

The Landscape of Far-Right Extremism & Terrorism 2021

Dr. Cynthia Miller-Idriss, Professor

American University School of Public Policy & School of Education

Director, Polarization & Extremism Research & Innovation Lab (PERIL)

American University, Washington, DC (USA)

Roadmap

1. Contextualizing global far-right extremist movements
2. Understanding history of U.S. violent far-right extremism & left-wing versus right-wing extremism in the U.S.
3. Comparing European and US approaches to far-right engagement in the military and law enforcement
4. Assessing recent developments & new growth dynamics in the US and evaluating the law enforcement response

Defining & Contextualizing Far Right

2020 Global Terrorism Index definition:

Far-right

Far-right refers to a political ideology which is centred on one or more of the following elements: strident nationalism that is usually racial or exclusivist in some fashion, fascism, racism, anti-Semitism, anti-immigration, chauvinism, nativism, and xenophobia. Far-right groups tend also to be strongly authoritarian, but often with populist elements, and have historically been anti-communist, although this characteristic has become less prominent since the end of the Cold War. Groups that are strongly anti-government are not necessarily far-right, although there is a subset of anti-government groups in the US that have been classified as far-right.

Not every group or organisation with any of these characteristics can be considered far-right, and not every far-right group is automatically violent or terroristic. However, terrorist groups with these characteristics and individuals sympathetic to these ideals have been classified as far-right terrorism in the 2020 GTI. In addition to specific terrorist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, the GTI classifies the following ideological groupings from the GTD as far-right:

Anti-feminist extremists	Anti-Muslim extremists	Neo-Fascists
Anti-immigrant extremists	Anti-Semitic extremists	Neo-Nazi extremists
Anti-Islam Extremist	Far-right Extremists	Right-wing extremists
Anti-LGBT extremists	Incel extremists	White nationalists/separatists
Anti-liberal extremists		

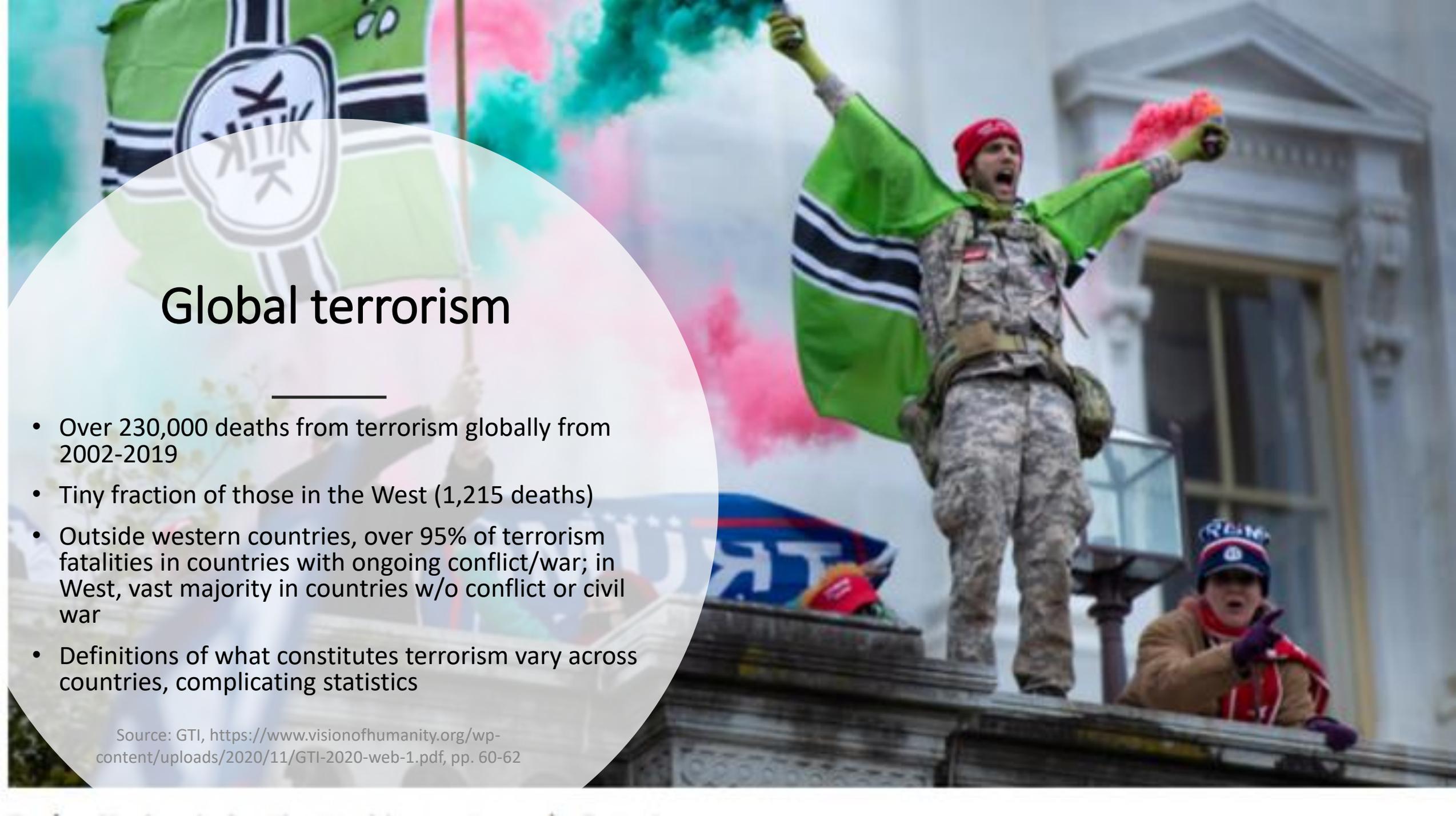
<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf>, p. 63

DEFINITION

- Fragmented spectrum defined by some combination of
 - exclusionary & dehumanizing beliefs
 - antigovernment & antidemocratic practices & ideals
 - existential threats & conspiracy theories
 - violent apocalyptic fantasies

DRIVERS

- Structural & system-level elements: political, economic, health crises and grievances create openings
- Individual vulnerabilities include trauma, disruption & loss, confusion & uncertainty, anger & betrayal, rebellion & status, desire for love/friendship, isolation & lack of belonging, boredom & curiosity
- Sense of precariousness + sense of entitlement



Global terrorism

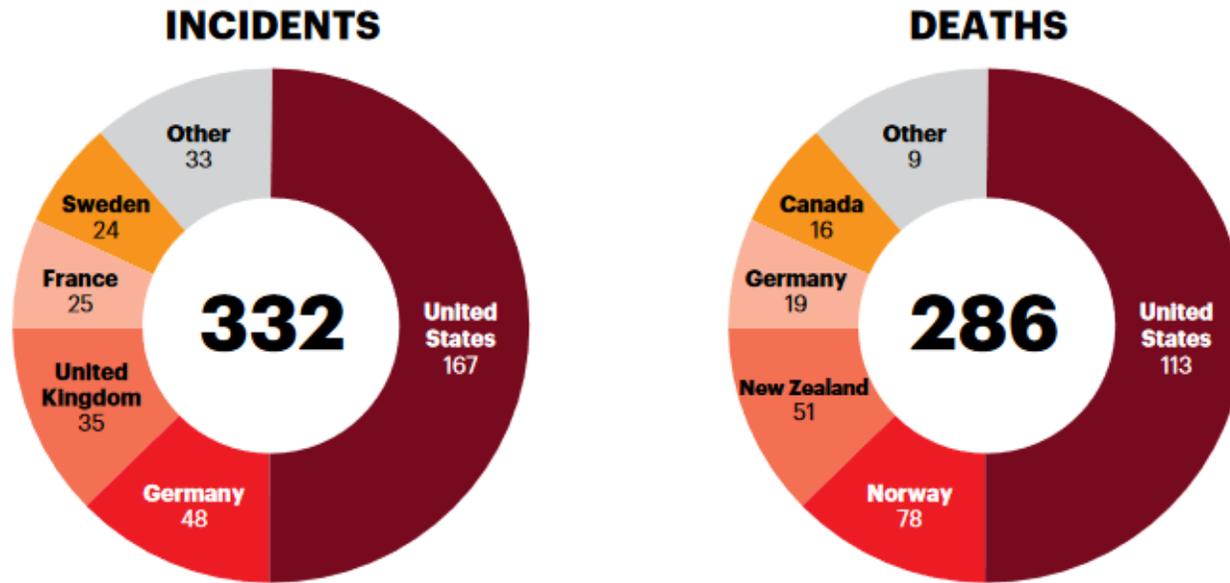
- Over 230,000 deaths from terrorism globally from 2002-2019
- Tiny fraction of those in the West (1,215 deaths)
- Outside western countries, over 95% of terrorism fatalities in countries with ongoing conflict/war; in West, vast majority in countries w/o conflict or civil war
- Definitions of what constitutes terrorism vary across countries, complicating statistics

Source: GTI, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf>, pp. 60-62

FIGURE 4.10

Distribution of far-right incidents and deaths from terrorism by country, 2002–2019

The US has recorded the largest number of far-right incidents and deaths in the West.



Source: START GTD, IEP calculations

The Global Far-Right

- Far-right terrorist incidents increased 250% globally over past five years (GTI, p. 61)
- One recorded FR terrorist attack in 2010; 49 in 2019. By 2019, far-right terror represents 46% of total terror in the West, responsible for 82% of deaths (GTI 2020, p. 63)
- Largest # of FR incidents and deaths in US
- In Oct. 2020, U.S. Department of Homeland Security threat assessment report --WSEs the “most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland”
- Most far-right terror not from groups: of the 52 far-right attacks 2002-2019 that resulted in at least one death globally, only 7 attributed to a specific group (GTI 2020, p. 65)
- Online radicalization through ‘self-radicalizing networks’ dominant mode of radicalization

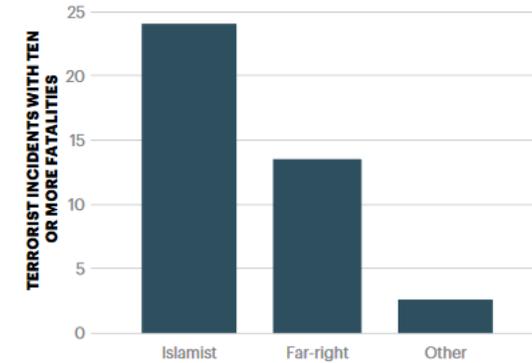
In the broader context

- Until 1980s, most politically-motivated terrorism in West came from left:
 - 93% of attacks & 58% of deaths from 1970-80 from far left (revolutionary Marxist or anarchist terrorists)
- Shift starts in mid-1980s
- Surge in far-left in past five years still the minority of politically-motivated terrorism in West

Source: GTI 2020, p. 63-64

High intensity attacks in the West by ideology, 1970-2019

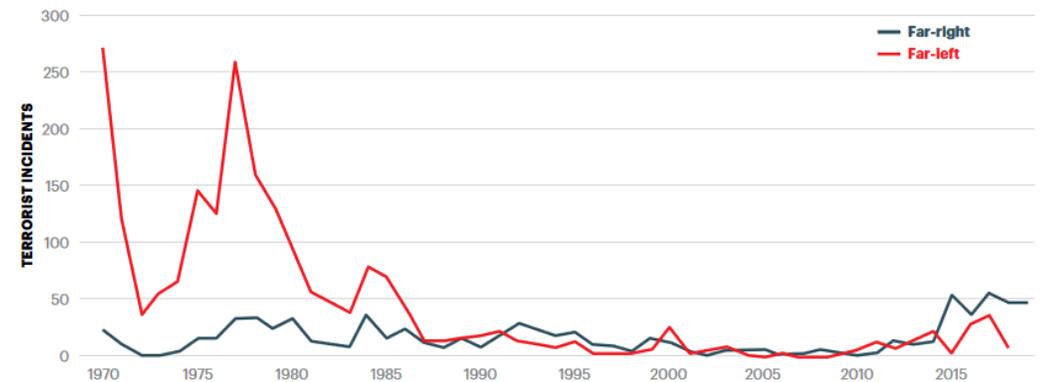
There have been 13 far-right terrorist attacks that killed more than ten people.



Source: START GTD, IEP calculations

Far-right and far-left terrorist incidents in the West, 1970-2019

Terrorism in the West peaked in the 1970s.



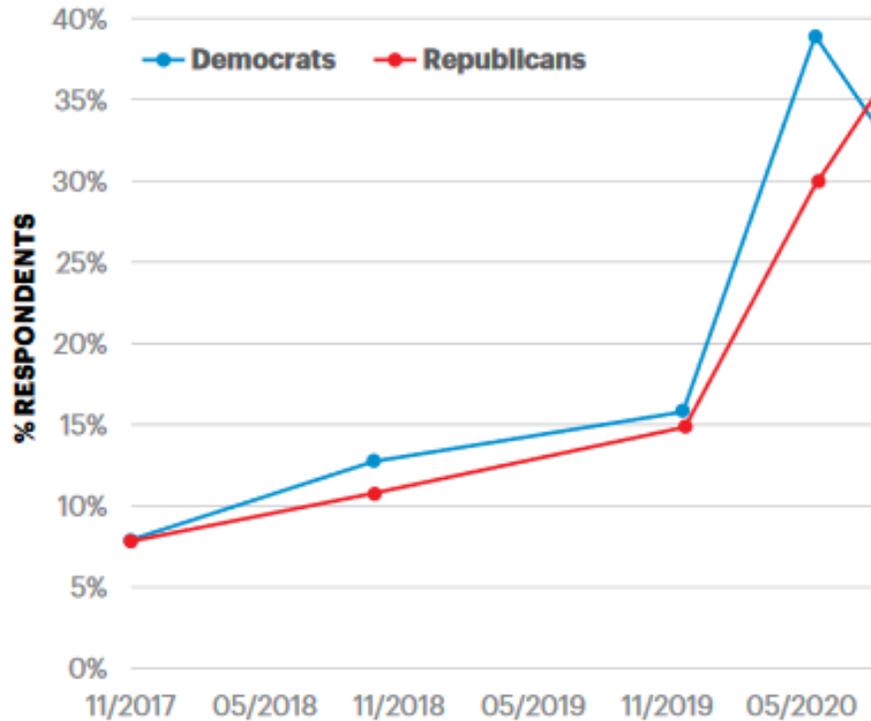
Source: START GTD, IEP calculations

History of U.S. Far Right

FIGURE 4.16

People who feel that violence is justified in advancing political goals, United States, 2017–2020

Both Democrats and Republicans are now much more likely feel that violence for political ends is at least partially justifie



Source: YouGov, Voter Study Group, Nationscape

- Foundation of white supremacism (Native American genocide, slavery)– but ideology of racist ideas emerged mid-1800s
- Ku Klux Klan (KKK), white supremacist vigilante group, founded at end of slavery & surged in two additional waves, 1920s & post Civil Rights
- Modern “white power” movement emerges 1970s-1995
- 9/11 shifts attention but growth resumes after 2008
- Mainstreaming & normalization 2015+ (“alt right”), surges in violence 2017+, policy attention 2019+
- 2020: pandemic conditions, renewed anti-government extremism in three waves
- Sharp increase in support for political violence across the spectrum

Military & Law Enforcement Engagement

- Germany: separate military agency
- Norway: greater trust in law enforcement facilitates mentoring & community-oriented approach
- Repeated scandals in Germany – national investigation 2020
- Repeated calls for data collection & transparency in US (mostly ignored until Jan 6)
- What's next: Pentagon-ordered stand-downs, governor & mayor mandates for military & law enforcement training, some new data collection
- Needed: more data & transparency (bad apples or systematic problem?), more support for Veterans Affairs

When the Far Right Penetrates Law Enforcement

America Can Learn From Germany's Response

By [Cynthia Miller-Idriss](#) December 15, 2020



A far-right militia member and a police officer in Stone Mountain, Georgia, August 2020
Elijah Nouvelage / Reuters

New growth dynamics in US & globally

- Broader context: mainstreaming/normalization of WSE (populist nationalism), global conspiracy theories re. Great Replacement fueling “heroic violence,” weaponization of youth culture
- In 2020: 3 waves of escalating anti-government extremism (some of which intersects with WSE)
- Rapid mobilization of violent militias and citizen vigilantes organized around sense of threat
- Revelations of military & law enforcement engagement in far right (e.g., Germany, US)
- Rapid growth in conspiracy theories (QAnon)- now in dozens of countries
- Growing nihilism, anti-establishment sentiment and accelerationism (across ideological spectrum)
- Persistent anti-vaxx conspiracy & vaccine hesitancy
- Skyrocketing firearms purchases (US): 2020 record-breaking, January 2021 higher than Jan 2020
- Volatile election & post-Jan 6 (US), ongoing COVID infections, ongoing economic precarity
- **End result:** toxic mix/tinderbox for spontaneous & planned mass violence



WHAT DRIVES VIOLENT RADICALISATION?

A Summary of the Academic Literature



Key points

- Radicalisation is a process.
- There is no single driver, factor, or formula.
- Each factor's relative importance differs according to context and individual.
- For more information, check out the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR): www.icsr.info.



Heightened drivers:

- Trauma, disruption & loss
- Confusion & uncertainty
- Anger & betrayal
- Rebellion & status
- Desire for love/friendship
- Isolation & lack of belonging
- Curiosity

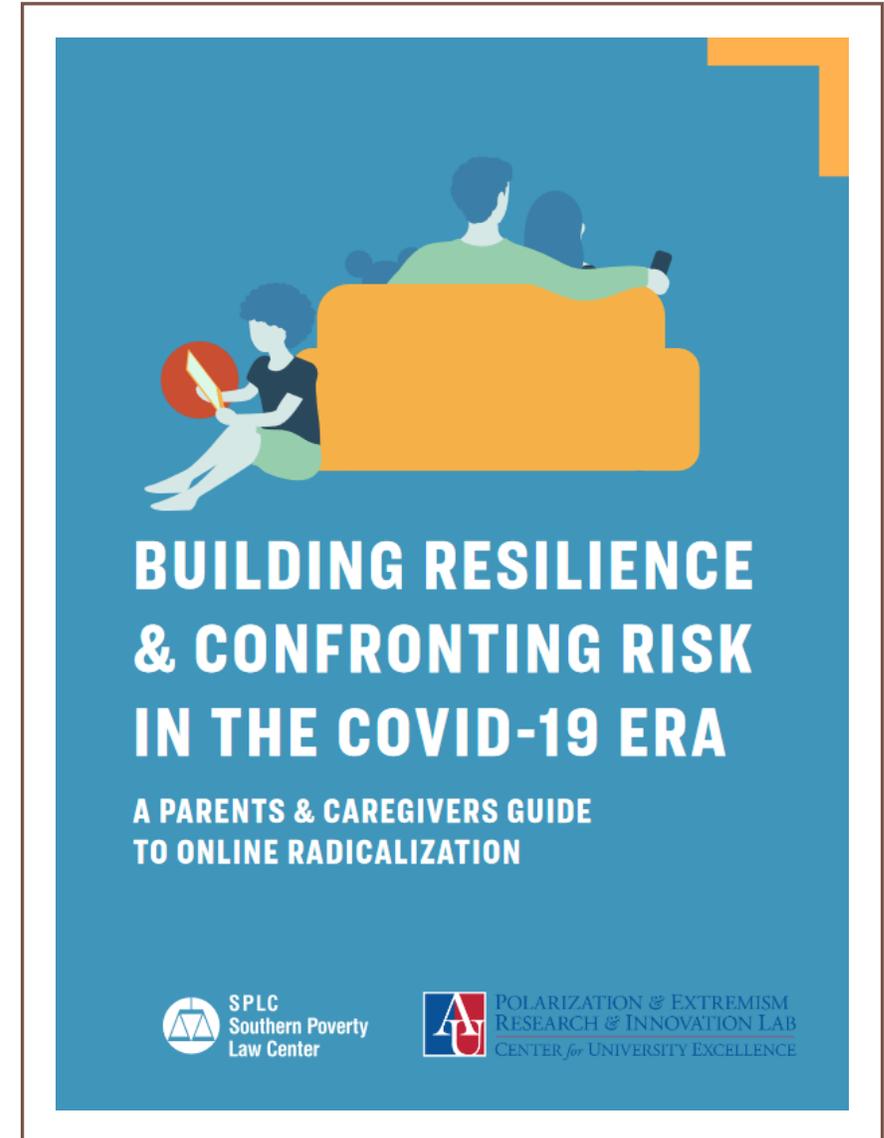
New risks in COVID-19 era



- Unprecedented time online
- Distracted parents/caregivers, reduced support from adults
- Increased likelihood of encounters with bad actors
- Isolation from others who would challenge new beliefs
- Uncertainty & loss
- Extremist mobilization (broadening support base, new content circulating, scapegoating & simplistic answers)
- “Perfect storm”- increased time online meets decreased supervision in a time of uncertainty and upheaval
- Extremist groups thrive by exploiting legitimate fears & grievances and preying on vulnerabilities

Recognizing Warning Signs

- Blaming immigrants for spread of COVID-19
- Stereotyping ethnic or religious groups as super spreaders
- Accusing political opponents or racial/ethnic groups of conspiring to engineer & spread
- Celebrating societal chaos or collapse due to pandemic
- Belief or hope that pandemic will return women to 'proper' place in home
- Extreme anti-government & violent anti-law enforcement sentiments
- Turning to racial stereotypes or race science to explain COVID-19's greater impact in minority communities
- Other conspiracies (5G technology, government-created bioweapon, government oppression, 'Jewish' master plan conspiracy, belief in societal collapse as prophecy)
- www.american.edu/peril or at www.splcenter.org/peril



Implications for threat assessment

- Likely decreased risk of planned mass violence/shootings in near term (due to shelter in place/shutdowns)
- But ongoing risk of violence in the near future through spontaneous mass violence
 - Need: de-escalation, de-legitimation of vigilante violence
- Increased risk of radicalization now means increased risk of violence in the long term (circa 18-24 months– planned mass violence)
 - Need: immediate investments in preventing radicalization; broad education for public, parents, caregivers, teachers to recognize & interrupt, building off-ramps

To read or learn more:

Twitter: @milleridriss

PERIL's website:
www.american.edu/peril

Personal website (with links to op-eds, essays etc):
www.cynthiamilleridriss.com



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