad view on Islamic and right-wing extremism's similarities, the case study analysis provided additional perspective on the modern, real-life phenomenon. The case studies answered the second portion of the research question by utilizing those identified similarities to explain the motivation and reasoning for collaboration and co-belief. Overall, the combination of a modified comparative analysis and case study approach produced general and precise conclusions on the unique similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism.

The data collection portion of this methodology included a mass-gathering of established literature and situation-specific research regarding the selected case studies. For the comparative analysis, this data included qualitative and quantitative research collected by experts in political science, intelligence, terrorism, psychology, and more. These include studies by various world governments, long-term statistical analyses of terrorism trends, peer-reviewed journal articles, and even books written by authors formerly involved in violent extremism themselves. The majority of this research focused solely on Islamic or right-wing extremism, with a limited selection of research dedicated to the comparison of both sects. These sources were utilized for their academic standing and reliability, as existing literature contained well-founded conclusions providing a solid groundwork to substantiate this thesis's unifying hypothesis. Next, the case

study data collection included primarily government press releases, court documents, and primary source accounts of individuals involved in the case studies. These direct sources allowed for an unbiased approach, providing clear facts suitable for analysis through the lens of the previously discovered similarities.

The relevant data collected was assessed and analyzed within a structured and organized framework. This methodology typified and compartmentalized the major aspects of Islamic and right-wing extremism in order to clearly discuss the similarities within those areas. These categories were ideology, radicalization and recruitment, and tactics and strategies of attack. With a step-by-step approach, the collected data was then studied and analyzed for the proof of similarities falling into these pre-selected categories. Given the breadth of data collected, this approach facilitated generalizations regarding the similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism for each of the aforementioned categories. These general similarities were also supported via specific examples from Islamic and right-wing extremism.

After the similarities in each category were identified and explained, those findings were applied to the case studies. The case study analysis answered how those previously discovered similarities guide the intersection/collaboration of these ideologies, groups, and individuals. The comparative analysis offered general similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism. Through the guiding perspective of those general similarities, the specific similarities amongst particular individuals and groups involved were identified. Then, those similarities allowed the explanation of the logical motivation and desire behind the interaction of Islamic and right-wing extremists. Essentially, those similarities (specific to those case studies and consistent with the larger generalizations) were shown to act as a driving force for collaboration and conversion

between Islamic and right-wing extremism. Ultimately, the parallels previously drawn from the comparative analysis were solidified and expanded upon with these concrete examples.

This methodology logically addresses the questions left unanswered by the relevant yet segregated research on Islamic and right-wing extremism. What are the similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism? The synthesis of this valuable research and years of terrorism trends demonstrates how the similarities exist in ideology, radicalization, and tactics and strategies. This comparative analysis is a simple identification of the similarities amongst the vast amount of research in order to measure the theoretical and historical likeness between these two groups. Moreover, this method is reliable and valid for two reasons. First, this study is replicable by any analyst as comparing different research on Islamic and right-wing extremism would result in the same patterns emerging. Second, recorded similarities explain how the shocking interaction of these groups is driven by their likeness, and it measures the type and extent of these similarities. Altogether, these figures and analysis methodology distinguish a clear, objective trend supporting the hypothesis.

## **Overview**

Utilizing this methodology, the ensuing chapters will further explore the similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism. First, this analysis will commence with a thorough examination of the ardent ideological principles and beliefs driving both Islamic and right-wing extremists. Chapter 2 explores Islamic and right-wing extremists' strict adherence to the most radical interpretation of their respective religions and how their perverted religious concepts justify and encourage violence. Moreover, this chapter analyzes the ever-present, existential fear that torments Islamic and right-wing extremists, such as the promise of a vague outside threat

bent on the destruction of their way of life. Those vague enemies will be shown to consist of primarily the same groups and ideas: Judaism, feminism, and liberalism. For Islamic and right-wing extremists, that fear and hatred also culminate into one common goal: eradicating and reconstructing society in favor of their idyllic world order. This chapter will demonstrate the identical warped perceptions and beliefs that constitute both Islamic and right-wing extremists' ideologies.

Chapter 3 will explore the path to adopting these extreme beliefs by examining the parallel radicalization and recruitment process for Islamic and right-wing extremists. Overall, these individuals follow similar "steps" to radicalization in a process that exploits fear and suffering, transforming these emotions into extremism. Moreover, this chapter will delineate these extremists' typical demographics and background, as vulnerable and impressionable young men. Next, Chapter 3 will evaluate the role of the internet in radicalization and how the existing extremist community offers isolation, encouragement, and identity. These radicalization tactics often appear in the form of propaganda or memes, spouting similar hateful and violent messages. Above all, this section will review how the internet echo-chamber facilitates and propels the radicalization and recruitment of budding Islamic and right-wing extremists alike.

Chapter 4 will examine Islamic and right-wing extremists' similarities in their attack tactics and strategies. This chapter will reveal the universal threat posed by Islamic and right-wing extremists: home-grown, lone wolves who draw inspiration and even instruction from the broader extremist community. Furthermore, Chapter 4 will illustrate how Islamic and right-wing extremists utilize the same types of weapons (guns, explosives, and vehicles) to attack vulnerable, soft targets, such as places of worship or recreational locations. Ultimately, this

chapter exhibits the manner in which Islamic and right-wing extremists strive for the same goal, maximum violence and mass casualties.

Finally, Chapter 5 will encapsulate these findings by utilizing these similarities to explain instances of interaction between Islamic and right-wing extremists. The first case study will explore Ethan Melzer, a neo-Nazi who colluded with Al Qaeda in an attempted attack against his Army unit. The next example will analyze the case of two-right-wing extremists or “Boogaloo Bois” who attempted to sell firearms to and offer mercenary support for the Islamic extremist group, Hamas. Overall, this chapter will demonstrate how the inextricable similarities between these groups’ ideologies, radicalization and recruitment, and attack tactics drive their desire for collaboration. Moreover, Chapter 5 will explore two instances of individuals who subscribed to both Islamic and right-wing extremism (one simultaneously and one consecutively). Both Nicholas Young and Devon Arthurs’ cases exemplify how the existing similarities between each sect facilitate and encourage an individual to radicalize into both Islamic and right-wing extremism.

Ultimately, these findings will culminate in the final chapter that offers insight and analysis to these conclusions. What are the implications of this collaboration? How do these findings affect the terrorism threat landscape? Why is this significant? What can further research uncover? The final chapter will offer a comprehensive answer to these questions with a profound analysis of the consequences and implications of the findings in the research. Above all, the ensuing thesis will erect a bridge between the academic and political chasm that currently separates Islamic and right-wing extremism.



## Literature Review

The existing literature in the field of terrorism is boundless and complex. As previously mentioned, the hyper-focus on Islamic extremism during the past two decades has produced broad and comprehensive findings. However, the quantitative data also paints a very clear picture of the most recent trends in Western terrorism. The aforementioned CSIS study exposes the burgeoning threat posed by right-wing extremists. In the past 25 years, right-wing attacks accounted for the majority of all terrorist incidents *and* fatalities in the U.S. (excluding 9/11) (Jones et al., 2020a). Scholars and government officials have begun to alter their focus, declaring the death of religious extremism and describing right-wing extremism as the “new wave” of global terrorism (Spence, 2020). Despite the attention shift, Islamic extremism is alive and well. A study of Islamic terrorism in the West since 1989 reveals an increase in both internal and autonomous terrorism since 2003 (Crone & Harrow, 2011). This attention-deficit afflicts government officials and media networks alike as they flock to be the first to discuss the new and “trendy” terrorist threat. However, classifying terrorism in “waves” creates an imaginary division between Islamic and right-wing extremism. This myopic view creates the gap this thesis intends to fill; there is no need to segregate the two, and in fact, there exists an unlikely union between Islamic and right-wing extremism.

A smattering of academics, experts, and journalists have already noticed this egregious disparity. Though sparse and scarce, their published literature has begun to address the remarkable similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism. By utilizing existing, valuable research, these individuals have begun to draw preliminary conclusions as well as increase attention to the issue. Scholars have begun to document and analyze some of these similarities that exist amongst the groups’ ideology, structure, attacks, recruitment, and more.

The similarities amongst their ideologies have been most often recognized in their religion, “all-consuming hatred,” and the fact that both sects operate on the hyper-conservative end of the political spectrum. Bakali recognized (and wrote exclusively about) the intense focus on religion present within Islamic and right-wing extremism. Both Islamic and right-wing extremists view their religions as possessing “the one true God.” Moreover, this religion forms the basis for their other conservative beliefs that govern their normative views on society. From the extreme forms of both Christianity and Islam stem a similar conservative backlash to feminism, LGBTQ+, Judaism, and so on (Bakali, 2019). Even major news organizations such as BBC have begun to notice the glaring similarities. Publishing a one-page article, BBC accurately declared, “Many white supremacists and violent Islamist extremists tend to inhabit a narrow-based world dominated by an all-consuming hatred and a total intolerance of anyone's views but their own” (Gardner, 2019). These eerie similarities appear self-evident once one begins to notice them. However, these casual declarations (though accurate) are unproven and require more evidence than a single-page headlining article to be considered academically sound.

Moreover, even those who have begun to research these similarities often only focus on one similarity amongst the multiple aspects that make up terrorism, especially in the recruitment and radicalization process. First and foremost, the digital age has transformed these terrorist groups’ ability to create a virtual community for extremists to comfortably socialize. The U.S. Department of Justice uses examples from both Islamic and right-wing extremism to describe how extremists use the internet to recruit and radicalize. Essentially, these online communities allow individuals to feel justified in their violent fantasies, further isolate themselves from the rest of society, and increase their drift towards extremist ideologies (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2014). A study out of St. Petersburg University further explains how

both Jihadists and white supremacists use the internet to create an “alternative reality” in order to recruit like-minded individuals. These groups even post instructions on building bombs and operating weapons so that these other extremists can “go forth and change the systems they live in” (Cedillo, 2019). Ultimately, these similarities have not been discussed in enough detail that acknowledges the dangerous consequences of their existence.

This radicalization process empowers individuals to commit acts of violence, and there is only slightly more research on how their attack strategies are similar. Firstly, The Telegraph helped popularize the term “white-jihad” by reporting on a neo-Nazi group that called for an imitation of Jihadist attack strategies such as suicide bombings. This article draws further comparison to tactics employed by both groups when referencing the attacks in Barcelona and Charlottesville. In August of 2017, ISIS claimed responsibility when a man killed 13 people by driving a van through a crowd in Spain. That same month, a Neo-Nazi in Charlottesville, Virginia drove his car through a group of protestors, killing one (Ebner & Amarasingam, 2017). Laaroussi adeptly articulates the reason behind these types of individual, violent acts. Perhaps the most pivotal similarity between the groups is the belief that their “communities are facing an existential threat, placing an obligation on the individual to fight back” (2019). This core belief has led to the rise in lone wolf terrorism by both groups, warranting further investigation into their attack strategies.

Ultimately, the undeniable similarities that herald the collision of Islamic and right-wing extremism warrant more than the present, inadequate research. These preliminary publications have begun to bridge the chasm that divides the findings on both ideologies into separate spheres of thought. However, the conclusions are meager and undeveloped. There exists no comprehensive analysis on the depths of these similarities and the danger that their cooperation

has (and will cause) on the world stage. Ultimately, the goal of this thesis is to unify the broader counterterrorism community in what is the singular fight against *both* Islamic and right-wing extremism.

## Chapter 2: Ideology

### Introduction

“The Jews will not replace us! White lives matter... White Sharia NOW!” The battle cries of the alt-right at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia echo the famous doctrine in Islam that has been perverted by Islamic extremists. For most Muslims, Sharia law is a “personal religious law and moral guidance” that advocates for life, family, and faith (Ali & Duss, 2011). However, organizations like ISIL and the Taliban have corrupted this concept and used it for justification of rape, slavery, and heinous acts of violence against women and non-Muslims (Cornell International Law Journal, 2015). Unsurprisingly, right-wing extremists have clung to the more extreme interpretation to support their misogynistic, violent, and oppressive ideology— while maintaining a separation from the “less than human” Muslims (Kelley, 2015).

How did an extremely racist, anti-Muslim community like the alt-right start incorporating core Islamic concepts? Simply, the beliefs and principles held sacred by right-wing extremists mirror those essential to Islamic extremism and vice versa. Sitting at the far-right, ultra-conservative side of the political spectrum, the ideologies of groups and individuals on both sides are strikingly similar. Of course, every group (and even every individual) differs slightly, but in terms of the majority, there are clear parallels.

Returning to the research question: What are the similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism that guide the intersection/collaboration of these ideologies, groups, and individuals? This chapter answers the first part of that question by stating their ideological similarities and providing examples. First, both Islamic and right-wing extremists use warped religious principles as the foundation for their broader philosophies within Islam and

Christianity, respectively. Second, their xenophobic views purport that anyone outside of these ideologies (such as the West or non-white immigrants) poses an existential threat to their goals and way of life. Third, those internal and external enemies are largely the same: Judaism, feminism, liberalism, LGBTQ+, etc. Finally, the end goal is to raze current governments to resurrect an authoritarian Califate or ethnostate. Ultimately, these examples support the hypothesis that Islamic and right-wing extremists have similar ideologies rooted in prejudice, hyper-conservatism, and distorted religion.

## **Hatred is Holy**

The ideological cornerstone of both Islamic and right-wing extremism is a staunch dedication to an extreme interpretation of their respective religions. Both sects view themselves as the “chosen” people following the exclusive moral path in their religion. Moreover, Islamic and right-wing extremists demand a puritanical enforcement of their selected religious rules, advocating a cruel intolerance of any violator. This type of “all-or-nothing” ideology permits and encourages violent action against any non-believer or even any practitioner that differs in their interpretation of that religion. Therefore, terrorism is moral and acceptable because it is “God’s will.” Ultimately, Islamic and right-wing extremists exploit religious concepts to bolster their oppressive and brutal ideological choices.

Both extremist groups consistently pervert religious concepts to justify how they are the “chosen peoples” following the sole, correct path in their religion. In Islam, Salafism is the replication of the traditions of early Muslims who followed the prophet Mohammed, such as the way to dress and eat. These Salafists simply follow the example of these Muslims, believing that they were the holiest practitioners of Islam. However, Islamic extremists twist Salafism to

declare that their approach to Islam is the only authentic one. These extremists emphasize the military exploits of the Salaf as the “chosen peoples” with a divine right to commit violence (Hamid & Dar, 2016). Similarly, in the Bible, there is a concept stating that God chose the Israelites (originally Jews) to be in a covenant with him. Most Christians and Jews see this as a divine call to spread the word of God and his mercy (Quinn, 2019). However, right-wing extremists (especially white supremacists) superfluously decided that this passage referred to white people, not Jews, as the true, chosen people favored by God. Therefore, any violent action in the furtherance of the white race is part of the race-war pre-ordained by God.

Consequently, both Islamic and right-wing extremists have used this concept of “peoples chosen by God” to fuel their ideological exceptionalism. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) vehemently rejects Islamic scholars studying modern, flexible practices of Islam. To ISIS, anything outside of the “original mandates” of Islam and the Prophet’s first followers is sinful and deserving of death (Hamid & Dar, 2016). Moreover, amongst right-wing terrorists, the Christian Identity Movement has been embraced by many white supremacist groups. Specifically, the KKK believes that “mainstream” Christian institutions have fallen astray, failing to fulfill their duties as God’s chosen people. Thus, the KKK’s violent actions against people of color are moral and responsible (D. Johnson, 2017). Ultimately, this strict interpretation and belief in being “God's chosen peoples” translates to extremist practitioners who differ from their mainstream counterparts in both the Islamic and far-right groups.

In addition to their “exceptional” status as the sole legitimate practitioners of their respective religions, both Islamic and right-wing extremists radicalize the principles and rules to be followed in their respective faiths. As previously discussed, most Muslims use Sharia as a guiding principle for moral and religious practices, such as how to pray and observe holy days

(Ali & Duss, 2011). However, Islamic extremists call for a strict and violent enforcement of Sharia, which includes preventing women from receiving education, justifying slavery, and enforcing authoritarian and oppressive rules over almost all aspects of life (Al-Jamil, 2010). Likewise, in Christianity, the Bible contains various passages about the sanctity of life and moral guidance for families and relationships. Right-wing extremists use these passages to justify anti-abortion extremism, force women into submissive roles, and declare any “non-masculine” men as satanic (D. Johnson, 2018).

These stringent and austere rules emanating from an adulterated version of religion result in these groups declaring brutal consequences for deviants. For example, the Taliban in Afghanistan believes in utilizing strict Sharia to “correct” the moral wrongs of society: a woman not wearing a headscarf deserves rape, a man listening to music merits the forceful shaving of his hair, and any non-Muslim Sikhs living in the area under their control must pay massive taxes (Ahmed, 2009). Equally horrifying are the beliefs and actions of the Army of God (AOG) in the United States. AOG purports that abortions are murder and the women and medical providers involved are perpetrating a “silent holocaust.” Therefore, in order to protect the sanctity of life, it is morally acceptable and *advisable* for AOG members to bomb abortion clinics and murder providers (D. Johnson, 2018). In the end, these strict rules allow the terrorists omnipotent control for violently policing morality.

Finally, distorted religious doctrine further enhances the justification for violent action by Islamic and right-wing extremists. In Islam, jihad is the idea that “religiously sanctioned warfare is an individual obligation incumbent upon all Muslims.” It is important to note that the vast majority of Muslims acknowledge this concept as referring to a specific set of circumstances where Muslims were persecuted because of their religious beliefs. Of course, however, Islamic



extremists describe jihad as an “immediate and divine imperative” to rise up in a holy war against any (Muslim or non-Muslim) enemies (Hamid & Dar, 2016). Similarly, the Bible refers to many religious wars in the Old Testament that most Christians view as solely historical examples used to illustrate Christian teachings. However, many right-wing extremists view these struggles as the justification for the violent uprising against Jews and non-whites in the holy race-war that is the end-time prophecy (SPLC, n.d.b).

This divinely inspired violence is evident in many groups’ charters. For instance, Al Qaeda follows Salafi-jihadism, and their approach allows violence against other Muslims and non-combatants in pursuit of the holy war (Hamid & Dar, 2016). This ideology is what allowed for the terrorist attacks on 9/11 against the non-military targets in the World Trade Center. In right-wing extremism, a brand of “Christian Identity” called the “dual seed-line doctrine” teaches that Jews are literal offspring of Satan. Those subscribing to this doctrine believe that Cain (Jewish) killed Abel (white) therefore igniting the race war and christening any violence against non-whites (D. Johnson, 2017). Ultimately, the idea of violence “anointed by God” serves as the ultimate justification for their terror.

In the end, religion is a tool exploited and abused by both Islamic and right-wing extremists to bolster their hatred and justify their violent pursuit of power. Both groups use the idea that they are the “chosen peoples” to designate themselves as indisputable leaders. Then, these extremists espouse stringent and subjective rules forbidding any resistance or difference of opinion. Finally, their “scrupulous” foundation sanctions violence and brutality because their hatred is holy. Therefore, the difference between Christianity and Islam is insignificant because their religious justifications are identical, and this debauchery of faith sets the stage to reinforce their hateful ideologies.

## **Everyone Else is the Problem**

An "us against them" mentality most accurately describes the principle that places Islamic and right-wing extremists into a constant state of fear from the vague but existential threats to their way of life. A key part of their ideology is the idea that their beliefs, goals, and societies exist under constant siege from outside forces seeking to destroy. This fear mongering supercharges an all-consuming hatred and total intolerance of anyone's views but their own. Who is this threat? For Islamic extremists, the West is a corrupting and oppressive force set on exploiting and destroying the Muslim world (Wood, 2015). For the far-right, their xenophobia is fueled by a hatred for non-white immigrants that "putrefy" white-Christian societies. However, their anger extends beyond the simple hatred of outsiders as both groups vilify internal moderates and sympathizers. Ultimately, Islamic and right-wing extremists exist in a never-ending see-saw of hatred toward outsiders and any potential internal threat.

The "righteous" fight against malicious invaders and their "debased" cultures unifies Islamic and right-wing extremists. For Islamic extremists, there is a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West. These extremists view Western influence in the Middle East as corrupting and evil (Wood, 2015). To them, the Western powers occupying Muslim countries are repugnant, and even modern Western culture, such as alcohol, music, and clothing is unacceptable (Beauchamp, 2015). The far-right agrees on this "clash of civilizations." However, right-wing extremists often view immigration as the "proxy war" for the white identity and Western civilization. In the United States, these extremists believe that non-white immigrants (often Black, Muslim, and Latino) are inferior in intelligence, morals, culture, and so on (SPLC, n.d.d). Therefore, the only way to stop the "white genocide" is to violently oppose immigration and racial mixing (SPLC, n.d.a).

This animosity towards outsiders by both Islamic and right-wing extremists designates clear enemies to attack. In many statements, the former leader of Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, declared the United States as the Al Qaeda's greatest enemy years before the attacks on 9/11. In his "declaration of war" in 1996, bin Laden stated that "no other duty after belief is more important than the war on America" (Beauchamp, 2015). After his death, Al Qaeda maintained this mandate against the corrupting influence of the U.S. in the Muslim world. Interestingly, many right-wing extremists view Muslims in an identical light, and to these individuals, *Muslims* are the corrupting influence on the West. In 2019, a white supremacist killed 51 Muslims in a Mosque in New Zealand, and he left behind a 74-page manifesto describing the need for violent white nationalism (Gardner, 2019). Though it seems paradoxical to declare the similarity of these ideologies based on their hatred for each other, the reasoning behind the hatred is the same, xenophobic vitriol.

However, the contempt of outsiders is just the beginning, as both groups revile any moderates or sympathizers within their own aggregate. In addition to decrying Muslims that participate in "Western" activities, Islamic extremists "reject the traditional Muslim respect for 'People of the Book'" (e.g. Christians and Jews). Islamic extremists believe that jihad is a defining concept in Islam and that it includes "lesser jihad" which endorses violence against "corrupt others" (Chermak & Gruenewald, 2014). Thus, lesser jihad incorporates violence against non-compliant Muslims as well. Similarly, right-wing extremists detest supposed multicultural forces that use "political correctness" and "social justice" to force race-mixing. Right-wing extremists believe that these "liberals" undermine Western civilization as much as the immigrants themselves (SPLC, n.d.a).

The attacks perpetrated by Islamic and right-wing extremists clearly demonstrate their ideological beliefs that permit aggression against these internal enemies. One French NGO found that Muslims are actually the victims of most terrorist attacks (National Counterterrorism Center, 2011). The Islamic State (IS), for instance, treats Shia Muslims and anyone they see as co-operating with "the non-believers" as equal enemies (Hamid & Dar, 2016). Similarly, in 2011, a Norwegian right-wing extremist carried out an attack in Oslo on youth members of a party he blamed for encouraging the racial mixing of Norway. Killing a total of 77 people, his goal was to harm both immigrants and their "enablers" (Gardner, 2019). Ultimately, both groups not only allow but advocate for the indiscriminate killing of those internal enemies hostile to their goals and beliefs.

In the end, Islamic and right-wing extremism rely on an "othering" of those with conflicting or alternative perspectives. Islamic and right-wing extremists' philosophies center around a state of fear, petrified of the external forces that might adulterate their "perfect" societies. Moreover, even any individual internal to that society is subject to the same hatred and brutality if they are moderate or sympathetic. Above all, the assertion that "everyone else is the problem" isolates these terrorists as "superior" and continually rationalizes the need to be at war with these existential threats.

## **The Isms of Hatred**

Coupled with their mixture of warped religious values and general hostility towards outsiders, Islamic and right-wing extremists share many common enemies. To begin, the vast majority of these extremists harbor a deep-seated hatred towards Judaism and the Jewish people. Moreover, their attitude towards feminism, the role of women, and women's value, in general, is

similarly distorted. Both ideologies also vehemently oppose the “liberalism” that would have them accept those groups among others, such as the LGBTQ+ community. Therefore, although sometimes for different reasons, the individuals and groups that Islamic and right-wing extremists choose to hate are often identical.

Islamic and right-wing extremists have an extensive and multi-faceted history of anti-Semitism. Many Islamic extremist groups concentrate an enormous effort on their propaganda targeting Jews and inciting violence against the Jewish state of Israel. These groups believe that Jews are engaged in a war against Islam, continually fueling their hatred with “historical accounts of Jewish treachery,” as well as engaging in modern conspiracy theories (Rickenbacher, 2019). Interestingly, many of these conspiracy theories originated in Western groups of white supremacists and neo-Nazis. Amongst right-wing extremists, anti-Semitism has also been long-prevalent, with many groups idolizing Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany. While there exists a varying degree of Jewish hatred (some lumping Jews in with other non-whites and others designating “the Jew” as their cardinal enemy), the rhetoric is largely the same as Islamic extremists. Essentially, all Jews participate in a malevolent conspiracy to harm white Christians and must be eradicated to create a purer homeland (SPLC, n.d.d).

Both Islamic and right-wing extremists are often exceptionally vocal about their anti-Semitism as well. In a video message in August 2015, Osama bin Laden’s son, Hamza bin Laden, described Jews and Israel as having a “disproportionate role” in the oppression of Muslims. Utilizing a range of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel narratives, his goal was to incite violence against Jews amongst Al Qaeda supporters (ADL, 2015). The National Alliance (the most dangerous and organized neo-Nazi group in the U.S.) has released similar inflammatory statements. The National Alliance’s leader asserts that creating an all-white homeland is possible

by locking “Jews, race traitors and other enemies of the Aryan race into cattle cars and send them to the bottom of abandoned coal mines” (SPLC, n.d.c). Ultimately, both groups rely on wild conspiracy theories and hateful exaggerations to justify their gruesome desire to violently eradicate Jews.

Moreover, both Islamic and right-wing extremists utilize anti-feminist ideology to subjugate, abuse, and oppress women. Islamic extremist organizations around the world pervert the Quran and other religious concepts in order to control and exploit women. These groups force women to wear the niqab (head-to-toe clothing covering everything but the eyes), work exclusively in the home, and submit entirely to their husbands (sometimes being one of many wives). Furthermore, many Islamic extremists permit rapes, honor killings, and sexual slavery as acceptable punishments for non-compliant women (Baffa et al., 2019). Right-wing extremists share a similar philosophy towards the “purpose” of women and abhor modern feminist movements that contend otherwise. Most far-right ideals stem from archaic gender roles that detest women working outside of the home instead of their true purpose of “cooking, cleaning, and having babies.” Additionally, right-wing extremists utilize the same “punishment” practiced by Islamic extremists, essentially declaring that women who dress/act promiscuously are deserving of rape and murder (Höppner, 2020).

Both Islamic and right-wing extremists provide immeasurable examples of these misogynistic ideologies. In one instance, ISIL created a manual on how to treat female slaves, including guidelines for when it is “permissible” to beat and rape them. Then, in August of 2014, ISIL abducted hundreds of young women and girls in northern Iraq, forcing them into sexual slavery, affirming their disdain and disregard for the rights of women. On the other side of the world, right-wing extremists were beginning to “admire” Islamic extremists’ treatment of

women. As previously mentioned, the term “white Sharia” grew in popularization in the alt-right. To them, the term represented a need to replicate the “barbarism” that Islamic extremists embody. The creator of the term remarked, “We have to strip females of suffrage and most if not all political, legal, and economic power. Our men need harems, and the members of those harems need to be baby factories” (Kelley, 2017). Overall, these terrorists consider women second-class citizens, useful only in their roles as submissive wives and mothers, deserving “domination” in the form of sexual violence.

Finally, Islamic and right-wing extremists view liberalism as a corrupting force, subverting their hyper-conservative goals and beliefs. These Islamic extremists are vehemently anti-inclusion and anti-tolerance. They view many young Muslims as “infidels” for their behaviors that incorporate Western music and clothing, lax attitude towards Islam, and acceptance of women, the LGBTQ+, and other religions (Wood, 2015). Similarly, right-wing extremists zealously oppose ideas of “multiculturalism” and “political correctness” for which the “liberal elite” advocate. Like Islamist extremists, the far-right is resistant to change and prefers extreme traditionalism that excludes diverse cultures and identities.

These terrorists are increasingly emphasizing their intolerance towards liberal ideas and people. For instance, ISIS has pledged its participation in a “global elimination” of LGBTQ+ people, inspiring terrorists worldwide. In 2016, a shooter killed 49 people in a gay night-club in Orlando, Florida after declaring allegiance to ISIS (Barron, 2017). In other parts of the United States, notorious white-supremacist Richard Spencer urges his followers to resist “rampant liberalism” by installing a “pseudo-libertarian government” that supports “traditional Western civilization” and stridently rejects “egalitarianism” and “universalism” (SPLC, n.d.a).

Ultimately, both sects' traditionalist and hyper-conservative values make these groups acutely resistant to an evolving international effort towards a culture of tolerance and acceptance.

Overall, Islamic and right-wing extremists are united in their interchangeable prejudices against progress and diversity. Both sects subscribe to implausible and bizarre conspiracies about the "malevolence" of Jews to justify their anti-Semitism. Moreover, their misogynistic principles result in nearly identical efforts to oppress and violate women. Therefore, their disdain for tolerance and acceptance (principles they ascribe to liberalism) is unsurprising. Tipping the scale at the ultra-conservative side of the political spectrum, Islamic and right-wing extremists' hatred towards specific groups makes their ideological enemies virtually indistinguishable.

### **The Caliphate and the Ethnostate**

Finally, both Islamic and right-wing extremists envision an idyllic world governed by their divine leaders and devoid of the "corrupting" persons and beliefs they revile. These extremists despise most of the world's established governments, especially free and democratic countries. Instead, Islamic and right-wing extremists obsess over past regimes, referring to these historical examples as archetypes to be replicated. What exact form of government would they prefer? If successful in an overthrow of existing governments, Islamic and right-wing extremists desire a Caliphate and ethnostate, respectively. Ultimately, both groups have clear, explicit goals for their violent usurpation of society.

Overwhelming, Islamic and right-wing extremists are ardently anti-establishment, believing that most modern governments allow for excessive freedoms. Consistent with the belief that politics and government should operate according to Islamic law, Islamic extremist political ideology directly clashes with Western and Middle Eastern established governments. To



these extremists, even the existing theocratic authoritarian regimes in the Middle East are not sufficient. These governments offer too lax an interpretation of Islam and do not allow for slavery and crucifixion (Fisher, 2014). Similarly, the far-right has become increasingly anti-government. Though politically aligned with right-wing politicians, most right-wing extremists believe that the United States, for example, has strayed from its original purpose as a “haven” for white Christians. Right-wing extremists often share the sentiment of Islamic extremists, regarding the current government as too liberal and needing to be torn down in favor of a more conservative regime (D. Johnson, 2018).

The similarities in their anti-government ideologies are evident in the examples of those actively resisting “the establishment.” For example, tens of thousands of foreign converts to Islam are thought to have left their homes to join the Islamic State. These individuals originate from the UK, Germany, Australia, Indonesia, the U.S., and so on. Nonetheless, these newly ordained extremists held the common belief that their home countries were “beyond repairing” and that changing the world order begins in the Middle East (Wood, 2015). On the other hand, unable or unwilling to leave the United States, members of the “Sovereign Citizens” movement advocate for a violent overthrow of the U.S. government. These individuals abhor the amendment that made former slaves citizens and the religious shift away from Christianity. Therefore, the members of Sovereign Citizens support a violent restructuring of the established U.S. government (Conroy, 2017). Ultimately, both Islamic and right-wing extremists agree that a violent overthrow of the establishment is the only path forward.

Consequently, in order to form a “more perfect society,” both Islamic and right-wing extremists look to the past for inspiration. Islamic extremists mourn the loss of the original Caliphate or an Islamic state under religious leadership. Most envy/despise the power of modern

Western governments, deciding the reason that the Muslim world is lagging is because they have “forgotten their roots.” Therefore, replicating the original, pinnacle Caliphate of 632 AD must be the answer to success (Fisher, 2014). Right-wing extremists’ ideological beliefs resemble this mindset as well. These extremists believe in returning to an all-white America, possibly by replicating the crusades that were the “best times for the white man.” The far-right’s growing obsession and nostalgia over the middle ages speaks to their apocalyptic image for the future (Bakali, 2019).

Furthermore, many Islamic and right-wing groups emphasize this historical obsession as a central theme in their ideologies. ISIS is particularly dedicated to re-obtaining control over the countries of Iraq and Syria. ISIS’s obsession over these two countries arises from the belief that Iraq and Syria exist on the land that was originally part of the Caliphate. Therefore, in order to be successful in the future, ISIS must replicate that Caliphate, its traditions, and military exploits (Fisher, 2014). Similarly, right-wing extremists host a growing obsession with historical events, in particular the crusades. One right-wing extremist group, the English Defense League (EDL), often uses images of the Knights Templar cross and crusaders. The EDL believes they are replicating the fight of the crusaders by eradicating Islam and maintaining white nationalism (Bakali, 2019). Ultimately, consistent with their ultra-conservatism and emphasis on traditional values, both sects glorify the past in an effort to resurrect those “ideal” regimes.

Finally, Islamic and right-wing extremists’ vision for the future is to establish a new Caliphate and ethnostate, respectively. As previously discussed, a Caliphate is an Islamic state that is supposed to encompass every Muslim on earth. Just as Mohammad and his followers created an organized political system, Islamic extremists today wish to regain that political and religious authority over all Muslims. By dismantling Middle Eastern governments like Iraq and

Syria, Islamic extremists believe they can successfully create this Caliphate (Fisher, 2014).

Similarly, right-wing extremists seek to create a haven (typically in North America) for all white, Christian individuals. This society would be a “gathering place for all Europeans” based on supposed “Western ideals,” free from any person of color (including Muslims and Jews), and governed by white-nationalist personalities (Lough, 2018).

Most Islamic and right-wing extremist groups clearly delineate their plans for the Caliphate and ethnostate. For instance, Boko Haram, a terrorist group active in Nigeria, is attempting to establish its own Caliphate in Africa. After capturing some territory in 2014, Boko Haram declared itself an Islamic Caliphate separately powerful from the “illegitimate” government of Nigeria with plans to expand their territory (BBC, 2016). Across the world in the U.S., Richard Spencer is at the forefront of the movement to create an ethnostate. Spencer’s vision is that after the fall of the United States, this ethnostate would emerge as a “safe haven for all whites around the world.” Similar to the Caliphate concept of encompassing all Muslims, Spencer declares “whether you’re Russian or Irish or Italian or Norwegian,” this ethnostate is inclusive to all white Christians (Lough, 2018). In the end, both sects’ ambitious plans for their sovereign nations speak to the depth of their identical delusions.

Therefore, although it is tempting to view terrorism as “senseless” violence, these extremists continue to commit attacks with the distinct purpose of breaking down and re-forming society in their image. Both Islamic and right-wing extremists view world governments as beyond repair and strive to overthrow them. Consequently, their infatuation with historical regimes and traditions inspires what these extremists believe is the ideal archetype. Ultimately, these extremists do not plan to stop until a Caliphate or ethnostate is accomplished. Overall,

these ideologies are therefore identical in many ways and are just the beginning of the similarities amongst Islamic and right-wing extremists.

## **Chapter 3: Radicalization and Recruitment**

### **Introduction**

“I didn’t know who I was, where I belonged, or what my purpose was. I was lost, and overnight... I became a full-blown neo-Nazi.” Christian Picciolini, a former member of America’s first neo-Nazi skinhead movement, describes the tenets of how he, a vulnerable teenager, was radicalized with promises of a community, purpose, and paradise (Picciolini, 2018, 3:04). How did a 14-year-old with no previous connection to terrorism transform into an extremist so quickly? Unfortunately, the path Picciolini followed was not unique. In his later de-radicalization work, Picciolini discovered that right-wing and Islamic extremists’ stories alike echoed his ill-fated path to extremism. Therefore, though some may attempt to blame terrorism on an inherent “evil” possessed by individuals pre-destined to commit atrocities, this attribution cheapens the overwhelming research on the intricacies and trauma of recruitment and radicalization. Islamic and right-wing extremists emerge in the wake of pain and suffering, and those who stoke the flames of their existing anger mold them into loyal followers willing to kill or be killed for a cause (Picciolini, 2020).

Moreover, this chapter continues to address the research question: What are the similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism that guide the intersection/collaboration of these ideologies, groups, and individuals? Essentially, the internet allows Islamic and right-wing extremists to radicalize vulnerable young men. Further similarities include the individuals’ paths to extremism, the traits that make them more susceptible, and how existing virtual communities facilitate and encourage that journey. Overall, these similarities help explain the

examples in later chapters where individuals have been recruited into both Islamic and right-wing extremism.

Therefore, in order to discuss the similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremists in recruitment and radicalization, it is important to first understand the generally accepted “path to extremism.” Moreover, focusing on the individual, studies show that disillusioned young men who have experienced adversity are most likely to seek out a community in either Islamic or right-wing extremist groups. In the internet age, these individuals interact on social media and in virtual chat rooms where they can freely consume extremist propaganda and become trapped in an internet echo-chamber. In the end, the radicalization and recruitment process for Islamic and right-wing extremists hinges on these individuals’ vulnerabilities, the internet, and manipulative propaganda.

## **The Path to Extremism**

The previous chapter thoroughly explains the abhorrent and often outlandish ideologies purported by these groups. However, because these beliefs exist so far beyond the mainstream, it is difficult to rationalize how a seemingly “normal” person can succumb to these groups and grow to hold these alarming beliefs. Therefore, understanding how the recruitment process exploits fear and suffering and defining the typical “steps” to radicalization is essential. Uncovering the similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremists in recruitment and radicalization begins with a deeper understanding of the general path to extremism. Therefore, this section explains the “typical” steps in radicalization in relation to research on Islamic and right-wing extremists.

Firstly, experts explain the “path to extremism” with varying and often incongruent terms, steps, and categorizations. However, these experts generally agree upon a few stages that describe the process in which an individual transforms into an extremist. Modifying the National Institute of Justice’s terms which offers one of the simplest explanations, the stages are: (1) pre-radicalization, (2) self-identification/interest, (3) indoctrination, and (4) planning and execution of violence (Smith, 2018). Although not individual reaches the final stage, these are the steps that most Western Islamic and right-wing extremists follow.

Stage (1) pre-radicalization: This phase is the “point of origin” for individuals before beginning the journey to extremism. Here, the majority of individuals begin with “ordinary” lives and no criminal record. However, there exist many similarities in the environment and background of those individuals that may make them more susceptible to recruitment/ radicalization. Though there is no unifying profile, most individuals recruited to both Islamic and right-wing extremist groups have a mixture of personal and external grievances. These could be economic problems such as poverty, social issues such as (real or perceived) discrimination, political controversies, or personal crises such as death or illness (Silber & Bhatt, 2007). Ultimately, these individuals exist in a state of turmoil, softening them to potential radicalization.

Stage (2) self-identification/interest: In this stage, external and internal factors drive individuals to gravitate away from their old identities and explore the ideologies of extremists. Just as those individuals had personal and external grievances, they begin to look for ways to resolve those challenges by applying extremist ideology. At the same time, these individuals might withdraw from family and friends while exploring these newfound beliefs. In this stage, these future extremists make “life-changing” decisions in order to create a sense of community and purpose (Smith, 2018). In this phase, the individual is “re-branding” by changing the way

that they view themselves and the world, but the individual is not necessarily fully committed to this new ideology.

Stage (3) indoctrination: The completion of this phase drastically increases the difficulty for de-radicalization as the individual has transformed into an extremist, wholly adopting those beliefs. During indoctrination, the extremist progressively intensifies their beliefs, and this “self-selected” group becomes increasingly important to their identity (Silber & Bhatt, 2007). In this phase (notably so in right-wing and Islamic extremist groups), the extremist becomes entrenched in the community. The extremist often demonstrates their commitment to the cause by moving to join a group or participating in other activities such as acquiring practical training in firearms (Smith, 2018). Ultimately, although the extremist has not yet committed an act of terrorism, their newfound ideology fully supports any violence committed by others in furtherance of the cause.

Stage (4) planning and execution of violence: In the final stage of radicalization, the extremist decides to plan and commit a terrorist attack (whether alone or with a group). Oftentimes, would-be-terrorists are either arrested before they are able to commit an attack or are unwilling to commit the attack for fear of the action itself or retribution. Therefore, this “planning and execution” phase includes a multitude of actions short of classifiable terrorism. These activities include issuing threats online or in person, offering monetary or physical support to another extremist’s violent attack, and obtaining firearms or explosive-making materials for a future attack (Smith, 2018). Consequently, in this phase, these extremists become self-sacrificing by submitting themselves to the probability of death or arrest in furtherance of their ideology.

Ultimately, much of the data for the creation of these “paths to extremism” originates from Islamic and right-wing extremist groups. Especially in Western nations, these extremists follow the path of (1) pre-radicalization, (2) self-identification/interest, (3) indoctrination, and (4)



planning and execution of violence. Moreover, understanding this process is essential to recognizing Islamic and right-wing extremists' multitude of similarities in radicalization and recruitment. From the types of individuals recruited, to the internet propaganda, to the direct actions of recruiting organizations, Islamic and right-wing extremists share a multitude of unique aspects. It is within this radicalization and recruitment process that these extremists mirror their tactics and reinforce their universal commitment to hatred.

## **The Individual**

In accordance with the pre-radicalization phase of the "path to extremism," individuals in both Islamic and right-wing extremism share similar characteristics, experiences, and motivations. Firstly, the demographics of both groups demonstrate that young men are most vulnerable to these types of extremism. Furthermore, these extremists share similar backgrounds, possessing "potholes," which are instances of trauma and hardships that have caused suffering. However, adversity alone is not sufficient to predict a proclivity towards extremism; rather, the unifying trait in Islamic and right-wing extremists is the manner in which they respond to their grievances. By becoming angry and disillusioned, these individuals seek a new identity, community, and purpose within these extremist groups. Although there is no unifying "profile" for who will become an extremist, these traits and characteristics can help explain how and why such similar individuals are radicalized by Islamic and right-wing extremists.

Fundamentally, the vast majority of both Islamic and right-wing extremists are relatively young men. This phenomenon of mostly young men joining Islamic and right-wing organizations differs sharply in the demographics in comparison to other terrorist groups. Although in general, an estimated 80 percent of terrorists are men, women are significantly more

likely to be active in eco or left-wing extremism (Chermak & Gruenewald 2014). In fact, one post-9/11 study found that of all the Islamic extremists in the U.S., 92 percent were men (Bergen et al., 2019). Similarly, although there are no official figures on the gender demographics of right-wing extremists, experts agree that members are overwhelmingly male (Hawley, 2018). Moreover, the newly-recruited men in both Islamic and right-wing extremism are relatively young (typically teens to early thirties). The same study on post- 9/11 Islamic extremists found the median age to be 26 (Bergen et al., 2019). Another limited study on right-wing extremists found identical results, with an average age of 26 as well (Kutner, 2020a, 29:26).

The demographics of newly emerging organizations further support the conclusion of young men being most likely to join Islamic and right-wing extremist groups. For instance, although some Islamic extremist groups permit women, most groups like ISIL allow only men to hold leadership roles (Darden, 2019). Additionally, the Proud Boys and the Boogaloo Bois are just two of the all-male organizations in the U.S. on the far-right. These groups specifically target disgruntled young men to draw them into extremism. The Proud Boys decry that their generation/gender faces the most discrimination in America (ADL, n.d.f). In the end, the demographics confirm that both sects target the same group in society to recruit and radicalize.

In addition to gender and age, both Islamic and right-wing extremists share a history of (perceived or real) trauma that contributes to their susceptibility to radicalization. Reformed extremist Christian Picciolini (2020) describes these traumatic events as “potholes.” These potholes are “untreated wounds—deep cuts and bruises, singular or cumulative—that are buried deep inside of us; the painful voids and obstructions keeping us from feeling self-worth, security, experiencing greater meaning in our lives, or establishing healthy connections with others” (p. 15). These stressors could be economic, social, political, or personal, but typically the

culmination drives the move towards indoctrination. For Islamic extremists, many experience socio-political challenges such as discrimination in secular countries, poverty, and the mental health consequences of being raised in war-torn environments (Baffa et al., 2019). In right-wing youths, these potholes include emotional/physical abuse, neglect, death, mental health struggles, disability, poverty, and even unchecked wealth or privilege (Picciolini, 2020).

Ultimately, first-hand accounts of former Islamic and right-wing extremists provide the most compelling evidence, as these individuals recognize the existence of potholes in their own backgrounds as well as those of their radical peers. For instance, Maajid Nawaz (formerly involved in the Hb ut Tahrir Islamic extremist group) recalls the rampant racism in Western countries that he and other recruits faced before joining. As a teen, Nawaz was personally attacked by neo-Nazis with machetes and screwdrivers and also harassed by the Essex police authorities (“How To Inoculate Angry Teens Against Islamic Extremism,” 2014). Similarly, Christian Picciolini was the victim of poverty, as his first-generation parents struggled to maintain their business. Picciolini recalled many of his extremist peers suffered from the same lack of opportunity and absent parents (2020). These experiences demonstrate how trauma prepares vulnerable individuals for radicalization into Islamic and right-wing extremism.

However, adversity is not a sufficient condition to radicalize an individual to Islamic or right-wing extremism; rather, the response to this adversity in the form of anger, disillusionment, and scapegoating ultimately propels radicalization. For Islamic extremists, the manifestation of the aforementioned socio-political grievances is often depression, discontentment, and the blaming of Western governments/societies for their failures (Darden, 2019). This inappropriate response to trauma (from lack of personal ability to persevere or lack of resources to address these issues) is prevalent in right-wing extremists as well. Picciolini underscores how this

inability to effectively deal with past trauma pushes these individuals to extremism. Picciolini (2020) concluded that “at the core of every radicalized individual I have ever met is one commonality: they sought to fill the emptiness caused by traumatic life experiences with something to mute or mask their pain” (p. 16).

This inability to “fill” their potholes drives Islamic and right-wing extremists to seek identity, community, and purpose within terrorist groups and ideologies. These hate movements offer a sense of safety, camaraderie, and agency previously non-existent in their mainstream lives (Picciolini, 2020). For instance, in the case of three British teens who traveled to Syria to join ISIS, the recruiter promised a life of “piety and dignity in the Islamic homeland.” These teenagers were invigorated with a new purpose in life by ISIS that supposedly promised to mend pre-existing grievances with British society (Moaveni, 2019). Similarly, veterans in the U.S. are increasingly choosing anti-government militias as a new community post-military service. Often unable to re-enlist in the military because of injuries or mental health issues, these individuals’ spirits are revitalized by training for the “impending” civil war (Steinhauer, 2020). Ultimately, both Islamic and right-wing extremists exhibit maladapted responses to adversity, with their hatred and disillusionment chasing them into the open arms of extremist communities.

In the end, it is impossible to definitively answer “why” an individual chooses extremism. However, there are glaring similarities amongst individuals in Islamic and right-wing groups. These young men, if not already harboring a propensity towards radicalization, are often targeted by groups based on their age and gender. Moreover, these individuals are consistently victims themselves, suffering all types of economic, social, and personal trauma. Unfortunately, an inability to overcome these hardships leaves these individuals angry and empty. Then, Islamic and right-wing extremist groups emphatically offer a fresh purpose, community, and identity. In

summation, these radicalized individuals are so profoundly similar that it is unsurprising when some eventually subscribe to *both* ideologies.

## **The Internet Echo-Chamber**

How do these individuals traverse the indoctrination phase so quickly? Simply, becoming an extremist is much easier today than it was 20 years ago. The internet is the ultimate tool for Islamic and right-wing extremists to disseminate propaganda, conspiracies, and even memes that validate and indoctrinate already vulnerable individuals. In its most benign state, social media like Facebook and Twitter enables the process of radicalization by introducing and mainstreaming extremist ideas. Islamic and right-wing extremist groups have also migrated to private chat rooms where budding radicals become completely entrenched in violent rhetoric. Moreover, their chosen form of propaganda is nearly identical as both sects co-opt popular internet jokes or “memes” to promote their ideology with similar themes. Overall, the internet facilitates radicalization and recruitment for Islamic and right-wing extremists because it creates a virtual community that normalizes, promotes, and imbues extremist ideology.

Social media acts as a personally crafted echo-chamber of conspiracies, hatred, and propaganda that encompasses the indoctrination phase for budding radicals. For both Islamic and right-wing extremist groups, platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. are critical in sustaining and advancing their movements. These spaces allow extremists unlimited opportunity to disseminate propaganda and “facts” that justify and prove their radical ideologies. Moreover, these posts garner a massive, supportive audience that legitimizes and mainstreams these ideologies, making them more “palatable” to those vulnerable to radicalization. Ultimately, once potential Islamic or right-wing extremists join the online extremist community, terrorist groups

bombard them with information that exclusively supports radical ideology. Therefore, these newfound extremists become a part of the community that disseminates hate, incites violence, and empowers and validates other “like-minded” individuals (Vadsaria & Holmes, 2020).

Islamic extremists were the first to leverage social media as a tool for radicalization, with the far-right following a nearly identical path to create their own extremist community.

According to the Rand Corporation, ISIS’s use of social media has assisted in the recruitment and mobilization of an estimated 40,000 foreign nationals from 110 countries. Moreover, ISIS has utilized the power of social media to maintain a grip on those recruits despite real-world failures such as massive territory losses in 2017. Experts conclude that ISIS attracts followers and maintains legitimacy through a domination of social media propaganda (Ward, 2018).

Similarly, U.S. right-wing groups have overwhelmingly adopted ISIS’s strategy of online recruitment. Recently, the number of extremist accounts and propaganda on social media has exploded. Groups such as the Boogaloo Bois, Atomwaffen Division, and the Proud Boys are crowding platforms that ISIS typically dominates. For instance, from 2012 to 2016 the number of American white nationalists on Twitter increased by 600 percent (Oh, 2016). Ultimately, social media is an invaluable tool for both sects as it allows mass distribution of propaganda that simplifies and expedites radicalization.

However, as these social media platforms increasingly remove misinformation and hate speech, Islamic and right-wing extremists have migrated to third-party messaging apps that allow for more private and personal communication. In recent years, companies such as Facebook and Twitter have not only removed content but cooperated with authorities to arrest extremists. Therefore, with the advent of encryption technologies, these extremists have fled to messaging apps that allow for the creation of undetectable, private messaging channels. These private chat

rooms serve as a continuity of banned extremist propaganda as well as “informational” content that includes survival tactics, images and videos with explicit violence, and even instructions on building bombs (Terban, 2018). These apps also allow Islamic and right-wing extremists to groom individuals. By capitalizing on existing fears and stoking anger and prejudice, these platforms seclude these budding extremists until they are fully entrenched in a community spreading only hatred and intolerance.

Unsurprisingly, just as right-wing extremists followed Islamic extremists to social media, both sects have retreated to the same encrypted messaging services. After being banned from most mainstream social media, the Taliban colonized the app Telegram. There, the Taliban created several channels in multiple languages, including Pashto, Persian, and Turkish, reaching 4,236 followers in 2016 (Ward, 2018). This unfettered access to extremists across the globe has become critical for recruitment. Similarly, members of the Boogaloo movement in the U.S. have been drawn to the app Reddit. Here, the Boogaloos are freer to discuss violent uprising against the government and bolster group identity by collaborating on their now-iconic Hawaiian shirt uniform. The Boogaloos also followed the Taliban to Telegram in an effort to unite members by providing resources on “survival after the societal collapse” (Vadsaria & Holmes, 2020). In the end, both Islamic and right-wing extremist groups use these chat rooms to administer isolation, 24/7 access to propaganda, constant encouragement, and ultimately a total disengagement from reality.

### **The Radical Meme**

What exactly is the propaganda that Islamic and right-wing extremists share on the internet? In addition to videos and tweets, these extremists utilize a popular form of internet communication called memes. Essentially, a meme is a culturally recognized image embellished

with text that comments on social ideas or events, often in a humorous manner (Gil, 2020).

These memes are familiar, palatable ways for new members to become comfortable accepting radical ideology. Consequently, Islamic and right-wing extremists spread memes and infographics in a spectacular magnitude. In fact, in 2020, researchers discovered Islamic State's digital library of online propaganda that contained more than 90,000 items and had an estimated 10,000 unique visitors a month (Silva, 2020). Moreover, following the Capitol riot in 2021, Twitter purged over 70,000 accounts spreading memes/propaganda associated with the far-right conspiracy group QAnon (Romm & Dwoskin, 2021). These figures represent just a portion of the overwhelming amount of propaganda spread online by Islamic and right-wing extremists.

Not only do Islamic and right-wing extremists utilize the same format of propaganda, the memes and infographics that these extremists disseminate share many similar themes. The figures at the end of the chapter demonstrate that both Islamic and right-wing propaganda themes are consistent with their similar ideologies and serve the overall purpose of garnering support via outrage, humor, and reassurances.

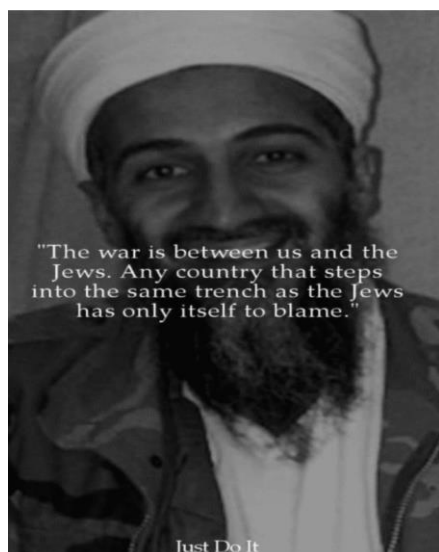
Figure 1 and Figure 2 demonstrate the common theme of anti-Semitism while drawing on popular meme formats. Figure 1 uses the image of Osama bin Laden and his anti-Jewish quote with the Nike "Just do it" catchphrase at the bottom that is a common theme in mainstream memes. Figure 2 utilizes the popular "butterfly man" template to invoke humor while simultaneously attacking Jews. Meanwhile, Figures 3 & 4 express an anti-feminism sentiment from both Islamic and right-wing extremists. In Figure 3, a quote from Anwar al-Awlaki (notorious Al Qaeda Imam) reaffirms the inferior place of women in Islamic society. Figure 4 is an alt-right meme that bashes feminism, depicting in a "humorous" manner how modern feminists are over-weight complainers in league with Jews against the traditional family unit.



Moreover, Figures 5 & 6 attempt to provoke anger and fear in their respective audiences, consistent with the Islamic and right-wing extremist ideas that their communities are facing “existential” threats. Figure 5 contains another image and quote of Islamic extremist Anwar al-Awlaki who warns that a vague, nondescript enemy is attacking Muslims and coming for “you” next. Figure 6’s “White Lives Matter” quote is a perverted version of the left-wing social movement “Black Lives Matter” that fights against discriminatory police brutality. This right-wing infographic warns of an apparent “white genocide” in order to provoke fear and anger amongst potential supporters. Finally, Figures 7 & 8 highlight the violent call to action that both right-wing and Islamic extremists seek. Figure 7’s knife and blood emphasize the quote that Islamic extremists should kill because the “kafir’s” (infidel’s) blood is “halal” (permitted by the Quran). Figure 8 is a recruitment image from right-wing extremist group, Atomwaffen Division. This image emphasizes guns, blood, and violence in an attempt to motivate and inspire potential recruits. Overall, using anger, comedy, and manipulation, Islamic and right-wing extremists disseminate similar memes and propaganda that recruit and radicalize vulnerable individuals.

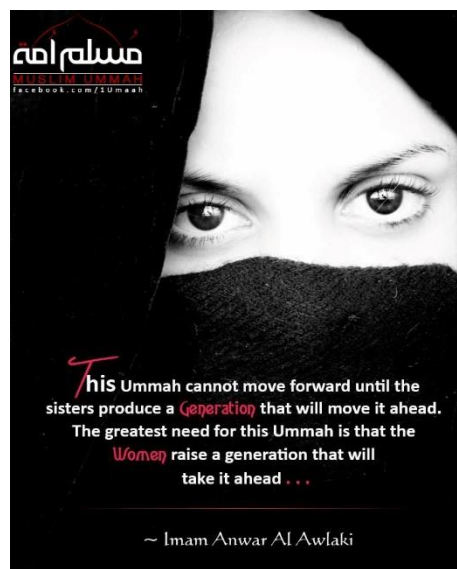
In conclusion, the internet is the most powerful modern tool in the indoctrination phase for Islamic and right-wing extremists. Social media delivers extremist propaganda to the masses, traversing continents in seconds and radicalizing vulnerable individuals. Moreover, the advent of private, encrypted chat rooms creates isolation chambers for these extremists to communicate and nurture each other’s violent ideology. Islamic and right-wing extremists spread propaganda with nearly identical themes via “user-friendly” methods such as memes and infographics. Ultimately, the indoctrination process is simple and streamlined. Vulnerable individuals become trapped in a boundless internet echo-chamber reverberating messages of hatred and preparing them for future violent attacks in the name of Islamic and right-wing extremism.

Figure 1



Note: Osama bin Laden Nike Meme. Retrieved January 1, 2021, from <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/shared-themes-recruitment-tactics-in-white-supremacist-and-islamist-extremist-propaganda/>

Figure 3



Note: al-Awlaki anti-feminism quote. Retrieved January 1, 2021, from <https://mypersonalbrandofheroin.tumblr.com/post/118393868891/awlaki-quotes-4-greatest-women-that-ever>

Figure 2



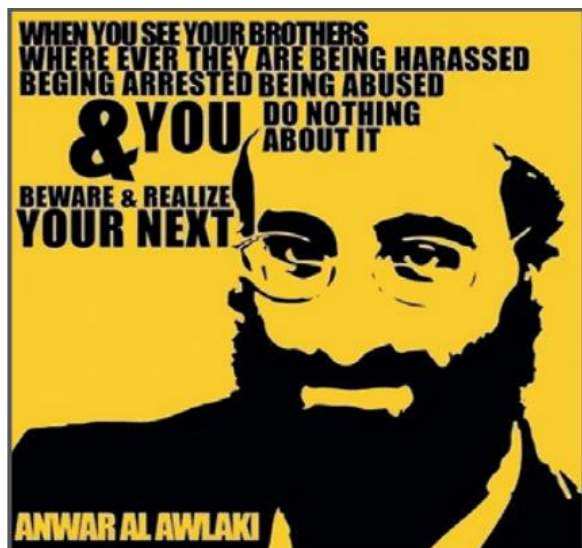
Note: Alt-right butterfly meme. Retrieved January 1, 2021, from [https://twitter.com/altright\\_memes](https://twitter.com/altright_memes)

Figure 4



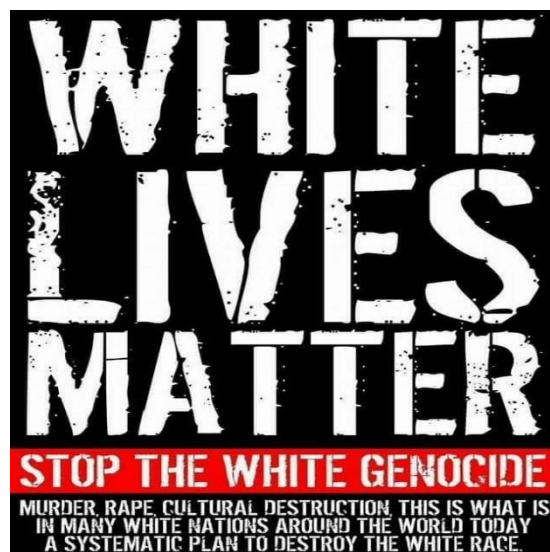
Note: Alt-right anti-feminism meme. Retrieved January 1, 2021, from [https://twitter.com/altright\\_memes](https://twitter.com/altright_memes)

Figure 5



Note: al-Awlaki threat quote. Retrieved January 1, 2021, from <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/downloads/ISIS%20in%20America%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>

Figure 6



Note: Alt-right white lives matter infographic. Retrieved January 1, 2021, from [https://twitter.com/altright\\_memes](https://twitter.com/altright_memes)

Figure 7



Note: ISIS recruitment image. Retrieved January 1, 2021, from <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/downloads/ISIS%20in%20America%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>

Figure 8



Note: Atomwaffen recruitment image. Retrieved January 1, 2021, from <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/shared-themes-recruitment-tactics-in-white-supremacist-and-islamist-extremist-propaganda/>

## Chapter 4: Tactics and Strategies of Attack

### Introduction

“Some well-placed Aryans will one day cause some serious wreckage... A thousand [Timothy] McVeighs...would end any semblance of stability in this racially-corrupt society” (ADL, 2000). Alex Curtis, one of the first individuals to popularize the term “lone wolf” in the ‘80s and ‘90s, shared this call to action on his personal extremist website. Throughout his “career,” Curtis encouraged white supremacy supporters to act individually and orchestrate violent attacks against other races as well as the U.S. government (Iovănescu, 2020). These “lone wolf” tactics have augmented in popularity in the decades since, and now both Islamic and right-wing extremists rely heavily on these self-sacrificing individuals in order to perpetuate their ideology and commit violent attacks. In 1995, Timothy McVeigh killed 168 United States citizens, and since then, hordes of “lone wolves” from both the right-wing and Islamic extremism have been responsible for the death of hundreds more (FBI, n.d.b).

In addition to the onslaught of lone wolf domestic terror attacks, Islamic and right-wing extremists also mirror each other in various aspects of their attack tactics and strategies. This chapter explores the final category of similarities amongst Islamic and right-wing extremists, completing the answer to the first half of the research question. What are the similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism? As the hypothesis states, these groups’ attack strategies hinge on self-sacrificing individuals employing specific tactics to achieve maximum fatalities. Moreover, later chapters will apply these similarities to explain how and why individuals from both sects have worked together to plan attacks.

Although many of these terrorists are home-grown “lone wolves,” these extremists typically align themselves with a particular group’s ideology and even use that group and other extremists for inspiration/instruction on how to commit an attack. Moreover, individuals subscribing to Islamic and right-wing extremism use similar weapons (guns, explosives, and vehicles) at about the same frequency. Additionally, these extremists are increasingly choosing “soft” targets such as places of worship or recreational locations. Finally, these extremists use terrorist attacks to achieve a similar goal, maximum casualties. Ultimately, Islamic and right-wing extremists perpetrate attacks with equivalent tactics, strategies, and intent.

### **Lone Wolves and...**

Historically, defined terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS have been responsible for planning and committing the most devastating terrorist attacks. However, new trends in both Islamic and right-wing extremism reveal that independent individuals or “lone wolves” are emerging as the most frequent perpetrators. Even so, these lone wolves are not entirely unaffiliated with traditional extremist groups. The internet allows lone wolves to explore extremist ideology and even interact with “like-minded individuals” online. Therefore, these terrorist groups serve as inspiration and motivation without ever contributing material support. Virtual extremist communities also offer instructional material for weapons, targets, and tactics catered to lone wolves. Ultimately, both Islamic and right-wing extremists have the tools to commit attacks in their country of origin, resulting in a burgeoning “home-grown” threat. Overall, both sects have transitioned to a reliance upon lone wolves, with the broader extremist community still motivating, inspiring, and advising these radical individuals.

Experts agree that lone wolves are responsible for the majority of terrorist attacks in the West, but the difficulty presents in defining a lone wolf. This thesis utilizes Iovănescu's description of "someone who commits violent acts of terrorism in support of some group, movement, or ideology, but does so alone and not as a part of an organized group" (2020). This definition does not exclude individuals, such as the Unabomber, who formulate and carry out an entirely unique ideology; however, it recognizes that most lone wolves are sympathetic to a specific group, or an extremist movement inspires their attack. In fact, Global Terrorism Index's study of the lone wolf phenomenon from 2000-2016 found that lone actors committed 98 percent of terrorist attacks in the United States (Iovănescu, 2020).

These statistics ring true for both Islamic and right-wing extremists. The aforementioned study also noted how most individual terrorists did not operate in total isolation and could be traced back to social networks of extremist communities. Half of those attacks were perpetrated by individuals who sympathized with the Islamic State but had no direct connection with the organization (Iovănescu, 2020). Other traditional Islamic extremist organizations such as Al Qaeda and ISIS are also adapting and encouraging supporters to commit solo attacks. Many right-wing extremists become lone wolves in a similar manner. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Reddit, and Parler share propaganda that enables individuals to develop their own personal ideology as a combination of various right-wing beliefs. This "radicalization from a distance" and the right-wing's emphasis on a "leaderless resistance" has emboldened individual action. To illustrate, right-wing lone wolves perpetrated attacks in 42 different U.S. states in the last six years alone (Jones et al., 2020a).

Copious examples demonstrate how these terrorist groups inspire but do not necessarily materially contribute to lone wolf attacks. The infamous shooting at Fort Hood serves as an

archetype for the relationship between Islamic extremist groups and lone wolves. In this case, on November 5, 2009, an army major killed 13 people and injured 32. Although acting alone, the shooter had been corresponding via email with notorious Al Qaeda propagandist, Anwar al-Awlaki. Therefore, despite receiving no material outside support in planning or committing the attack, some claim the attack is a direct result of the shooter's sympathies for Al Qaeda and the encouragement from al-Awlaki (Poppe, 2018). On the far-right, lone wolf terrorism is not only encouraged but has been a cornerstone of attack tactics and strategies. In the '80s and '90s, the aforementioned Alex Curtis was joined by Louis R. Beam and Thomas L. Metzger in using the internet and mailing lists to recruit lone wolves. These men pioneered propaganda campaigns specifically intended to inspire extremists to launch individual attacks. Curtis, Beam, and Metzger reasoned that these scattered, anonymous threats would one day erode government power in favor of white supremacy (Iovănescu, 2020). Ultimately, Islamic and right-wing extremists' encouragement for individual action explains and underscores the consequential surge of lone wolves.

In addition to ideological inspiration, Islamic and right-wing extremist lone wolves depend on the broader extremist community to supply tactical instructions for committing attacks. Organized terrorist groups and unaffiliated individuals contribute information on bomb-making, how to obtain weapons illegally, the best targets to choose, and so on. These extremists distribute the instructional material in multiple, accessible forms such as essays, videos, and infographics. Islamic and right-wing extremists also rely on encrypted messaging applications and private chat rooms to provide personalized, readily available advice for potential lone wolves (ADL, 2018). Because of these pervasive methods, lone wolves' physical isolation from other extremists poses no obstacle to carrying out a successful attack.

Islamic and right-wing extremists even curate online forums to provide tactical recommendations to lone wolves. In addition to Al Qaeda's traditional terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda has offered an "e-learning" course on homemade explosives. Hosted on Shumukh al-Islam (a popular jihadi platform), Al Qaeda presented "Bomb-making for Beginners" during April and May 2011. Al Qaeda marketed this course to potential U.S. lone wolves, and it exemplifies Al Qaeda's instructional support of "individual jihad" (Stenersen, 2013). On the far-right, the anti-government Boogaloo movement has capitalized on the internet's capability to bolster lone wolves as well. The Boogaloo Bois host a channel on the dark web called the "Boogaloo Intel Drop." This forum includes posts that teach gunfighting techniques and infographics that demonstrate the basics of camouflage and concealment. The ultimate goal of this information dissemination— for lone wolves to uprising individually and spark the civil war (Vadsaria & Holmes, 2020). Overall, these groups share a staunch determination in furnishing all but physical and material assistance to lone wolves who perpetrate attacks in support of their respective ideologies.

Ultimately, this abundance of virtual information has altered the terrorism landscape, creating a surge in domestic or "home-grown" terrorism. In the decades since 9/11, the U.S. and other Western countries have fixated on preventing foreign terrorist attacks; however, the evidence demonstrates that radicalized citizens or permanent residents pose a much greater threat. Since 2002, 127 Islamic extremists have been involved in terrorist plots or attacks in the U.S. Of those terrorists, 90 percent were either citizens, permanent/temporary residents, or legally documented otherwise. Furthermore, 52 percent were U.S.-born, with many of the rest having spent the majority of their lives in the U.S. (ADL, 2018). However, these Islamic extremists still only account for a portion of overall terrorist attacks. The ADL found that home-



grown, right-wing extremists committed 73 percent of terrorist-related murders from 2009 to 2018 (Serwer, 2019).

Many recent events illustrate the escalation in home-grown Islamic and right-wing extremism. In July 2016, for instance, a French citizen drove a truck through a crowd in Nice, killing 84 and injuring more than 300. The attacker was sympathetic to the Islamic State but had no formal ties to the group and never traveled to meet other extremists. The attacker planned and committed the attack, all while living in France (Cragin, 2019). Similarly, far-right neo-Nazis in the U.S. draw inspiration from the German Reich but tend to apply that ideology to their own country. In 2017, these Nazi sympathizers joined together at the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. This protest included several different American far-right groups such as self-identified neo-Confederates, white nationalists, Klansmen, and more. The event culminated with one supporter (acting alone) driving his car through a group of counter-protesters, killing one (SPLC, n.d.a). Ultimately, these extremists are now able to self-radicalize, plan, and, commit attacks without ever leaving their hometown.

These harrowing examples demonstrate how the terrorist threat has shifted to lone extremists. Presently, most Islamic and right-wing extremists who commit attacks in Western countries draw inspiration from larger extremist movements/groups but operate as lone wolves. Therefore, Islamic and right-wing groups now empower, advise, and encourage these types of solo attacks. These patterns have resulted in a transformation from foreign to home-grown, domestic threats. Ultimately, lone wolves are responsible for driving, bolstering, and perpetuating Islamic and right-wing extremism.

## **Their Weapons**

In addition to acting outside the confines of a formal group, Islamic and right-wing extremists utilize similar weapons in about the same frequency and manner. Islamic and right-wing extremists employ a diverse mixture of weapons. Both groups heavily gravitate towards firearms to commit mass shootings. Islamic and right-wing extremists also use explosives in a manner distinct from other extremists. Most uniquely, Islamic and right-wing extremists commit vehicular terrorist attacks. This section demonstrates how Islamic and right-wing extremists gravitate towards similar weapons to perpetrate attacks, distinguishing themselves from other terror groups. Ultimately, these weapons' similarities further underscore the unique parallel of their overall tactics and strategies.

Primarily, Islamic and right-wing extremists gravitate towards firearms to perpetrate attacks more than other group types. For example, left-wing extremists in the U.S. only used firearms in 6 percent of attacks from 1994 to 2019. Meanwhile, these figures sharply contrast for Islamic and right-wing extremists. For the same timeframe, Islamic extremists utilized firearms for 31 percent of total attacks and 62 percent of fatal attacks. Similarly, right-wing extremists used firearms in 66 percent of total attacks and 73 percent of all fatal attacks (Jones et al., 2020b). Not only are shootings more common statistically, Islamic and right-wing extremists encourage the use of firearms. Al Qaeda even published a magazine recommending firearms as a “fast and simple” option for lone wolves. The magazine called automatic weapons “the ultimate mowing machine” for crowded places (CNN, 2010). Similarly, many right-wing groups such as the Boogaloo Bois encourage individuals to stockpile weapons to subvert the U.S. government. (Vadsaria & Holmes 2020).

Islamic and right-wing extremists' affinity for firearms is demonstrated by their consistent veneration and replication of other mass shooters. In 2015, a couple in San Bernardino, California, perpetrated a mass shooting at the husband's workplace, killing 14 and injuring 19. These terrorists used illegally modified rifles with high-capacity magazines (Keller, 2015). Prior to the attack, the couple pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. Then, post-attack, ISIS hailed the couple as heroes, suggesting that other supporters replicate the shooting elsewhere (Karimi et al., 2015). Far-right mass shooters also draw inspiration from their predecessors. On August 3, 2019, a man traveled to a Walmart in El Paso, Texas and opened fire with the intent to kill as many "Hispanic invaders" as possible. The perpetrator ordered his weapon, an AK-47, and ammunition illegally from overseas (McCullough, 2019). Moreover, the shooter's published manifesto revealed that he was attempting to replicate the recent mass shooting of Muslims at a Mosque in New Zealand (Arango et al., 2019). Overwhelmingly, the data displays how Islamic and right-wing extremists specifically gravitate to firearms and mass shootings.

Although left-wing extremists most often utilize explosives, Islamic and right-wing extremists also employ this tactic. However, while left-wing extremists tend to bomb buildings or symbols, Islamic and right-wing extremists utilize bombs less frequently and tend to use them as a weapon for murder rather than destruction. For instance, left-wing extremists utilized explosives in 81 percent of all attacks from 1994 to 2019. Most of these attacks were intended to destroy structures such as labs involved in animal testing and businesses contributing to pollution. Most significantly, very few of these attacks resulted in a loss of human life. Meanwhile, Islamic and right-wing extremists utilized explosives less often but with the specific intent to kill. From 1994 to 2020, Islamic and right-wing extremists used explosives in 31 and 50

percent of attacks, respectively, with most of these attacks resulting in at least 1 death (Jones et al., 2020b).

Many notorious Islamic and right-wing extremist bombings delineate how these extremists are unique in their utilization of explosives. In 2013, two brothers detonated pressure-cooker bombs at the Boston Marathon. The self-radicalized, Al Qaeda sympathizers chose this location not only for symbolism but for the mass-casualty effects. Specifically, the brothers set off the bombs at the finish line around the five-hour mark (the average time it takes to complete a marathon), thereby ensuring more casualties (Ray, 2013). Right-wing extremists similarly utilize explosives as weapons for murder and not simply destruction. Eric Rudolph, a right-wing terrorist active between 1994 to 1996, perpetrated four bombings in Georgia and Alabama. An anti-gay and anti-abortion extremist, Rudolph's targets included an Olympic Park, a gay nightclub, and two women's health clinics that provided abortions. Most importantly, Rudolph chose the explosives as a weapon for murder, not necessarily spectacle. By choosing to bomb the nightclub and clinics during active hours, Rudolph ensured casualties (FBI, n.d.a). Ultimately, Islamic and right-wing extremists employ explosives in the most similar manner out of other Western domestic terrorists.

Finally, both Islamic and right-wing extremists are unique in their utilization of vehicles as weapons. Although vehicular attacks represent a small portion of their total attacks, experts have identified an astonishing increase in Islamic and right-wing extremists using trucks and cars to drive through large crowds. From 1994 to 2020, Islamic and right-wing extremists only used vehicles in about one to ten percent of attacks in the U.S. However, this tactic was exclusive to Islamic and right-wing extremists, with no other terrorist group/type committing a vehicular attack in that same time period (Jones et al., 2020b). Moreover, Islamic and right-wing extremist

groups even encourage vehicular attacks for lone wolves because of the weapon's accessibility and ease of use. For instance, ISIS has begun aggressively advocating for vehicle attacks in its online magazine, Rumiya. ISIS suggests that lone wolves find the heaviest vehicle possible and drive it through a location with large crowds (Myre, 2017). Right-wing extremists also encourage vehicle attacks, typically against protesters. During a surge of Black Lives Matter protests in 2015/2016, right-wing extremists popularized the "Run Them Over" meme, precipitating multiple deadly vehicle attacks (Allam, 2020).

High-profile vehicle attacks by Islamic and right-wing extremists underscore their unique propensity towards this weapon. On October 31, 2017, an Islamic extremist drove a truck through a crowded bike path in Manhattan. In addition to being the deadliest attack in New York since 9/11, the terrorist's planning for this attack proved significant. Investigators discovered that the perpetrator specifically followed ISIS's aforementioned Rumiya magazine. The attacker rented the recommended load-bearing truck, drove the route pre-attack, and even dedicated the attack to ISIS with the suggested hand-written note (ADL, 2018). Similarly, independent right-wing extremists recently reinvigorated the "Run them Over" mantra with a series of vehicular attacks. During a resurgence of Black Lives Matter protests in May/June 2020, there were 50 reported vehicle-ramming incidents. As of June 2020, law enforcement categorized 18 as deliberate, including one attack by the Virginia head of the KKK (Allam, 2020). Overall, both Islamic and right-wing extremists are increasingly encouraging and perpetrating vehicular attacks.

In the end, Islamic and right-wing extremists gravitate towards weapons more similarly than any other type of terrorist group. Both sects account for the vast majority of firearm-related terrorist attacks. Islamic and right-wing extremists also uniquely employ explosives as a "means

to an end” for murder. Finally, the vehicular attack phenomenon betwixt both groups underscores their parallel evolution. Ultimately, Islamic and right-wing extremists’ complementary weapons choices help explain their overall similar attack tactics and strategies.

## **Their Targets**

In addition to their weapons similarities, most Islamic and right-wing extremists choose similar targets for attack. Despite historical trends targeting large military or government institutions, both Islamic and right-wing extremists are increasingly attacking “soft targets.” These soft targets are crowded places with less security and typically a large number of people (Jones et al., 2020b). While Islamic and right-wing extremists’ targets are partially symbolic, the availability and vulnerability of victims are essential. Therefore, these extremists focus on places of worship and recreational locations. Ultimately, both Islamic and right-wing extremists balance symbolism and casualties by choosing soft targets.

To begin, both Islamic and right-wing extremists are continually targeting crowded places of worship. As previously mentioned, both sects harbor deep-seated hatred towards the Jewish religion and community. Therefore, both Islamic and right-wing extremists have a long history of attacking synagogues and Jewish religious institutions. In the U.S., terrorists target Jewish people more than any other religious group, and Islamic and right-wing extremists are the primary perpetrators of those attacks. Moreover, 51 percent of those attacks occur at Jewish places of worship or synagogues (Barsky, 2016). For Islamic and right-wing extremists, synagogues are perfect targets. Synagogues are not only symbols of Judaism but are also largely unprotected and contain large gatherings of potential victims. This logic also applies to the scattered instances of Islamic extremists attacking Christian religious institutions. Right-wing

extremists also tend to attack other minority groups in their places of worship, such as Muslim mosques and traditionally Black churches (Jones et al., 2020b).

Not only are the attacks on religious institutions historically popular, Islamic and right-wing extremists continue this trend in the modern era. In 2016, two self-proclaimed “American jihadists” and ISIS sympathizers separately planned bombings at synagogues in Florida and Arizona. Although authorities thwarted these plots, both attackers intended to set off homemade explosives at the synagogues during services (Barsky, 2016). Recently, one right-wing extremist perpetrated the deadliest mass shooting in New Zealand’s history. The attacker entered two mosques during services, killing 51 and injuring 40. Similar to the American attackers, this shooter intended to “kill as many Muslims” as possible, surmising that they would be most vulnerable during their prayer (Lever & Hollingsworth, 2020). Ultimately, these individuals demonstrate Islamic and right-wing extremists’ continual commitment to targeting religious centers.

Moreover, Islamic and right-wing extremists attack other soft targets such as recreational spaces or events. Experts have noted that since 2014, most Western Islamic extremists have begun targeting places such as shopping malls, nightclubs, public parks, etc. more frequently (ADL, 2018). As Islamic extremists especially target humans, many of the most lethal attacks from 1994 to 2020 occurred at public venues. These attackers chose recreational spaces and events as a way to “send a broad message” to American society. Right-wing extremists also tend to attack spaces, such as recreational centers, parks frequented by immigrants, or multi-cultural parties/events (Jones et al., 2020b). These locations allow for right-wing extremists to blend symbolism, fear, and mass murder.

Targeting of recreational areas coincides with the soft-target focus while allowing Islamic and right-wing extremists to contrast the horrors of terrorism with spaces typically used for joy and entertainment. In 2016, an Islamic extremist perpetrated a deadly shooting at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Interestingly, experts determined that the shooting was not necessarily anti-LGBTQ+ motivated; instead, the shooter attacked in support of ISIS and as a reprisal for U.S. policies abroad. Moreover, electronic evidence showed that the shooter researched alternative recreational targets such as shopping malls, entertainment complexes, and other nightclubs (Zambelich & Hurt, 2016). Two years later, a right-wing extremist perpetrated a similar mass shooting at a yoga studio in Tallahassee, Florida. This extremist was motivated by misogynistic ideals, and experts likened his attack to other anti-feminist terrorists. Experts further emphasized that these types of right-wing misogynists tend to attack locations that are “havens” for progressive feminist ideals, such as yoga studios, sorority houses, and so on (Gathright, 2018). Overall, both Islamic and right-wing extremists gravitate towards entertainment and recreational locations.

Ultimately, these soft targets form the perfect blend of symbolism and vulnerability. While Islamic and right-wing terrorists still target government and military institutions, the focus is shifting towards more easily assailable locations. In Western countries, places of worship or recreation are targets largely unique to Islamic and right wing-extremism. These recent attack patterns emphasize the similarities in the co-evolution of Islamic and right-wing extremists’ tactics and strategies.



## **Their Goals**

Why are Islamic and right-wing extremists' attack tactics and strategies so similar? Simply, these extremists have an identical end goal, mass murder. In the case of Islamic and right-wing extremists, lone wolves around the globe maximize the reach and quantity of lethal attacks without the burdens of group coordination. Moreover, the firearms, explosives, and vehicles these extremists use as weapons significantly increase the likelihood of serious injury and death. By choosing crowded, unprotected locations, Islamic and right-wing extremists essentially ensure maximum potential victims. This similar end goal is significant because it differs vastly from left-wing extremism (the only other large sect of terrorism in most Western countries). While Islamic and right-wing extremists focus on death, the left focuses on destruction. Ultimately, Islamic and right-wing extremists' similar tactics and strategies coalesce into the perfect formula for mass murder.

Lone wolves maximize fatalities with their ability to perform attacks from anywhere in the world and by any means available. As previously mentioned, groups such as ISIS and Al Qaeda venerate and exalt lone wolves. The encouragement of "individual jihad" is essential to augmenting these terrorist groups' reach. The post-9/11 radical increase in combating foreign threats has extinguished most foreign Islamic extremist groups' ability to perpetrate attacks in Western countries. Therefore, these home-grown lone wolves offer the perfect (and sometimes only) opportunity to attack the countries and peoples they so despise. When these lone wolves attack, they do so free from the burden of group cooperation, travel, etc., and the only objective is mass-murder (Iovănescu, 2020). The far-right encourages lone wolves for similar reasons. As the aforementioned white supremacist Alex Curtis declared, "Lone wolves who are smart... can accomplish virtually any task before them" (ADL, 2000). A central theme of right-wing

extremism is the “leaderless resistance.” These right-wing extremists believe violence is a necessity for change, and these isolated mass-murders are key to ultimately toppling the established government (ADL 2000). Overall, both groups utilize lone wolves as weapons for perpetuating their extremist beliefs through murder.

Similarly, the nature of these lone wolves’ preferred weapons maximizes possible casualties. Groups such as ISIS and the Boogaloo Bois encourage firearms for their lethality, availability, and ease of use. Accordingly, firearms are responsible for the majority of the deaths in Islamic and right-wing terrorist attacks in the U.S. Moreover, Islamic and right-wing extremists use explosives with the specific intent to kill. The Boston bombers and the anti-abortion bomber, Eric Rudolph specifically chose times and locations that augmented the number of potential victims. Unlike left-wing extremists who typically use explosives as weapons of destruction, Islamic and right-wing extremists are successful at injuring or killing someone in a much larger proportion of their bombings (Jones et al., 2020b). Finally, vehicular attacks are unique to Islamic and right-wing extremists. As a weapon, vehicles serve the distinct purpose of running through crowds. Accordingly, multiple Islamic extremists have used trucks to drive through the aforementioned crowds in cities across Europe and the U.S. (Myre, 2017). Meanwhile, the far-right continues to advocate for vehicular attacks against left-wing protesters (Allam, 2020). Ultimately, Islamic and right-wing extremists chose weapons that facilitate large-scale murder.

Additionally, Islamic and right-wing extremists are moving away from high-security government targets in favor of “soft” targets abundant with vulnerable “enemies.” As previously mentioned, Islamic and right-wing extremists frequently target places of worship. These locations symbolize what these extremists hate and also offer little security or resistance. By

attacking targets such as synagogues (especially during active hours), Islamic and right-wing extremists also ensure injuries and casualties. The aforementioned right-wing terrorist who attacked two mosques in New Zealand was able to commit the deadliest terrorist attack in the country's history with this method (Lever & Hollingsworth, 2020). As for recreational places/events, these spaces also offer large crowds of unsuspecting victims. Locations such as the yoga studio during prime hours are easily accessible and filled with individuals that may be unprepared or incapable of fighting back. In the end, Islamic and right-wing extremists choose targets that directly enable the goal of mass murder.

This similar goal has proven distinct from other terrorist groups. The FBI classifies terrorism as the use of violence in order to achieve political goals and create a lasting psychological impact on the larger population (n.d.c). However, not all terrorist groups utilize violence against *people* to achieve their political aims. In most Western countries, the most prominent terrorist group types are Islamic, right-wing, and left-wing extremism. While Islamic and right-wing extremists focus on injury and murder, most left-wing groups focus on property destruction. The University of Maryland's Extremist Crime Database demonstrates this sharp contrast. From 2001 to 2016 (excluding 9/11), extremists were responsible for 225 deaths in the United States. Islamic extremists killed 119 in 23 separate instances, and right-wing extremists killed 106 in 62 separate instances. Meanwhile, left-wing extremists' attacks did not result in any fatalities in this time period (Government Accountability Office, 2017). However, according to the FBI, left-wing extremists were responsible for significant property damage. From 1996 to 2002, far-left groups such as ELF and ALF have committed approximately 600 attacks resulting in damages of over \$42 million (Watson, 2002). Overall, these statistics demonstrate Islamic and

right-wing extremists' affinity for mass murder, and the sharp contrast from left-wing terrorism emphasizes the uniqueness of this similarity.

In the end, Islamic and right-wing extremists' similar tactics and strategies demonstrate their clear intentions of mass murder. These extremists encourage and depend on lone wolves for their ability to easily perpetrate attacks across the globe. Meanwhile, these lone wolves' weapons (firearms, explosives, and vehicles) all facilitate the greatest casualties with minimal difficulty. Moreover, Islamic and right-wing extremists chose crowded, unprotected spaces to maximize potential victims. Above all, Islamic and right-wing extremists' intent to kill sharply contrasts left-wing extremists' goals of property destruction, highlighting the exclusiveness of this similarity. Islamic and right-wing extremist's attack tactics and strategies, therefore solidify their inextricable similarities.

## Chapter 5: Case Studies

### Introduction

“And that's something that's always scared me... we start to see some of these Islamist terror groups start to partner with these far-right groups. And while that may sound crazy because they hate each other, unfortunately, their enemy, their number-one enemy is what they would consider the Jew. So I think it's only a matter of time before we start to see these organizations begin to work with each other and start to spread their terror more globally” (Davies, 2018). Christian Picciolini offered this comment on an NPR podcast regarding how the previous Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi attempted to recruit him and other neo-Nazis for a violent uprising against Jews in the early '90s. Although Canadian intelligence services thwarted this plot, Picciolini was one of the first to express his well-founded fears of the potential violent cooperation between Islamic and right-wing extremists. Unfortunately, decades after Gaddafi's fall, this fear has become a reality.

In addition to a historical coalescence of violent ideology and action, new instances of collaboration and intersection between Islamic and right-wing extremist groups are occurring. The previous chapters thoroughly discussed the similarities between these two intertwined groups: ideology, recruitment and radicalization, and tactics and strategies of attack. These chapters answered the first part of the research question. What are the similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism? In accordance with the hypothesis: Islamic and right-wing extremism have similarities in ideologies rooted in prejudice, hyper-conservatism, and distorted religion; radicalization strategies that target young, vulnerable men; and attack strategies that hinge on self-sacrificing individuals to achieve maximum fatalities.

However, these similarities not only have academic and theoretical relevance, these findings also offer explanations for real-world occurrences. As the second part of the research question asks: How do the similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism guide the intersection/collaboration of these ideologies, groups, and individuals? This chapter utilizes those found similarities in an attempt to explain situations in which extremists from each sect have collaborated with each other and instances where individuals have subscribed to both ideologies. Why would Islamic and right-wing extremists conspire together? How can a neo-Nazi suddenly convert to Islamic extremism? While it is impossible to delve into the mind and decision-making process of an extremist, these similarities offer plausible, logical explanations as to why collaboration or conversion may be appealing.

Overall, this chapter explores four recent examples in which Islamic and right-wing extremists have either colluded with each other or instances where individuals have subscribed to both ideologies. Most importantly, all of these instances occurred in the past five years, with two occurring less than a year ago. Granted, there exist multiple historical instances of collaboration or dual-subscription to Islamic and right-wing extremism, such as the collusion between Gaddafi and the neo-Nazis (Gartenstein-Ross & Blackman, 2019). While this instance and others set precedents, they are aging and declining in relevance. Instead, this chapter explores the more recent examples of the intersection between Islamic and right-wing extremism that demonstrate the modern and current threat.

This chapter examines two instances in 2020 where right-wing extremists offered material support or planned attacks with Islamic extremists. First, this chapter explores the neo-Nazi, Army soldier, Ethan Melzer's collusion with Al Qaeda, their planned attack on U.S. troops, and the similarities that drove this collaboration. Second, this chapter analyzes an instance in

which two members of the far-right Boogaloo Bois movement attempted to provide weapons and mercenary support to the Islamic terrorist group, Hamas. This chapter additionally examines how the similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism could have driven individuals to subscribe to both ideologies (simultaneously or consecutively). This chapter first explores police officer and neo-Nazi/ISIS supporter, Nicholas Young. Next, this chapter discusses Atomwaffen Division supporter to ISIS convert, Devon Arthurs. Overall, the case studies corroborate how the similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremists drive the intersection/collaboration of these ideologies, groups, and individuals.

## **Better Together**

Islamic and right-wing extremists have an extensive history of collaboration that has been reinvigorated in the modern era. Before Gaddafi's conspiracy with Canadian neo-Nazis, Hitler's regime attempted to court Muslims in the Middle East to coordinate a global elimination of Jews (Gartenstein-Ross & Blackman, 2019). However, while these historical instances largely concentrate around a shared desire to violently exterminate Jews, modern alliances between Islamic and right-wing extremists extend beyond sole anti-Semitism. In 2020, two instances of Islamic and right-wing extremist cooperation exemplified the many similarities between the two sects. Firstly, U.S. Army soldier, Ethan Melzer and his neo-Nazi group, the Order of Nine Angels, colluded with Al Qaeda in a plot to attack his fellow U.S. troops. This cooperation can be explained by numerous similarities in ideology, radicalization, and tactics and strategies. A few months later, two right-wing extremist "Boogaloo Bois" attempted to deliver weapons to and act as mercenaries for Hamas, a foreign Islamic extremist group. Hamas and the Boogaloo Bois' similarities in ideology and attack tactics and strategies reveal the probable motivation behind this attempted cooperation. Ultimately, these case studies thoroughly support the hypothesis that

the cooperation of Islamic and right-wing extremists is driven by their unique similarities in ideology, radicalization and recruitment, and attack tactics and strategies.

### **Melzer and Al Qaeda**

Ethan Melzer, a U.S. Army soldier and right-wing extremist, plotted a violent, mass ambush against U.S. troops by disclosing sensitive military information to an Al Qaeda operative. Melzer joined the U.S. Army in 2018 and shortly thereafter entered a right-wing extremist group, the Order of Nine Angels (O9A) (Department of Justice, 2020a). The O9A is a Satanic neo-Nazi group that espouses the typical neo-Nazi ideology (anti-Semitism, racism, etc.) and even more extreme beliefs such as a deification of Adolf Hitler and a belief in human sacrifices and a Satanic empire (Lowe, 2019). On his path to extremism, Melzer consumed propaganda from right-wing and Islamic extremist groups alike until he was deployed in October 2019 (DOJ, 2020a).

Two years later, in April of 2020, Melzer received orders for a foreign deployment. This event acted as an impetus for Melzer's idea for an attack against his fellow service members. Melzer promptly contacted members of O9A and a related right-wing extremist organization, the "RapeWaffen Division," in order to facilitate what they referred to as a "jihadi attack." Melzer shared sensitive information, such as his unit's deployment location, movements, and security details for the purpose of a "mass casualty" attack. Later, in May 2020, Melzer contacted a member of Al Qaeda (an Islamic extremist group that uses terrorism in an attempt to establish a Caliphate). Melzer leaked more information to the Al Qaeda operative, such as the location of a military facility where he expected to be deployed, the facility's surveillance and defense capabilities, number of soldiers, and so on. Ultimately, a month later, Melzer was interviewed by



the FBI wherein he admitted his collusion with O9A and Al Qaeda. Melzer was subsequently arrested, thwarting the attack (DOJ, 2020a).

Despite the seemingly contradictory nature of Al Qaeda and O9A, their similar ideologies ultimately explain their complementary motivations to conspire to commit an attack against the U.S. military. Both groups are ardently against established (especially Western) governments, and they wish to create their own historically-reminiscent societies. Al Qaeda seeks to expel “Westerners, specifically Americans, from historically Muslim lands, such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and North Africa” (ADL, n.d.a). The O9A similarly condemns “liberal, Judeo-Christian” governments such as the United States and other Western nations (Counter Extremism Project, n.d.). Accordingly, Melzer proudly described himself as a “traitor against the United States” who would bring about a total breakdown of Western democracy and civilization (DOJ, 2020a). Furthermore, both Al Qaeda and O9A tout their plans to replace these governments with their own idyllic society. For Al Qaeda, once their land is purged of Western influence and established governments, this Islamic extremist group (like most others) aims to create an Islamic empire. This empire or Caliphate would resemble the original Caliphate of 632 AD and exert the same control over all Muslim people and lands (ADL, n.d.a). Similarly, the O9A declares that they wish to return to a self-deterministic “tribal society” or essentially a world order based on fascism, social Darwinism, and Satanism (CEJ, n.d.).

Al Qaeda and O9A’s archetypal societies are additionally similar in the peoples they disparage and exclude. Like many other Islamic and right-wing extremist groups, Al Qaeda and O9A share a belief in violence towards Jews and women. Al Qaeda has a profound history of anti-Semitism. Their ideology states that Jews are Muslims’ “eternal enemy” and the one true evil that must be violently eradicated from the world (ADL, n.d.a). The O9A agrees with this

sentiment, spouting conspiracy theories about a Jewish-controlled state. Their founder even declared that O9A's brand of Satanism encompasses the command to "diabolically" plot against Jews (Lowes, 2019). Both organizations also have a history of sexual violence against women. In Afghanistan, Al Qaeda frequently perpetrated the systematic raping of women. Al Qaeda's goal was to force the women to become suicide bombers in order to "redeem" themselves (French, 2017). The O9A also published "The Rape Anthology," which is a collection of writings praising ritualistic and random acts of rape against women (CEJ, n.d.). Overall, Al Qaeda and Melzer/O9A agree on many twisted and violent ideological principles, and these similar ideologies offer a logical explanation as to why they collaborated.

The commonalities between Al Qaeda and O9A's radicalization and recruitment tactics further explain the likelihood of their cooperation. Essentially, both groups rely on the internet for communication and the dissemination of violent propaganda. Al Qaeda advocates for "electronic jihad" or utilizing the internet for online libraries of propaganda, a virtual platform for radicalization, and encrypted messaging applications for extremist discourse (Rudner, 2017). Similarly, Melzer was radicalized via the internet, as O9A relies on social media and encrypted messaging platforms to recruit new members and spread propaganda (DOJ, 2020a). In fact, Al Qaeda and O9A have a history of utilizing the same popular extremist app, Telegram (DOJ, 2020a; Rudner, 2017). Although the Department of Justice has not released the name of the encrypted messaging app Melzer and the Al Qaeda member used to communicate, it is likely the two encountered each other on Telegram or another similar extremist site. Ultimately, the cooperation between Al Qaeda and Melzer was facilitated by their existing presence on the internet in forums where both Islamic and right-wing extremism fester.

Finally, both groups prefer similar attack tactics and strategies, and this agreement facilitates their cooperation in planning for a unified goal. Firstly, when Melzer first reached out to O9A about the possibility of an attack on his unit, members of O9A characterized their plans as a “jihadi attack.” This characterization is unsurprising as the group has a history of expressing admiration for Islamic extremists, particularly Al Qaeda’s former leader, Osama bin Laden (DOJ, 2020a). This predisposition to an appreciation for Islamic extremists and their attack strategies logically explains Melzer’s next steps of contacting Al Qaeda to plan an attack with similar strategies. Consistent with other Islamic and right-wing extremists, Al Qaeda and O9A agree that mass casualties are the end goal of an attack. Al Qaeda’s desire for mass casualties is most obviously demonstrated by their attacks on 9/11 that left nearly 3,000 dead (BBC, 2011). Melzer repeatedly emphasized the extent of O9A’s Satanic obsession with death. Melzer described the attack’s objective as a “mass casualty” event, disregarding the danger it would pose to his own life (DOJ, 2020a). Therefore, both groups’ affinity for mass casualties was a likely driving force in their cooperation.

Ultimately, the similarities amongst ideology, radicalization/recruitment, and attack tactics and strategies offer a clear explanation for Al Qaeda and O9A’s partnership. Both ideologies are rooted in the desire for the destruction of Western governments in favor of an “idyllic” society that allows free discrimination and violence against Jews and women. Moreover, both groups infest the same extremist section of the internet for communication and radicalization. O9A also admires Al Qaeda’s tactics and strategies, with both groups focusing on mass casualties. Overall, the combination of these similarities clearly drives and facilitates the partnership between Melzer/O9A and Al Qaeda.

## **Hamas and the Boogaloo Bois**

Just a few months after Melzer conspired with Al Qaeda, the pattern of Islamic and right-wing extremist collaboration continued with the Boogaloo Bois and Hamas. In May 2020, the FBI began investigating Benjamin Teeter and Michael Solomon. Teeter and Solomon were members of the Boogaloo movement, which is an anti-government, anti-police, and pro-gun extremist movement that desires a second civil war in the U.S. Then, in June 2020, the FBI received audio recordings from a confidential human source (CHS). Teeter and Solomon believed the CHS be a member of Hamas (an Islamic extremist and anti-Israel group based in the Gaza Strip and West bank). In these recordings, Teeter and Solomon expressed interest in working with Hamas because they believed that Hamas shared the Boogaloo Bois' anti-U.S. government views. Teeter and Solomon also declared their desire to employ themselves as "mercenaries" for Hamas in order to generate money for the Boogaloo movement. The funds were supposedly needed to recruit new members and purchase land for a training compound (DOJ, 2020b).

Later, Teeter and Solomon continued the conspiracy with the CHS and an undercover FBI agent posing as Hamas leadership. The Boogaloo Bois offered assistance to Hamas to bomb U.S. government buildings and even suggested several courthouses as potential targets. Teeter and Solomon also conveyed their ability and eagerness to manufacture unmarked parts for guns and create unregistered and untraceable weapons, including suppressors (DOJ, 2020b). Consequently, the men sold five suppressors for \$1,800 as well as a "drop-in auto sear" that could be used to convert a weapon to shoot automatically. The Boogaloo Bois expected these weapons to be used against Israeli and U.S. military personnel overseas (DOJ, 2020b). Ultimately, the FBI arrested Teeter and Solomon, charging them with terrorism-related offenses.

Despite never truly interacting with Hamas, these organizations' similarities clearly explain the Boogaloo Bois' proclivity to collude with these Islamic extremists.

Ignoring the obvious geographical disparity between Hamas and the Boogaloo Bois, Teeter and Solomon identified clear ideological similarities that led them to seek out collaboration. Overall, both Hamas and the Boogaloo Bois revile "tyrannical" established governments (including the U.S.) and wish for a violently imposed new world order. Hamas calls for an eradication of the State of Israel and condemns the U.S. and other Western governments for their support of the State. Hamas has flaunted commitment to the cause by perpetrating numerous violent terrorist attacks in Israeli cities since 1994 (ADL, n.d.d). Meanwhile, the Boogaloo Bois also vehemently express their desire for an "armed insurrection against [U.S.] government tyranny." The Boogaloo Bois liken this uprising to a second civil war or American revolution (Miller, 2020). Teeter even highlighted the groups' common frustrations against these established governments, expressing to the CHS that Hamas "shares anti-U.S. government views that align with their own" (DOJ, 2020b). After the deposition of these governments, both Hamas and the Boogaloo Bois have distinct plans for their new world order. Hamas's ideology forbids Jewish control in the area they designate as Palestine and plans to erect an Islamic government in its place (ADL, n.d.d). The Boogaloo movement intends to rebuild the U.S. in favor of a libertarian and "anarchocapitalist" society rife with individualism and supposed unfettered civil liberties (Miller, 2020). Ultimately, the ideological intersection of Hamas and the Boogaloos acutely promotes their inferred benefits of cooperating towards a common goal.

Moreover, despite fewer similarities in radicalization and recruitment strategies, Hamas and the Boogaloo Bois' preferred attack tactics and strategies mirror each other. Inherently, both groups favor soft targets and maximum casualties. Hamas's past terror attacks exhibit their

obvious preference for soft targets. Despite anger focused at the Israeli government, Hamas typically chooses low-security targets, such as buses, hotels, shopping malls, cafes, and so on (ADL, n.d.d). The Boogaloo Bois expressed this same affinity in their conspiracy with the CHS informant they believed to be a Hamas member. Teeter explained that he and Solomon had decided to target a historical courthouse not only for its American symbolism but because of its low security and ease of access. Furthermore, resembling most other Islamic and right-wing extremists, both Hamas and the Boogaloo Bois maintained mass casualties as a key end goal. Hamas's typical targeting of the aforementioned largely populated centers and their use of suicide bombers distinguishes their intentions to cause mass casualties. Meanwhile, the Boogaloo Bois' obsession with war and death is demonstrated by their conversations with the CHS. Solomon stated, "Here's the thing. I want to like take down twenty senators... I want to murder a bunch of U.S. politicians" (Affidavit in Support of an Application for a Criminal Complaint at 15, United States v. Solomon, No. 0:20-mj-00668-TNL (D. Minn. filed Sept. 3, 2020)).

In addition to these targets and goals, both groups typically utilize similar weapons, and the sale/use of explosives were a central theme in the Boogaloo Bois' attempted conspiracy. As previously mentioned, Hamas mainly utilizes explosives for their terrorist attacks, specifically suicide bombers. Historically, Hamas even offered summer camp-type youth groups to attract more suicide bombers (ADL, n.d.d). Similarly, both Boogaloo Bois, Teeter and Solomon obsessed over bombs in their attempted planning for a joint attack. Teeter continuously emphasized their ability and desire to commit a courthouse bombing. Teeter also suggested a raid on a National Guard armory to steal explosives and obtain C-4. Additionally, both men were a part of the "Boojahideen" sector of the Boogaloo movement. Boojahideen is a play on words

from “mujahideen” (Islamic guerrilla fighters), and the term’s use further emphasizes the Boogaloo’s perceived similarity to the tactics and strategies of the Islamic extremist group, Hamas (Affidavit in Support of an Application for a Criminal Complaint, United States v. Solomon, No. 0:20-mj-00668-TNL (D. Minn. filed Sept. 3, 2020)). Ultimately, these perceived similarities amongst Hamas and Boogaloo Bois tactics and strategies support an unambiguous motivation for their attempted collusion.

Overall, the evidence demonstrates that the Boogaloo Bois were able to distinguish and act upon their similarities to Hamas. Most importantly, Hamas’s anti-government ideology definitively established a common ground that tempted Teeter and Solomon. The Boogaloo Bois identified commonalities amongst attack tactics and strategies that they believed would facilitate their cooperation towards murder and destruction. In the end, the Boogaloo Bois were not truly conspiring with members of Hamas but rather the FBI. However, this evidence supports the conclusion that these distinct similarities in ideology and tactics and strategies drove Teeter and Solomon to seek out a collaboration.

### **Why pick one?**

In addition to the examples of Islamic and right-wing extremists working together, there exist multiple instances of individuals subscribing to both ideologies (simultaneously and consecutively). Recently, two cases have exemplified the interconnected nature of Islamic and right-wing extremism by demonstrating how an individual can be drawn to two seemingly contradictory ideologies. Firstly, U.S. neo-Nazi/police officer/ISIS sympathizer, Nicholas Young exhibited how these ideologies can coexist simultaneously in one persons’ belief system due to their complementary nature. Secondly, Devon Arthurs, delineated the clear path from right-wing

to Islamic extremism when he left a neo-Nazi, Atomwaffen Division cell and converted to Islamic extremism. These similarities reveal the complex entanglement of Islamic and right-wing extremism. Ultimately, these case studies support the hypothesis that the similarities of ideology, radicalization and recruitment, and tactics and strategies explain and encourage situations in which individuals have subscribed to both Islamic and right-wing extremism.

### **Nicholas Young**

Nicholas Young had an “ordinary” upbringing. Raised by two Catholic parents in D.C., Young attended college before becoming a D.C. metro police officer in 2003. However, in his spare time, Young dressed up as a Nazi, traveled to Libya to fight the dictator Gaddafi, and kept a prayer list that included Saddam Hussein and Adolf Hitler. These revelations about Young were uncovered by a six-year-long surveillance and then sting operation by the FBI (Weiner, 2017). Law enforcement first came into contact with Young in 2010 due to his acquaintance with Zachary Chesser, who was eventually convicted for attempting to aid Al Qaeda. Over the next few years, Young continued to nurture his Islamic and right-wing extremist ideology. Young had contact with several FBI CHSs (confidential human sources) before the incident that led to his arrest. Young eventually sent \$245 worth of gift cards to a CHS he believed to be involved with ISIS. Ultimately, Young was sentenced to 15 years in prison, thereby becoming the first law enforcement official to ever be convicted of a terrorism offense (DOJ, 2016).

While Young subscribed to brands of both Islamic and right-wing extremism, he was particularly obsessed with the interaction and unification of these ideologies. Before converting to Islam in 2006, Nicholas Young was known for his fascination with Nazi ideology (claiming no allegiance to any particular group). Evidence of this dedication exists in his endless supply of far-right memorabilia, such as his confederate flags, SS (Nazi police force) lightning bolt chain,



Nazi uniforms, posters of Hitler, and so on (Weiner, 2017). Meanwhile, the FBI uncovered separate evidence speaking to his Islamic extremist beliefs. This evidence includes “bookmarked” web pages with titles such as “English Translation of Jihad Songs,” “Sheikh Osama Bin Laden Speech to American Citizens,” and “Anwar Al Awlaki The True Muslims MUST SEE” (Government's Opposition to Defendant's Omnibus Motion in Limine Exhibit Selected Websites Bookmarked by Young, United States v. Young, No. 1:16-cr-265 (E.D. Va. Oct. 10, 2017)). On top of Young’s separate Islamic and Nazi paraphernalia, Young clearly understood the unique union between these extremist sects. Uncovered evidence showed that Young harbored an obsessive veneration of Nazis collaborating with Muslims against Jews. Particularly, the FBI found evidence related to the 13<sup>th</sup> Waffen Mountain Division, which was a Muslim, armed branch of the Nazi Party (Government's Opposition to Defendant's Omnibus Motion in Limine Exhibit Report of Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, United States v. Young, No. 1:16-cr-265 (E.D. Va. Oct. 10, 2017)).

Overall, the substantial similarities in Islamic extremist and Nazi ideology heralded Young’s transformation into subscribing to both belief systems simultaneously. Young’s anti-Semitism and fear of an “existential threat” unified these seemingly separate ideologies. Consistent with typical Islamic and right-wing extremists, much of Young’s “research” and belongings centered around violent anti-Semitism. For instance, Young used a flag of Israel as a doormat and maintained copies of numerous memes demonstrating anti-Semitic conspiracies and violence against Jews (Government's Opposition to Defendant's Omnibus Motion in Limine Exhibit Exhibits Related to Jew-Hatred, United States v. Young, No. 1:16-cr-265 (E.D. Va. Oct. 10, 2017)). Young also bookmarked websites such as “CNN Jews behind 9-11 exposed,” “The Synagogue of Satan,” “Since The Dawn Of History\_Jews Destined To Spread Corruption In The

World,” and many more (Government's Opposition to Defendant's Omnibus Motion in Limine Exhibit Selected Websites Bookmarked by Young, United States v. Young, No. 1:16-cr-265 (E.D. Va. Oct. 10, 2017)). Young’s memorabilia of the Mountain Waffen Division demonstrated his belief that both sects could unify in a violent revolt against Jews. Meanwhile, Young’s other bookmarked pages and recorded conversations also demonstrated his fears of an “existential” threat commonly shared by both Islamic and right-wing extremists. Some vague web pages rife with conspiracy about this outside threat included titles such as “Who is the real enemy of the united states,” “The Hidden Truth About The World & Islam,” “Organised Israeli Intelligence In USA” (Government's Opposition to Defendant's Omnibus Motion in Limine Exhibit Selected Websites Bookmarked by Young, United States v. Young, No. 1:16-cr-265 (E.D. Va. Oct. 10, 2017)). Ultimately, Nicholas Young focused on the common Islamic and right-wing ideological themes reinforcing his subscription to a mixture of those ideologies.

The similarities in recruitment and radicalization for both the neo-Nazi and Islamic extremist community further underscore how Young was recruited into both sects so easily. Essentially, Young “fit the profile” for both sects (vulnerable young man), and he was recruited/radicalized on internet extremist platforms. Young’s past actions, as well as descriptions given by family and friends, clearly establish Young’s susceptibility. Young struggled with “fitting in” long before his journey into extremism. He attempted to join the Army but failed, attended college but dropped out, and even tried the military for a second time in his school’s ROTC program before quitting again. Eventually, Young converted to Islam in 2006, looking for yet another community. Young’s co-workers and even family described him as “weird” and “awkward” (Weiner, 2017). This evidence bolsters the likelihood that Young was

searching for identity, community, and purpose similar to many other Islamic and right-wing extremists.

Overall, these struggles likely pushed Young into the “open arms” of the internet extremist community, where he interacted with both Islamic and right-wing extremists. The electronic evidence seized from Young’s computer, such as saved files, texts, and internet history demonstrates his internet-driven devolution into Islamic and right-wing extremism. Young had been in continuous contact with individuals in the extremist community (real or informants) for years. The uncovered evidence included emails, instant messages, and posts on extremist platforms. There, Young and other extremists discussed shared ideology, terrorism plots, and even personal information. Young’s hard drive was also littered with similar propaganda from both Islamic and right-wing extremism. This evidence included hate music, copies of ISIS’s “Inspire” magazine, videos of other extremists committing violence, and so on (DOJ, 2016). Ultimately, Nicholas Young, like many other Islamic and right-wing extremists, became trapped in an internet echo-chamber that solidified his space in each extremist community.

In the end, Islamic and right-wing extremism’s similarities in ideology and radicalization facilitated and promoted Young’s support of both sects. Islamic and right-wing extremism’s shared anti-Semitism and fear of existential threats coalesced into a “logical” belief system for Young. Moreover, Young’s existing vulnerability combined with the alluring internet extremist community created the perfect environment for the simultaneous radicalization into Islamic and right-wing extremism. Overall, these shared characteristics became the factors that shaped and nurtured Nicholas Young into an ISIS-supporting neo-Nazi.

## **Devon Arthurs**

At the young age of 14, Devon Arthurs embarked upon the dark journey into neo-Nazism, ultimately radicalizing and maturing into a senior leader in his own Nazi group, Atomwaffen Division. Nearly a decade later, many were shocked when Arthurs murdered his two neo-Nazi roommates in the name of ISIS (Thompson, 2018). Before this horrific event, Arthurs spent almost a decade in the throes of white supremacy and right-wing extremism online. Ultimately, Arthurs' online life became a reality when he moved into an apartment with his fellow extremists, creating a cell of what Arthurs himself now describes as a "neo-Nazi" terrorist organization." The Atomwaffen Division is an American neo-Nazi organization with an estimated 60-80 "official" members nationwide. However, this group has inspired international terrorist attacks against, Jews, people of color, and LGBTQ+ (Kutner, 2020a). For a time, the Atomwaffen cell lived in a "paradise" filled with items such as posters of Hitler, copies of Mein Kampf, and a shrine to Oklahoma City bomber, Timothy McVeigh (Thompson, 2018).

Then, in May of 2017, Arthurs decided to murder two of his roommates with a gun. After killing his roommates, Arthurs called his father to inform him that he "did something bad." Next, he calmly walked to the condo's leasing office to report the incident to the woman at the front desk. Arthurs then crossed the street over to a smoke shop and held the owner and two customers hostage with a Glock semi-automatic pistol. During this hostage situation, Arthurs revealed his reasoning for murdering his roommates. Arthurs stated that his name was "Khalid" and that he was a Muslim who wanted to go to Syria to fight for ISIS (Kutner, 2020a). The roommates had supposedly insulted Arthurs' "Muslim faith" because, in the past year, Arthurs had become entrenched in Islamic extremism. Eventually, Arthurs was apprehended by police (Kutner, 2020c). However, the question remains, how could Arthurs, who had spent half his life dedicated

to right-wing extremism, decry and denounce his life-long ideology in favor of Islamic extremism?

Essentially, the similar ideological themes amongst Islamic and right-wing extremism appealed to Arthurs, and he decided that Islamic extremism was better-equipped for reaching his goals. Arthurs stated that he converted to Islam at 17, after “out-growing” the racist and hateful ideology of the Atomwaffen Division. However, despite Arthurs’ denunciation of certain aspects of the right-wing ideology, the other overarching themes that Arthurs clung to in Islamic extremism largely mirrored those of his previous neo-Nazi faith. Arthurs still called for the destruction of the Jewish/U.S. government while wanting to install a new world order.

Both ISIS and the Atomwaffen Division designate Jews as the cardinal enemy controlling/exploiting the equally corrupt U.S. government. In fact, in a 2015 propaganda video, an ISIS spokesperson asserted a supposed conspiracy between Jews and the U.S. The spokesperson stated, “In this age the seeds of corruption were sown by America and cultivated by the Jews heading a capitalist financial system of enslavement” (ADL, 2015). Like many other Islamic extremist groups, ISIS advocates for the creation of a Caliphate. After the destruction of current society, ISIS’s Caliphate would exert control over all Muslims and Muslim lands (Bunzel, 2015). Similarly, the Atomwaffen Division believed in conspiracies regarding a Jewish-controlled U.S. government. Arthurs himself stated that Atomwaffen’s ideology drew inspiration from “The Order,” a neo-Nazi terrorist group espousing that the U.S. had been taken over by a “shadow government of powerful Jews” (Kutner, 2020a). During his transitioning ideological period, Arthurs emphasized his desire to raze modern society and resurrect a new one. Arthurs cited how “Arabs and Nazis collaborated during World War II” and wrote how he couldn’t wait until “society burned down.” Arthurs stated that “if neo-Nazis didn’t do it,” he would “laugh

from the grave as Islamists did” (Kutner, 2020b). Overall, despite Arthurs’ profession of changing ideologies, his belief system maintained identical overarching themes, clearly facilitating his transition from right-wing to Islamic extremism.

In addition to the similarities in ideology, Arthurs’ path to radicalization in both Islamic and right-wing extremism is nearly identical. Experts have described Arthurs as the “poster boy for radicalization.” Arthurs exhibited all the prerequisite characteristics that leave one vulnerable to recruitment, and he allowed the internet to radicalize him in both instances. Arthurs had a very difficult upbringing, dealing with medical trauma, his parent’s separation, poverty, undiagnosed/untreated mental health disorders, and so on. Essentially, all of these traumatic instances perfectly fit Picciolini’s description of “potholes” or traumatic events that make an individual vulnerable to radicalization (Picciolini, 2020). Therefore, in both instances, Arthurs sought out identity, community, and purpose in online extremist forums. At 14-years-old Arthurs participated on internet forums such as “Tiny Chat.” This platform allowed Arthurs to talk to neo-Nazis and freely absorb right-wing propaganda until the ideology consumed him. Later, as a young man, Arthurs returned to these same forums after becoming disillusioned with neo-Nazism. Here, Arthurs discovered Islamic extremism and was again recruited and groomed by the existing extremist community. The Islamic and right-wing extremists used similar strategies in both instances of radicalization. These tactics included memes, readily-available comfort/validation, and a glorification of violence against the oppressor (Kutner, 2020b). Arthurs ultimately confronted Islamic extremism in the same comfortable environment, and the familiar propaganda and recruitment strategies likely facilitated his conversion.

Ultimately, both ISIS and Atomwaffen Division encourage similar tactics and strategies that fulfill Arthur’s existing predisposition to violence. Similar to many other Islamic and right-

wing extremists, these groups support lone wolf attacks against “soft” targets in order to achieve maximum fatalities. For instance, ISIS famously called for jihadists to “fight for the cause from wherever they were” and to take up whatever weapons they had to attack civilians. These calls resulted in multiple, simultaneous terror attacks using bombs, guns, knives, vehicles, and so-on, transforming ISIS into the world’s deadliest extremist group (Kutner, 2020c). The Atomwaffen Division touted similar violent fantasies perpetrated by a “leaderless resistance” of small cells or lone wolves. The Atomwaffen Division has planned and acted up these types of attacks. The group organized “Hate Camps” that engaged members in weapons and combat training, with some members going on to murder civilians in the name of their ideology. The term “atomwaffen” even means “atomic weapon” in German, a fact emphasized by Arthur’s roommates. Arthurs revealed to police that his roommates were stock-piling weapons, stealing chemicals, and attempting to build a nuclear weapon (Kutner, 2020a). Overall, Arthurs was dedicated to the “white jihad,” clearly intending on blending tactics and strategies of Islamic and right-wing extremists.

Despite Arthurs’ violent outburst and murder of his roommates for their criticism of Islam, Arthurs maintained a stake in the neo-Nazi community. Leading up to the attack, Arthurs frequently patrolled chatrooms, attempting to convert other white supremacists to Islam. These clear ideological similarities in their anti-Semitic and anti-U.S. rhetoric acted as a bridge between the two communities for Arthurs. Their identical radicalization and recruitment techniques employed upon the vulnerable Arthurs also succeeded twice. Additionally, ISIS’s attack tactics and strategies (nearly identical to those of Atomwaffen) obviously satisfied his lust for violence and murder. In the end, Devon Arthurs exhibits the powerful intersection between

Islamic and right-wing extremism, demonstrating again how their similarities can entrap an individual.



## Chapter 6

### Summary

This thesis started with a grim revelation. Two decades after the harrowing attacks on September 11, 2001, the terrorist threat has not only endured but evolved. The U.S. has spent \$2.8 trillion on counterterrorism funding but still lost roughly 250 more victims to terrorist attacks in the ensuing years (Donheiser, 2018; Bergen et al., 2019). However, only one of those attacks was perpetrated by a foreign Islamic extremist similar to those responsible for 9/11. Therefore, the failure is not in the U.S.'s ability to combat further foreign terrorists; rather, domestic extremists were overlooked and allowed to flourish in the shadows. Specifically, right-wing extremism has blossomed, growing to be the largest terrorist threat facing the Western world, with Islamic extremism trailing not far behind (Jones et al., 2020a). Even more significantly, Islamic and right-wing extremism exist in concert, in a seemingly bizarre cycle of collaboration and motivation, culminating into a singular threat.

This thesis, therefore, reviewed the similarities existing between Islamic and right-wing extremism and how those characteristics drive the intersection and cooperation of the two sects. As the hypothesis states: Islamic and right-wing extremism have similarities in ideologies rooted in prejudice, hyper-conservatism, and distorted religion; radicalization strategies that target young, vulnerable men; and attack strategies that hinge on self-sacrificing individuals to achieve maximum fatalities. These similarities explain situations in which extremists from each sect have collaborated with each other and instances where individuals have subscribed to both ideologies. Chapters 2 through 4 delved into each category of similarities identified by the hypothesis in

rigorous detail. Chapter 5 analyzed and applied those findings to case studies of the intersection between Islamic and right-wing extremism.

Chapter 2 explored the various similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremists' ideologies. Despite Islamic and right-wing extremists subscribing to different religions (Islam and Christianity, respectively), both groups adhere to extreme interpretations of religious principles and doctrine. Islamic and right-wing extremists view themselves as the "chosen people" and their violence against moderates and non-believers as "anointed" by God. Both Islamic and right-wing extremists' ideologies also center on fear, purporting that outside threats (and even internal sympathizers) are seeking to destroy their way of life. These aforementioned threats are even identical, with both sects rife with anti-Semitism, anti-feminism, and anti-liberalism. Finally, Islamic and right-wing extremists envision an idyllic world governed by their divine leaders and devoid of the peoples they abhor. Islamic and right-wing extremists draw inspiration from past "archetypal" societies and seek to raze modern governments in favor of these Caliphates and ethnostates, respectively. Overall, Islamic and right-wing extremists' ideologies share the same central themes and center around an identical concept of hatred and fear.

Chapter 3 examined Islamic and right-wing extremists' identical radicalization and recruitment processes. Overall, budding extremists from both sects follow similar steps: (1) pre-radicalization, (2) self-identification/interest, (3) indoctrination, and (4) planning and execution of violence. These steps transform "ordinary" individuals into violent extremists. Moreover, the types of individuals radicalized into either sect are typically vulnerable, young men who have faced trauma or hardship and fill those gaps with extremism. The internet echo-chamber facilitates and encourages this process for Islamic and right-wing extremists. Social media sites

introduce these susceptible individuals to extremist ideology and drench them in constant, hateful propaganda. Then, private chatrooms further isolate these individuals where the broader extremist community provides unrelenting support and encouragement. Violence is normalized through the dissemination of memes and infographics that reinforce anti-Semitic conspiracies, anti-feminism, and so forth. Above all, the internet acts as an isolation chamber and an unfettered breeding ground for Islamic and right-wing extremist propaganda that streamlines the radicalization and recruitment process.

Once these Islamic and right-wing extremists are fully-indoctrinated, they utilize similar attack tactics and strategies to achieve their violent goals as demonstrated in Chapter 4. The evidence exhibited how Islamic and right-wing extremists typically act as “lone wolves,” unattached to a specific group but drawing inspiration or even instruction from the broader extremist community. Moreover, Islamic and right-wing extremists uniquely utilize guns, explosives, and even vehicles as weapons for attacks. Recent statistics demonstrated how both sects are increasingly choosing “soft targets” such as places of worship or recreation that offer little security and resistance. Overall, the combination of these weapons and targets serves to achieve their identical end goal of maximum fatalities. Ultimately, both sects overwhelmingly focus on self-motivated acts of violence to promote their respective ideologies.

Finally, Chapter 5 concentrated on the unification of these similarities by utilizing these findings to analyze and explain case studies where Islamic and right-wing extremists cooperated or instances in which individuals subscribed to both ideologies. The first case study explored was the attempted collaboration of neo-Nazi, Ethan Melzer, and Al Qaeda for an attack against Melzer’s Army unit. The analysis determined that both Neo-Nazis and Al Qaeda shared ideological similarities, such as anti-government sentiments, a veneration of the past, and

vehement anti-Semitism and anti-feminism. Both groups also shared the internet as a tool for radicalization and centered their attack strategy on the goal of mass murder. The next case study of Teeter and Solomon recalled an instance where two “Boogaloo Bois” attempted to sell weapons to and plan an attack with Hamas. The desired collaboration stemmed from a shared anti-government view and a belief in a violent usurpation of society. Moreover, Chapter 5 explored case studies of two young men who subscribed to both ideologies. Nicholas Young and Devon Arthurs clung to the mutual ideological themes of anti-Semitism and a fear of an “existential threat.” In both periods of radicalization, these young men were recruited into Islamic and right-wing extremism with violent propaganda. Overall, these case studies demonstrate the intricate relationship between Islamic and right-wing extremism and support how these similarities drive their cooperation.

Ultimately, these previous chapters demonstrated the perhaps shocking but undeniable similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism. These findings established how both Islamic and right-wing extremists’ ideologies center on fear mongering, hatred, and stereotypes. Both sects prey on vulnerable young men, using the internet as a gateway for propaganda and the promise of community and belonging. Islamic and right-wing extremists often act alone but with the praise and encouragement of others electing violent means to achieve violent ends. Above all, these similarities in ideology, radicalization and recruitment, and attack tactics and strategies offer insight into the case studies of interaction between Islamic and right-wing extremists. It is these similarities that compel extremists to collaborate for a common goal and inspire individuals to subscribe to both ideologies, solidifying the unlikely union between Islamic and right-wing extremists.

## Conclusions

Returning to the research question: What are the similarities between Islamic and right-wing extremism that guide the intersection/collaboration of these ideologies, groups, and individuals? The findings in this thesis support the hypothesis: Islamic and right-wing extremism have similarities in ideologies rooted in prejudice, hyper-conservatism, and distorted religion; radicalization strategies that target young, vulnerable men; and attack strategies that hinge on self-sacrificing individuals to achieve maximum fatalities. These similarities explain situations in which extremists from each sect have collaborated with each other and instances where individuals have subscribed to both ideologies.

Not only do these findings support the hypothesis but these similarities and their consequences answer the research in detail beyond the scope of the original hypothesis. The hypothesis stated that Islamic and right-wing extremism have ideologies rooted in prejudice, hyper-conservatism, and distorted religion. However, the central theme behind their ideologies is fear and isolationism that transforms into hatred. As Christian Picciolini stated, “Hatred is born of ignorance. Fear is its father, and isolation is its mother. When we don’t understand something, we tend to be afraid of it, and if we keep ourselves from it, that fear grows and sometimes turns into hatred” (Picciolini, 2018, 18:03). Islamic and right-wing extremists exist in a constant state of fear, believing that their community and way of life faces an existential threat. The “evils” that these extremists revile are often unknowns because these groups are a small minority. These marginalized groups may exist outside of the dominant community entirely, or their way of life is perceptively different from these extremists. Therefore, both sects obsess over the creation of their own idyllic society free of what they fear. Overall, both sects demonstrate clear resistance

to change and evolution, and these ideologies transform those fears into a universal language of hatred.

Moreover, the findings support the hypothesis on the manner in which Islamic and right-wing extremists' radicalization strategies target young, vulnerable men. However, the findings go beyond the demographic significance and speak to the influence of the internet. Vast internet communities provide companionship and purpose to these lost individuals. There, propaganda and familiar memes constantly bombard these budding radicals, drawing them closer and deeper to extremist ideology. The internet echo-chamber is truly the pivotal and essential force for radicalization and recruitment, and Islamic and right-wing extremists' identical use of its power overshadows all other external influences.

As for the similarities in tactics and strategies, the hypothesis accurately characterized how Islamic and right-wing extremists act as self-sacrificing individuals aiming to achieve maximum fatalities. However, this classification does not fully encapsulate the uniqueness of Islamic and right-wing extremists' attack tactics and strategies. The findings overwhelmingly establish that Islamic and right-wing extremists' combination of weapons and targets creates the opportunity for maximum fatalities. This hunger for violence is markedly different from the majority of other active terrorists in the West. Particularly, this goal is distinct from left-wing extremists who typically destroy property instead of attacking humans. Ultimately, Islamic and right-wing extremists are inextricably linked in their desire for violence and murder, demonstrating the severity and similarity of the threat.

These academic and anecdotal similarities, while shocking, signal a much darker threat. Not only have Islamic and right-wing extremists worked together in the past out of convenience or necessity, but these individuals have *recognized* their common ground. The case studies of

collaboration and co-belief exhibit two essential conclusions. First, the fact that these seemingly juxtaposed extremists can work together or even simultaneously subscribe to the same ideology further supports the conclusion that Islamic and right-wing extremism are incredibly similar. Second, Islamic and right-wing extremists not only recognize these similarities, but these parallel ideologies and goals motivate and inspire these extremists to collaborate. Therefore, Islamic and right-wing extremists pose twice the threat individually and collaboratively. Overall, the case studies presented in Chapter 5 cement the inextricable nature of Islamic and right-wing extremism.

Above all, Islamic and right-wing extremism represent two faces of a singular threat. These sects share the same core beliefs and fundamental philosophy. Both maintain and affirm that dogma in an isolated, delusion community until lashing out in a violent rage. These similarities in ideology, radicalization, and attack prove vital components in their collaboration. However, (despite the recent surge) there are only scattered instances of cooperation and co-belief. Why hasn't there been more collusion and intersection between Islamic and right-wing extremists?

Simply, these groups also tend to direct their unabated hatred toward each other. Right-wing extremists are profoundly racist and abhor Muslims. The far-right typically views Islam as uncivilized and savage, with many groups even dedicating themselves entirely to its eradication. Similarly, most Islamic extremist organizations perceive a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West. These extremists classify Islam as incompatible with modernity and despise any non-believer as morally corrupt. That mutual hatred is a colossal barrier to cooperation. Islamic and right-wing extremists must overcome their biases or simply ignore them to achieve a common goal. The individuals subscribing to both ideologies must find a way to reconcile that

dissonance. Despite Islamic and right-wing extremists' unbelievable similarities, their insurmountable hatred for each other acts as the sole obstacle preventing dangerous collaboration.

## **Implications and Recommendations**

The conclusions of this thesis indicate practical implications broader than the theoretical study. Islamic and right-wing extremism are not two separate maladies afflicting the U.S. and the rest of the West. Islamic and right-wing extremism are symptoms of the same disease: rising fear, ignorance, hatred, and so on that combine to create the perfect cocktail of extremism. These intricate similarities underscore the absurdity of segregating Islamic and right-wing extremism into separate issues. Their hatred is borne of a universal sickness that drives both Islamic and right-wing extremists to violence.

In the age of the COVID-19 pandemic, comparing extremism to a disease is intimately painful and sobering. However, this metaphor can offer a separate perspective. The unity of Islamic and right-wing extremists clearly poses a significant and novel threat. Therefore, a unified effort is essential to effectively combat the totality of violent extremism. The horrors of 9/11 provided two decades of valuable research on Islamic extremists. Meanwhile, right-wing extremists are emerging quickly, collaborating with Islamic extremists, and in some cases, outpacing them entirely. This thesis has illuminated how right-wing extremism is not unique from Islamic extremism but rather a variant of the same disease. Similarities in ideology, recruitment, and action imply that similar counterterrorism and extremist prevention mechanisms could be used to combat both Islamic and right-wing extremism. Research regarding one type of extremism could provide insight into the motivation and agenda of the other. Ultimately,



recognizing and understanding these similarities is the first step in utilizing those decades of research and effectively combating Islamic and right-wing extremism both individually and collectively.

Unfortunately, there still exist vast gaps in the research regarding these threats as a single entity. This thesis lacks a comparison of group structure and dynamics in Islamic and right-wing extremist organizations. Although both types of extremism have proven to be primarily propelled by a “leaderless” existence, organized and capable groups exist on both sides. Understanding the possible similarities in group dynamics and sociology could provide insight on how to dismantle and disrupt those groups. Moreover, while this thesis encompasses ideology and recruitment, it lacks the research and analysis on psychological motivations of Islamic and right-wing extremists. Psychological studies or interviews performed on current or past extremists could offer profound insight into the motivations and “logic” behind these extremists’ actions. While this thesis clearly demonstrates that Islamic and right-wing extremists may spout the same ideologies and take similar violent action, psychological studies are needed to determine whether these individuals also “think” the same as well.

Furthermore, the majority of this thesis broadly covers a wide range of groups and individuals, making generalizations on ideology, recruitment, and attack tactics and strategies. While the last chapter analyzes individual case studies, it includes just a minute portion of instances of collaboration or co-belief among Islamic and right-wing extremists. More case study comparisons on Islamic and right-wing extremist groups with similar geography, background, and so on could offer insight into threats facing specific regions. Moreover, those case studies, coupled with psychological and sociological insights, could provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon overall.

In the end, terrorism exists only within the contexts and confines of society, government, economy, culture, privilege, religion, and every other aspect of the man-made human experience. Without the cooperation of diverse discipline experts (in an effort more unified than that of Islamic and right-wing extremists), terrorism will endure. Hatred is a universal language familiar to every culture and society across the globe. Therefore, a profound understanding of the causes and consequences of that hatred specific to Islamic and right-wing extremists is key to better counterterrorism strategies overall.

“With guns you can kill terrorists, with education you can kill terrorism.”

– Malala Yousafzai

(United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, n.d.)

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## ACADEMIC VITA

### EDUCATION

**The Pennsylvania State University**, Schreyer Honors College, & College of IST  
Bachelor of Science (B.S.) in Security & Risk Analysis & Minor in Spanish

### WORK EXPERIENCE

#### **Cyber Security & Intelligence Intern**

*Merck & Co.- Cyber Fusion Center*

- Created weekly metric reports for the incident response team that summarized high visibility incidents related to malware, phishing, data loss prevention, suspicious network activity, etc.
- Coordinated with cyber threat intelligence and threat defense operations teams for intel. sharing

#### **Cyber Security Engineer Intern**

*Liberty Mutual Insurance- Security Operations Center*

- Investigated thousands of emails for phishing or malware via IPs, DNS traffic, macros, and IOCs
- Conducted incident response by interpreting proxy logs, C2 domains, malware trees, etc.
- Analyzed cyber threat intelligence by tracking advanced persistent threats (APTs) through campaigns, Tactics/Techniques/Procedures (TTPs), victimology, and open-source intelligence

#### **Learning Assistant**

*College of Information Sciences and Technology*

- Responsible for supporting professor in grading, classroom activities, and holding office hours
- Assist students in labs with Linux, cryptography, SQL injections, password cracking, and more

### RESEARCH & LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

#### **COVID-19 Open-Source Intelligence Team**

*Team Co-Lead*

- Utilized open-source intelligence analysis to create daily reports surrounding the events and effects of the coronavirus pandemic in the northeastern region
- Participated in daily meetings with students and professors to analyze the intelligence reports and deliver relevant findings to Penn State's Office of Emergency Management

#### **Penn State Mock Trial**

*Captain, Competing Attorney*

- Led and organized hundreds of hours of practices with team to create a presentation based on complex affidavits, depositions, exhibits, and other legal documents
- Reviewed 150+ page cases to problem solve factual/legal issues in intercollegiate tournaments

### ACQUIRED SKILLS

- **Spanish**
- **Java**
- **Splunk**
- **SQL**
- **Tableau**