American Revolution in the New Millennium: How Current U.S. Social Conditions Contribute to Domestic Terrorism

by

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Abstract

The United States relative to the rest of the world is still in its infant years. An elementary school level of understanding of history would reveal that while the rest of the world has experienced significant revolution, war, colonization, or other state changing events, the U.S. has existed within a vacuum—remaining relatively safe within its own borders. Its political system, population, and overall health remain strong. Small changes in populations, government, economies, leadership, social conditions, and religions have combined to create a tidal wave of ideology that virtually wipes away the state that existed before it, creating a new landscape. This thesis proposes that in the midst of present U.S. social conditions the likelihood of extremism is strong. The U.S. like any nation has experienced radical change at its birth during the American Revolution, later during the Civil War, and experienced extremist action throughout the 1900s from both the left and the right. The threat of jihadists everywhere isn’t our greatest fear, it’s actually U.S. citizens. The 1900s demonstrated how social inequality, racism, the threat of communism, bipartisan politics, and a committed military overseas create a strong rift in social ideology and serve to polarize society.

Do current U.S. social conditions contribute to a growing domestic extremism threat? Obamacare, the Occupy movement, secularism, a generation of millennials whose social skills are defined by how they conduct themselves on Facebook, a growing Hispanic population—causes our country to become more and more polarized. The social conditions for a terrorist threat to emerge exist now and this research will prove why that threat is already here. This research will explore an analysis on U.S. history to pinpoint similar conditions of today that caused groups on the Left and Right to emerge, eventually declining at the end of the century and transition into an analysis of current conditions and its vulnerabilities that are already being exploited by groups on the left and the right. This thesis will support why policymakers need to pay greater attention to domestic born threats rather than the jihadists that we spend so much time and resources on.
Dedication

To my wife Erika and daughter Felicity for giving me the time and opportunity needed to complete this thesis.
Acknowledgements

Thanks to John Coale, Tamara Mouras and David DuBois for their understanding and flexibility in accomplishing this thesis.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Research Question

At present there exists a great propensity for increased domestic extremist action as a result of current U.S. social conditions. A brief analysis of history indicates that the present state of the U.S. is vulnerable to increased domestic extremist action. Ignoring this development can prove fatal for policymakers and citizens alike. This thesis will prove that the propensity for such a development is strong and that policy makers should focus less on global jihadists and more on our own domestic born threats. Groups like al-Qaeda receive the most attention from our policymakers in terms of manpower, legislation, money, and military resources. As the U.S. enters four more years under the same presidency, it is possible that social conditions will continue to trend in the same direction. A look at current trends, historical conditions related to a rise in extremism, and current conditions will be the focus of research on this issue. From this, what counterterrorism expectations can we have? Are jihadists still the threat or are emergent groups coming to the forefront?

Background

According to Rex Grossman in *On Killing* (1996) he describes the process in which many individuals who commit violence typically in battle have disassociated (polarization) themselves from their enemies as much as possible. For terrorists, they are not targeting fellow citizens of the world, but an enemy--an enemy that through propaganda and increased adherence to extreme ideology has taken on more and more of a less human quality. (Chap 3) Making the enemy less attractive because they are
different from the group, or not sharing the same social norms or cultural practices allows disassociation from the enemy to occur which dehumanizes them and makes them a more attractive target.

While not all movements believe in a god, they will always believe in the devil. (Hoffer, 1951, pg 91) The devil can best be described as an antagonist or the enemy. This “devil” can range from a race, religion, or political organization. In the case of the Narodnaya Volya it was the tsarist regime in Russia. For al-Qaeda its devil is the U.S. or Israel because both represent western civilization and cannot exist in the Muslim caliphate. This “devil” polarizes the group further. The enemy or “devil” does not necessarily need to be religious or anti-religious for that matter, it simply needs to stand in opposition or contradict the group’s ideology.

Any ideology, religious or not, can lead to violence and the greater the polarization the more violent the group. Polarization in the U.S. is a result of social issues and not as much about religious ones. While issues like abortion carry very significant religious overtones, it is by and large a social issue. A domestic threat would differ a great deal from the goals of a group like al-Qaeda in that groups evolving out of the polarizing social conditions of the day would seek to change the U.S. politically, socially, economically, or religiously, whereas al-Qaeda simply wants to destroy it.

Left and right wing groups could involve cultural factors such as prayer, uniforms, or creeds that allow individuals to make membership in the organization a priority and a common theme in their life regardless of the competing interests of work, family, or religion, therefore serving to polarize the group further from their enemy. This dynamic of social issues leading to polarization will be the focus.
Conclusions

Islamic extremists are a religious extremist group to be taken very seriously. However they are severely limited in operational capability because of the lack of support they receive within U.S. borders. Religious tolerance within the U.S. is great. Because of it, a religious group has a difficult time achieving substantial support in terms of mass numbers—they either don’t feel persecuted or their populations are too spread out amongst the competing religions with the U.S. The polarization seen today in the U.S. is a result of social conditions, which has caused a severe divide between the Left and the Right. What was once a political debate is seeing more today in terms of demonstrations, protests, and the resurgence of political groups than in previous decades and the below research will support this.¹

¹ See Table 3 – Party Polarization, 1879-1999
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Islamic Threat

Reliable data concerning attacks and groups operating came from Federal Bureau of Investigation data, some of which was taken from Masters’ *Militant Extremists in the United States.* (2011) The data categorized attacks by terrorist group typology to show historically what attacks have taken place on U.S. soil from Islamic extremism to domestic born threats.

Juergensmeyer’s *In the Mind of God* (2003) is too in depth about religious extremism, but relevant data is available concerning religious groups, specifically those concerning the U.S.

History

To gain a historical perspective three publications were utilized. Mahan and Grisets’ *Terrorism in Perspective* (2004) gives a good description of majority and minority populations existing within a democracy. The psychology and rationale for groups to make the leap to terrorism is inherent to a complete understanding of why social conditions serve as motivators.

David Rapoport’s “The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism” in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy* (2004) demonstrates that terrorism throughout history has come in four waves—Religious, Anti-colonial, New Left and Right Wing. The publication is useful for a complete understanding on left and right wing groups, which is the focus of this thesis. The Religious and Anti-colonial sections are not relevant to this study.
George and Wilcox’s *American Extremists* (1996) identifies the three periods where left and right thrived in the 1900s. Each time was during a milestone event—World War I, World War II, the Red Scare, the Great Depression, the Communist Movement, and the McCarthy Era. This is likely the greatest piece of evidence that during milestone moments in our history, more importantly in our recent history, each event had a direct impact on the extremism of the era and explains why extremism was at a higher rate than during years considered to be more stable.

**Left and Right**

A sufficient understanding of the left and right was needed to identify if social conditions of today were relevant and how they might impact such groups if at all. Rapoport’s *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy* (2004), Crenshaw’s *Terrorism in Context* (1995), Hoffman’s *Inside Terrorism* (2006), Chalk, Hoffman, Reville, and Kasupskis’ *Trends in Terrorism: Threats to the United States and the Future of the Terrorism Risk Insurance Act* (2005), and Mahan and Grisets’ *Terrorism in Perspective* (2008) were all found to have equal degrees of usefulness.

**Political Polarization**

Garner and Palmer’s “Polarization and Issue Consistency Over Time” (2011) describes what leads individuals toward party affiliation which is important because party affiliation is typically paramount in what defines someone on the left or the right. Extremists may go well beyond party lines, but their ideology is somewhat consistent with non extremist party members. Party affiliation can be a slippery slope to identifying with a group and then escalating toward more extreme groups.
Epstein and Graham’s RAND study, *Polarized Politics and Policy Consequences* (2007) identified polarization over time. It greatest contribution was in demonstrating that polarization was at its greatest during the Civil War and again in 1999.

**Unemployment**

Hudson’s “The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?” (1999) and Hightower’s “Declining Social Conditions of Students and Youth in the U.S.” (2008) contributed to information on motivators and indicators of social classes. Group involvement was necessary throughout the course of this research to demonstrate why a particular social condition may manifest itself into an extremist action. Hightower’s “Declining Social Conditions of Students and Youth in the U.S.” (2008) focused on the susceptibility of youth and Epstein and Graham’s RAND study, *Polarized Politics and Policy Consequences* (2007) explained the role of education in political awareness.

For veteran rates, which was thought to be relevant due to a large retuning veteran population at present, Kleykamp’s *Employment, Earnings and Enrollment Among Post 9/11 Veterans*. (2012) was utilized.

**Population Growth**

Chapter 3

Methodology

Global Jihadists

At face value, the biggest threat to the U.S. is Islamic extremism. While other religious groups represent domestic threats to the U.S. such as the Christian Right and Jewish extremists, American jihadists appear to be the most destructive of all groups and are motivated to an unparalleled degree. The question is—how likely is an attack from an Islamic extremist going to happen on U.S. soil? Initial research focusing on a quantitative methodology will identify this threat and recognize those relevant to the U.S.

Historical Data

Once threats are identified, an analysis of history will be conducted to determine trends in the U.S. during times of similar social disorder. This qualitative methodology focusing on historical evidence will then be compared to recent terrorism statistics and current social conditions to determine a correlation.

Relevancy

Although we can speculate about threats, acts in recent history are the most telling about what our biggest threats are. History is also relevant in that it tends to repeat itself and can demonstrate a pattern of cause and effect from event to action taken by extremists. Lastly, the current environment will be evaluated to determine if the environment is conducive to extremist action.

The elements of this research will yield an acceptance of the hypothesis, that today’s social climate has an increased propensity for extremist action.
It should be noted that research is limited in that; history is not exactly as it is today. Globalization and technology contribute to terrorism both positively and negatively and are not what they were even as recent as a decade ago.
Chapter 4
Discussion

Observations

Islamic Extremism

The U.S. Muslim population is .6% (CIA Factbook, 2011) and is likely to double over the next two decades (Pew Research, 2011). Despite this growth, the FBI reports roughly two-thirds of terrorism in the U.S. was conducted by non-Islamic extremists from 1980-2001. From 2002 to 2005, 95% of terrorism in the U.S was conducted by non-Islamic American extremists. (Masters, 2011)

Religious Extremism

In 1980 there was only one religious group on the U.S State Department’s list of terrorist organizations, yet twenty years later, half the list was classified as a religious group. (Juergensmeyer, 2003, p. 6)

U.S. History

David Rapoport has argued that terrorism has come in four waves throughout history. Each wave has influenced the type of terrorism existing in the U.S. today. The four waves are the religious, anti-colonial, new left, and right wing waves of terrorism. (Rapoport, 2004, p. 47)

There are three periods when left and right wing groups thrived in the U.S. World War I through the 1920s brought about the Red Scare and even included extremism from the U.S. government. The Great Depression of the 1930s through World War II marked the second period which was highlighted by the communist movement in the U.S. Out of
this came American Nazis, fascists, and ultra-conservatives. The third period was the 1950s marked by the McCarthy era. (George & Wilcox, 1996, p. 23)

Below is a table documenting domestic incidents of terrorism in the U.S. from 1980 to 2005, indicating a period of decreased activity following the turbulent 70s.

Table 1 - Domestic Terrorist Incidents and Preventions
United States, 1980-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Terrorist Incidents</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(FBI, 2007)

The Left

From January 1969 through April 1970 there were 8,200 bombings, attempted bombings, and bomb threats resulting from student movements. (Reports of President’s
Commission on Campus Unrest) As the 70s went on, groups with anti-colonial, new left, and religious motivations attacked the U.S. Puerto Rican separatist groups such as Fuerzas Aramadas de Liberacion Nacional were responsible for 40 attacks in New York City alone, the Jewish Defense League conducted 27 attacks on those they saw as anti-Semitic, and domestic terrorist groups such as the Weathermen blew up a bomb in Washington D.C. as a way to protest the U.S. invasion of Laos. (START, 2010)

**Present Threat Assessment**

The FBI has classified terrorism originating within U.S. borders into four groups: eco-terrorists and animal rights extremists, sovereign citizen movements, anarchist extremism and militia extremism. (FBI, 2009)

Eco-terrorists and animal rights extremists seek to protect the environment and animals. An example of these groups is the Earth Liberation Front (ELF).

Sovereign citizen movements are movements in which U.S. citizens have declared themselves to be separate of the U.S. The laws and Constitution do not apply to them as they do everyone else. They govern themselves and are not bound by government regulation, taxes, or any law enforcement authority represented by the U.S. An example of sovereign citizens is the Militia of Montana.

Anarchist extremism involves the belief that there should be no government, laws, police, or authority. Their political philosophy is centralized around the idea that there should be no state and that the existence of a state is harmful to liberty. They can be considered radical left wing groups.

Lastly, militia extremists are right wing groups with an anti-government ideology, most of which disappeared by 1996. (Mahan & Griset, 2008, p. 187) “Marching” militias or “up-front” militias are actively violent and seek revolution as seen in the Christian
Patriot movement. These types are estimated to have 10,000 followers. (Hoffman, 2006, p. 104) In the mid 90s there were at least an estimated 800 militias in the U.S. with 100,000 followers. (Hoffman, 2006, p. 104)

Table 2 – Patriot Group Population, 1995-2000

(United States Action from Southern Poverty Law Center.)

Public opinion about the forfeiture of civil rights for the purpose of terrorism has decreased since 9/11. It reached a low point at 27% being for it in 2009 and stayed at 40% in 2011, which is still down from 55% following 9/11. (Pew Research, 2011; United States Action, 2010)

**Polarization and Bipartisan Politics**

Polarization was strong during several times in the U.S. The Civil War is the most prominent time our country was polarized. The table below shows a peak in the
distance between parties and again in 1999. The figure represents ideologies in both the House and Senate. Political polarization is typically defined on a scale of -1 to +1. -1 being most liberal and +1 being most conservative and can be gauged based on voting history on legislation. The below graph depicts the distance between parties using the -1 to +1 scale, with 0 being a unified House or Senate and 1 being completely polarized.

Table 3 – Party Polarization, 1879-1999

(Epstein & Graham, 2007, p. 3)

The 1960s brought several issues that divided parties such as segregation. In the 70s, polarized presidential candidates, and issues like abortion led to polarization. By the 80s and 90s polarization accelerated. The table below covering the last 50 years, indicates
how party unity reached its highest in 2008. Parties were aligned on issues at a rate of 90%, demonstrating little dissent within Congress.

Table 4 - Party Unity Scores by Congress, 1960-2008

(Garner, 2011, p. 227)

In addition to polarization amongst parties, demographics have shifted. Whites, the South, and upper-class families have associated themselves with Republicans while urban areas and minorities have associated with Democrats. (Garner, 2011, pp. 230-231)

The table below demonstrates the lack of overlap on issues in Congress from 1961 to 1962 and again from 1999 to 2000. In Congress, roll-call votes measure ideological distance. For the purpose of polarization -1 is defined as most liberal and +1 as most conservative. A member has a value based on their voting history. If they vote on the liberal side of an issue, every single time they would be assigned a -1. (Epstein &
This research was significant because it demonstrated the polarization separating the Left from the Right.

Table 5 - Polarization in Congress from the 1960s to 2000

**87th House of Representatives (1961–1962)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
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</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Epstein & Graham, 2007)
Employment and Education

A Washington Post survey discovered that 80% of wage workers experience challenges affording gasoline or saving for retirement with 40% having no retirement at all, 50% struggle to afford food, and 30% lacked health care.

Studies have shown that education plays a major role in political awareness. Educated individuals are more likely to be politically aware than less educated individuals. (Epstein & Graham, 2007, p. 11)

The unemployment rate average from 2005-2010 was 8.1%. Veteran rates were as high as 9.3% during that same period. These unemployed veterans have a higher likelihood of going to college due to legislature such as the Post 9/11 GI Bill that assists them with the costs of college. Veteran males are 9% more likely to go to college and females are 12% more likely compared to their civilian peers. (Kleykamp, 2012, p. 18)

This creates a massive population of overeducated, unemployed veterans. In 2011 this population was at 12% based on post 9/11 veterans (Kleykamp, 2012, p. 2). 12% of veterans had no jobs. More importantly, 30% of those 18 to 24 years olds were unemployed. According to Tanielian and Jaycox, as many as 20% of Iraq war veterans have developed some form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Kleykamp, 2012, p. 9). This exacerbates the already existing problem of unemployment and over-education. Large population increases in the a demographic that can contribute to the work force, with an education that years ago would have secured them a job creates a vulnerable group for left and right wing extremists to exploit. This is then compounded by the stigma of PTSD, which also affects employment.
Rice proved that countries with low income per capita are at a greater risk for conflict within their own borders. (Rice, 2006, p. 5)
Rice also found that it is possible that conditions including a youth bulge, high unemployment, and high levels of education cause an increase in the likelihood of conflict. (Rice, 2006, p. 11)

**Immigration**

The diversity of the U.S. will continue to grow. According to a CNN (2008) estimate, by 2042 the current minority population will trump that of the white population. Additionally, according to the Pew Research Center, 78% of Americans favor stronger enforcement of immigration laws and border security. (Pew, 2011)

**Discussion**

**Islamic Extremism**

This evidence indicates that despite the growth of the Muslim movement in the U.S., the majority of attacks on U.S. soil are still from non-Islamic groups. However, while Islamic extremism might not be the threat we think it is, religiously motivated groups in general have still become increasingly popular.

While the Muslim religion can exist in the U.S., the idea of a jihad has difficulty thriving. For other religions, as much as religious doctrine such as the Koran inspires people, something like the Bible or other applicable doctrine can be just as much of an instigator. The more secular our nation becomes, the further we get from religion. Small changes such as taking God out of the Pledge of Allegiance or the teachings of Darwinism in public schools, will serve as motivation for extremists, along with other changes that are a part of other groups ideology. These reforms will present an attack on groups like the Aryan Nations or Christian Identity and force them to defend themselves.
Despite the increase in religious terrorist organizations within the U.S., popular support is difficult to achieve. Their cause is suppressed by the many existing and often competing conservative religions that also thrive in the U.S.

Like American jihadists, all religious groups within the U.S. are playing third fiddle to right and left wing extremists. These groups target specific issues within the population and not the country as a whole; therefore they have the ability to gain a following on U.S. soil.

**U.S. History**

From Rapoport (2004) four waves defining U.S. terrorism are identified. This study will focus on the left and right wing waves which became clearly defined in the twentieth century. Table 8 shows the almost 50/50 split in March 2009.

**Table 8 – U.S. Liberal versus Conservative Populations, March 2009**
Throughout history, the U.S. has been met with dynamic milestones that created environments where extremism thrived. Exploration of this period offered evidence as to what threats could emerge in the twenty-first century. The underlying theme being that the U.S. as a democracy invites feelings of resentment and frustration from minority parties. “Democracies often produce groups that feel marginalized and are willing to attack those deemed responsible for their condition. Majority rule works well only when minorities consider themselves part of the political body” (Mahan & Griset, 2008, p. 188 from Rapoport, 2000) Violence as a means of political change from those considering themselves to be minorities has been seen throughout U.S. history.

Left

The New Left wave thrived in the middle of the 20th century. When conventional groups such as political or military organizations proved to be unsuccessful, unconventional groups began to evolve. This strategy became popular amongst third world populations who did not approve of the existing political system in their country, such as the Viet Cong. (Rapoport, 2004, pp. 56-60) Plane hijackings and hostage situations became prevalent during this period along with the rebirth of assassinations. In the 1960s and into the early 70s the U.S. saw student movements on campuses define the New Left era where radical thought, anti-war, and civil rights were the topics of the day.

By the 1980s support of these groups and their cause began deteriorating due to many followers of the leftist movement eventually turning toward underground and increasingly violent groups when their peaceful demonstrations went unheard by political leaders. This push to go underground caused more peaceful demonstrators to join solely for the logistics a clandestine group can enjoy and their ability to avoid arrest. (Crenshaw,
1995, p. 118) These underground groups were not as successful as their more open predecessors.

**Right**

Right wing extremism trickled out in the 1960s and 70s when the left wing cause grew and experienced a rebirth around 1981 when economic conditions caused working class whites to reenergize the cause. An additional milestone that gave rebirth to the right wing movement was the passing of the Brady Bill—a significant piece of legislation on gun control. (Mahan & Griset, 2008, p. 195)

Right wing generally refers to a group that supports less government interference. Right wing extremism in the 1900s is likely predated by the KKK in the late 1800s. The KKK resisted Reconstruction efforts by targeting blacks, whom they attributed the social and political disorder of the time. Similar targeting developed throughout history. This was seen in the anti-Chinese movement in the nineteenth century, and with the massive influx of immigrants from Europe in the twentieth century.

Following World War I, right wing ideology expanded to include anti-communist ideals. Soon after racial segregation and the anti-immigration and sedition laws became the social issues of the day. In the 1960s there was a reemergence of the KKK which now included anti-immigration and anti-Semitism in their cause. The Red Scare in the 40s and 50s became a popular right wing cause.

At the onset of the 1970s secularism became the push that shifted right wing ideology toward evangelical Christianity. This included the ending of prayer in school and abortion rights. Right wing ideology eventually included apocalyptic and millennial ideology and finally a survivalist mentality in the 70s and 80s.
What’s always been paramount regardless of the social issues of the day was limited federal government. Right wing groups believe the Constitution gives federal government the authority to regulate interstate commerce and immigration, fix standards of weights and measures, coin money, pay debt, and raise and employ military forces. It also provides specific guidance that prohibits anything else unless it is covered specifically by the Constitution’s 10th Amendment. Right wing groups focus on this part of the Constitution and it’s why they find things like income tax, federal enforcement of civil rights laws, abandonment of the gold standard, and social programs like welfare to be unconstitutional.

Present Threat Assessment

As the government becomes more intrusive in people’s lives, right wing extremists will become more provoked. The war on terrorism has given birth to legislature such as the PATRIOT Act that has received heavy debate from both parties.

Of all four groups identified by the FBI, militias present the greatest organized threat. The militia movement being referred to is typically an extremist right wing group devoted to racial cleansing, religious dominance, and the defeat of secular government. Militias can come in any form whether Left or Right, but for FBI classifications it is referring to the right. Their belief in the Second Amendment, specifically gun ownership, encourages the majority of their following, but is then taken to an extreme level. These groups are commonly based on apocalyptic ideation and conspiracy theories such as the belief the United Nations (UN) is plotting to create a single “New World Order” government. They also believe that minority groups throughout the U.S. will be a catalyst in the accomplishment of these objectives. An example of common militia theology can be seen in the case of The Michigan Militia who “believes that the U.S.
government has already initiated a program to control completely the life of every American.” (Hoffman, 2006, p. 103)

Militias are transitioning to Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) tactics. In 1995 authorities uncovered a plan that the Minnesota Patriots Council intended to release ricin into the population specifically including U.S. Marshalls, Internal Revenue Service (IRS) agents, and local sheriffs. In a separate case, a man connected to the Aryan Nations ordered bubonic plague. (Hoffman, 2006, p. 107)

The propensity for an attack from groups like ELF or from lone wolves like Eric Rudolph or Theodore Kazynski, the Unabomber, are greater than the left or the right because they represent the majority of attacks in the U.S that are actually carried out. It has been more common for terrorists to commit eco-terrorism or come in the form of “lone wolves.” This thesis focused on the groups likely to incite the greatest amount of destruction to U.S. national security which is not a lone wolf, and are not eco-terrorists, they are left and right wing extremists.

Polarization and Bipartisan Politics

The United States is more polarized on the left and the right than ever before. This is due to several factors including the presence of bipartisan politics, political ignorance, and a lack of issues that create overlap between parties.

Being conservative or liberal has caused Americans to associate with political parties more than in the past. Being conservative has now been immediately associated with being Republican and liberal being associated with the Democratic Party. “Citizens today base their policy preferences more closely upon their group interests, core values, and party identifications than they did several decades ago.” (Garner, 2010, p. 226) This has caused group dynamics leading to several issues.
While decades throughout the 20th century saw strong polarization, significant overlap still occurred, meaning parties still found common ground on many issues. (Garner, 2010, p. 226) At present, this is rarely occurring and is largely due to distancing over issues by party identifiers. The dynamic today, known as “clustering,” implies that citizens have issue preferences that are both farther from those in the opposing camp and also more homogeneous within their own camp. This distinction between issue distance and within-group variance helps explain much of the scholarly disagreement regarding mass polarization. (Garner, 2010, p. 228)

Because of clustering, Americans identify with political parties based on recognition of only a few issues. Parties stand on either side of the issue, and suddenly the issue position and the party become one and the same. Once an association is made with a party a “mass opinion” is developed, similar to the theory of groupthink. Over time Americans will negotiate their position on issues rather than their affiliation with a party to maintain group solidarity. (Garner, 2010, p. 229) These individuals have removed the same freedom of thought that cults and extremist organizations work diligently to suppress. The conflict of all this is that while Americans today appear to “know” exactly where they stand on issues, there is no middle ground that fosters open debate and citizens are less likely to think for themselves. (Garner, 2010, p. 243)

Political ignorance has created a population of people not cognizant about the many political issues impacting the U.S. Because of this, this population will “passively receive whatever information comes to them as a ‘by-product’ of daily activities at work and during their daily lives.” (Garner, 2010, p. 230). Following the affiliations of family members, friends, or other like-minded citizens removes the burden of navigating the political word themselves. (Garner, 2010, p. 230) Reading the newspaper, watching the news, following the economy, educating oneself on foundations of our political system is
the politically responsible thing to do, but it can also cost money, take up time, or be uninteresting for many.

The lack of overlap in government creates legislative gridlock. Since passing legislation is unachievable, things like extremism or terrorism might be the only answer for some individuals or groups seeking a change. The rise of new interest groups in the political world has contributed to polarization. Activist and extremists influence the population and therefore can control elections and selections of political representatives. The Occupy Movement is a strong example of this.

The people who participate are for the most part those who care intensely about some issue, and this promotes polarization because the people who care deeply also tend to have extreme views on the issues they care deeply about. (Epstein & Graham, 2007, p. 13)

**Employment and Education**

Socially, terrorists were believed to have come from populations with low self-esteem such as minority groups, the poor, the uneducated, and the politically oppressed. (Hudson, 1999, p. 26) Hudson argues that many individuals often come from middle class and even upper class families. Many are even educated “and capable of sophisticated, albeit highly biased, political analysis.” (Hudson, 1999, p. 64)

The dismal economy has presented a significant challenge in that it contributes to specific psychological traits often found in minority groups, but now exists within a majority context. At present the over educated and under employed of this country threaten a social dynamic at the brink of extremist action.

The collapse of the financial market, while not a complete collapse, is still one of the worst in U.S. history and has created a large population of unemployed young people.
Even those employed, have limited prospects and smaller wages than the generation before them.

Those without a secondary education have an even harder time. College educated individuals needing work, accept positions in what was normally filled by non-college educated individuals. Causing non-college educated individuals to go unemployed.

What irritates the lower and middle class population most is that they lack basic needs for survival and what can be considered an average quality of life in America yet corporate and political elites, both Democrat and Republican continue to thrive, often at the majority populations expense. “The working class is told that it must tighten its belt, while those who caused the economic crisis snatch up an even larger share of social wealth.” (Hightower, 2008)

The harsh economic times and financial crisis most Americans are experiencing is compounded by overeducation. Overeducation has led to more debt, and a more politically aware young population. Individuals who lack political awareness will likely associate with a party that represents only a few of their interests. For example, Democrats who are strong advocates of issues like welfare will likely be the party that welfare recipients associate with.

These struggling individuals can best be described by Hoffer as “frustrated.” Based on the theory of aggression, “when expectation outstrips achievement…frustration is generated. This collective frustration turns to anger and hence, to violence.” (Gupta, 2005, p. 6) Mentally defeated individuals, those considered frustrated have an increased propensity to perpetrate an act of violence. These individuals have experienced what they perceive as failure and will seek relief through an aggressive act to rid of their pain
or anguish. At the same time they will focus their aggressions on removing the initial cause of their frustration. If a white man loses his job and is replaced by a Hispanic man, his target may be on the Hispanic population. This dynamic of frustration leading to aggressive behavior is known as the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis.

“All movements, however different in doctrine and aspiration, draw their early adherents from the same types of humanity; they all appeal to the same types of mind” (Hoffer, 1951, p. xi)—the frustrated. Hoffer argues that this frustration combined with how mass movements exploit this frustration through “an effective technique of conversion” develop and maintain its following (Hoffer, 1951, p. xii)

Another common psychological trait is an individual’s ability to accept themselves as a “bad guy”. Embracing the identity of what is known to be considered a negative identity by an individual is known as the Negative-Identity Hypothesis. (Hudson, 1999, p. 20) To elaborate, some individuals who have failed at something may suddenly embrace the contradiction of whatever their goal or desire to be was negotiate in their mind that they in fact did not fail. The Occupy Movement is a good example of this. Because they are jobless, often penniless people with a significant amount of debt from student loans they are unable to rationalize their situation as failure. Instead capitalism is to blame, and they are the opposition to it. For example Ted Kazynski, the Unabomber, had a challenging time fitting in with mainstream society, his response rather than attempting to adjust and thrive in mainstream society was to become a recluse and fully embrace the contradiction of being a well liked popular guy. Once you have embraced this side, you can then target what was considered desirable as the enemy, and therefore they have rationalized in their mind that they have not failed at all and are
actually a “good guy”. It is a great deal of rage and helplessness that contribute to this hypothesis. (Hudson, 1999, p. 20) This lack of accountability is also known as a damaged self-concept in which people blame outside influencers for their shortcomings.

In the case of the educated, another hypothesis includes the strong desire for an individual to utilize skills they possess such as engineering, survivalist skills or bomb-making. A biomedical engineer recently graduated, working at Blockbuster Video and living in their parent’s basement may feel relevant, desirable, and part of a team or family if they can put their skills to use even in the realm of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs).

Universities have become recruiting grounds for idealist, open-minded individuals threatened by their inevitable graduation and bleak job prospects to follow. Universities are liberal atmospheres where young and impressionable minds have an environment in which to express themselves, make decisions regardless of consequence, or life choices not normally made in a more conservative environment. Students who join groups on a campus may feel compelled toward mobilization. They could be in a support group for prisoners, or an “Occupy” protest before taking on an extremist ideology.

These individuals are easily stimulated by the idea that revolution, extremist action, or terrorism can change their current conditions. Hoffer argues that in all of us is a “tendency to locate the shaping forces of our existence outside ourselves.” (Hoffer. 1951, p. 6) Ultimately, they rationalize that the revolution, extremist action, or terrorism they become a part of will change those “shaping conditions”.

As discussed, frustrated individuals seek change, but not for individual gain or personal interest, but if only to remain relevant as a population. Followers in a mass
movement are not as much worried about things like wealth or power, but are more concerned with simply having a voice at the table. The mass movement gives hope to these individuals (Hoffer, 1951, p. 15) that change is achievable. For a mass movement to be effective individuals must feel that the movement has the means to instigate change (Hoffer, 1951, p. 3), this can be through membership, leadership, or influence. The Occupy Movement, although not extreme, is a group that provides the means to mobilize and offers a shared ideology. Through leadership and behavior modification, extremist action can and has occurred in order to instigate change.

Economic conditions are compounded by an influx of military veterans and high education rates. Individuals experiencing dissatisfaction with their current conditions are more likely to see terrorism as an acceptable opportunity to change their current condition. In the case of someone who is unemployed, this dissatisfaction is prevalent, with above average unemployment numbers for veterans and an above average rate of unemployment for college graduates. Feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and possibly even mobilization are likely in this group.

From the unemployed 18 to 24 year old civilians and veterans without jobs, there is a pool of individuals who already have the social and psychological factors to see terrorism as a reasonable opportunity to change their conditions.

Young individuals with limited futures such as being unable to go to college due to financial issues or a lack of interest often turn to the military. (Kleykamp, 2012, p. 6) Once in the military these disadvantaged individuals are then thrust into an environment filled with mental and physical risks greater than that of their peers. Based on Tanielian and Jaycox’s statistic of 20% of Iraq war veterans having developed some form of Post-
Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) this makes them even less desirable to civilian society. (Kleykamp, 2012, p. 9)

Unemployment numbers following other wars did not yield the results seen today, except in the case of Vietnam. (Kleykamp, 2012, p. 4) A closer look of history during that time shows increased demonstrations and protest. This problem will only get worse. Significant budget cuts in the Department of Defense has been made across the board affecting manpower numbers in every branch who now have to “tighten the belt”. The largest branch, the U.S. Army, is projecting a loss of around 30,000 over the next couple years that will have to be reintegrated into society. (Kleykamp, 2012, p. 2)

Additionally, studies on unemployment have yielded a relationship between unemployment and suicide terrorism. While unemployment has not had a clear effect on terrorism rates, the quality of terrorism has changed accordingly. Benmelech argues that unemployment has assisted in recruiting more educated, mature, and experienced terrorists (Benmelech, 2010, p. 18) because their outlook in the job market is bleak. When opportunity in terrorism seems to outweigh the opportunities in the market, then terrorism suddenly becomes more appealing. (Benmelech, 2010, p. 2)

Rice’s research that proved that countries with low income per capita are at a greater risk for conflict within their own borders (Rice, 2006, p. 5) is very telling. Throughout history, the world has seen extreme poverty followed by civil war and academics debated this for some time. Although the U.S. per capita GDP is high, the harsh economic times create a sense of relative deprivation. Civil war or conflict may be more likely in poor countries than wealthy ones. But what if wealth was an expectation
and the lower class in the U.S. felt like they were poor? Americans are so used to having so much, they may perceive their situation to be as dire as an average citizen in Somalia.

**Immigration**

Population growth is a global pandemic; however in the U.S. it is a result of immigration unlike other countries, whose growth is a result of higher fertility rates and lower mortality rates due to advances in medicine. In the U.S., two-thirds of the population growth is a result of immigration. When immigration occurs, employers typically gain money by employing a cheaper workforce and those who use immigrant produced products. Those competing with immigrants in the market do not benefit. Over the past few decades immigration has been a consistent topic in Congress, resulting in many acts of legislation and an influx of minority population growth in the U.S. One debate is, do immigrants consume more services like welfare, subsidized housing, tax cuts, and scholarships than they contribute? (RAND, 2000, Global Shifts in Population)

Some who are leaning more toward conservatism now, after having some type of life experience such as losing their job to an illegal alien may find themselves pulled into extreme KKK ideology and slowly evolve in their way of thinking over time. This will also push liberals further left leaving a large gap with two extreme groups.

Groups like the KKK and other right wing hate groups will not differentiate between legal and illegal immigrants. (Avila, 2007) An individual who is strongly opposed to illegal immigration and conservative in their views may find themselves caught in the cross fire between groups like the KKK and a Hispanic majority nation. Many will be left with the question—which side do I choose? The government needs to be sure that those individuals who may not believe in the KKK ideology don’t turn to it because they see it as the lesser of two evils.
The Pew Research proposes that 78% of Americans favor stronger enforcement of immigration. This is a large population to recruit from for extremists looking to exploit those disenfranchised by immigration.

As immigration numbers grow, polarization does too. (Epstein & Graham, 2007, p. 11) Immigration has contributed to more than just politics. It has had major impacts on the economy and social conditions only furthering the political divide. The republican and democratic parties now associate with specific policies concerning immigration, and economic and fiscal policies. Immigrants, who are non-citizens, cannot vote, but their political impact is still severe. Those with lower incomes commonly associate with Democrats. A lower income family is more likely to be an immigrant than higher income family. Group association in the lower class will cause those who can vote to represent this silent party.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

Findings

1. It is clear that the current U.S. social conditions have created an environment in which extremism can flourish.

2. Global jihadists are always a relevant threat, however the threat of the left and right from domestic groups is far greater because of the greater propensity for increased popular support from American citizens.

3. Polarization within society increases extremism. The conditions of bipartisan politics, poor economic prospects, an overeducated youth population that is unemployed, a large returning veteran population that is unemployed, and immigration rates contributing to population shift create an environment that only reinforces polarization are consistent with acts of extremism throughout history.

Summary of Contributions

1. U.S. resources are allocated incorrectly. Increased attention on domestic threats during a time of social crisis is necessary.

2. Social factors in today’s population have led to increased alignment with political parties and interest groups which serve the ends of terrorist leaders seeking to exploit young educated people seeking change.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Future studies should focus on when similar social conditions existed, how was extremism suppressed.
2. Focus more on other democracies throughout the world that failed due to similar social conditions.

3. Conduct a qualitative study on Occupy movement. Large sample of over-educated underemployed youth with a propensity to demonstrate.

**Recommendations for Solutions**

1. U.S. politics needs to focus on bipartisan politics and find common ground in places like the House and Senate. The U.S. population can only be represented in this way. Party lines need to be less of an issue when determining the direction of the country. This has been seen recently with the January 2012 agreement between Democrats and Republicans for substantial immigration reform overhaul that will offer a path to citizenship for the millions of illegal aliens living and in many cases working in the U.S. A polarized policy of mass deportation on the right or an open border on the left was not achievable and would only polarize society further. A similar approach to other legislative policy should also be practiced to include in the areas of economic policy, foreign policy, veteran’s issues, health care reform, and most importantly a compromise on social issues.
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