



Extremism and Victimhood in the U.S. Context

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Political extremism is not a new phenomenon. From the Know-Nothing Party of the 1850s to the Weather Underground of the 1960s, political extremism has been a present force on both the political right and left. This study looks at four modern day extremist groups, two from the right and two from the left, and examines their use of rhetoric and narrative. A comparison is also made between these groups and the Islamist groups that the Center for Strategic Communication has been studying for the past three years.

The written and visual rhetoric of these groups shows how they create an image of themselves (in a heroic light) and their opponents (in a villainous light). The idea of victimhood is central to the way these groups form their image of themselves and their enemies. They all use victimhood to justify their actions. In the end all of these groups, regardless of their political affiliation, employ the same techniques to sway their audience and more importantly, justify their own actions and beliefs.

Getting someone to reject deeply held beliefs is a near impossible task. The recommendations of this paper instead focus on the contested population, those who have expressed interest in but not yet fully committed to an extremist ideology. Strategic communication should be targeted at those groups to show how peaceful protest can be effective, challenge the extremists' perception of victimhood, and challenge the freedom fighter narrative on which they depend.

INTRODUCTION

On April 19, 1995 a bomb housed in a rented Ryder truck went off in front of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City. The resulting explosion killed 168 people, including 19 children, and injured over 600 more. This was the largest and most successful domestic terrorism event in the United States but it is not a stand alone incident. In 2001, there were letters laced with anthrax sent to members of congress and various media outlets resulting in the deaths of five people. In 2008 Jim David Adkisson went on a shooting rampage in a Knoxville, Tennessee, church because he wanted to “kill liberals.”¹ In 2009, James von Brunn, a Holocaust denier, killed a security guard before he was shot at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.² While these more recent events do not have the notoriety of Oklahoma City, they do show that domestic terrorism is still an ongoing reality.

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Terrorist events do not happen spontaneously. Besides the obvious planning and gathering of materials that is necessary to pull off a violent event such as this, there is a language of terrorism. Much of what the Center for Strategic Communication does is examine the use of extremist rhetoric by foreign extremists. As we are currently engaged in a war, both physical and ideological, with Islamic extremism it makes perfect sense that we devote time and energy to analyzing Islamic extremists’ use of rhetoric and narrative. But it is also worth examining the rhetoric used by domestic extremists. As the United States saw in 1995 there are dangerous and deadly threats that come from within. This paper will look at four examples of domestic extremism, the Army of God and Sovereign Citizens on political right and the Earth Liberation Front and the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty movement on the political left, and compare their use of language to each other and the Islamic extremist model.

A distinction does need to be made between the domestic extremists discussed in this paper and Islamist extremists. It is certainly true that one can be domestic (American) and Islamist and extremist. Nidal Hasan, the U.S. Army Major, accused of murdering thirteen people at Ft. Hood, Texas, certainly fits this bill. Faisal Shahzad, who attempted to set off a car bomb in Times Square would also fall into this category. The difference is that these men were less concerned with domestic issues and chiefly concerned with U.S. policy overseas. They were a part of some larger Islamist agenda and not trying to improve America for some subset of Americans. A study of American Islamists is certainly a worthy endeavor but it is not the focus of this paper.

THE PERCEPTION OF VICTIMHOOD

Standing outside an abortion clinic with a protest sign is acceptable, but standing outside the same clinic with a sniper rifle is not.

Extremism is behavior that exists outside the normal, socially accepted range of behavior. Politically it exists on the far-right and the far-left and not typically within the mainstream political views of most Americans. The problem is where one sits politically will dictate what you see as normal or extreme. One temptation is to say that peaceful protest is mainstream but violent protest is extreme. In other words standing outside an abortion clinic with a protest sign is acceptable, mainstream behavior but standing outside the same clinic with a sniper rifle is not. There are, however, non-violent examples of what one might consider extremist behavior such as the Westboro Baptist Church protests at funerals. The Westboro Baptist Church's actions are seen by many as extreme but are in fact non-violent. They would better be labeled a fringe group rather than an extremist group. The distinction between the two hinges on the use or advocacy of violence. Fringe groups may adhere to an ideology far from the mainstream but if they do not support violence we would not label them "extremist."

For the purposes of this paper extremism will be defined as violent action or words supporting or encouraging violent action in furtherance of some ideological goal. This is not violence for violence's sake, or for other criminal motivation such as greed, but violence intended to force a change in policy.

Extremism in America is not a new phenomenon. One could go back to the origins of the country and discuss those extremists who used violence in order to break free of the British Empire (this is the very embodiment of the axiom "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter"). Another example could be Nat Turner's uprising. In 1831, slave Nat Turner led an uprising that left nearly 60 white people dead and terrorized the community of Southampton, Virginia.

Herein lies the conundrum of extremism: on the one hand fighting for one's freedom, be it from an imperial power or from racial enslavement, is a perfectly understandable thing to do *unless* you are that imperial power or are that slave owner. Then that act of fighting for freedom becomes an act of extremism. The issue is one of perception. Most people would not say Timothy McVeigh is the equivalent of an American revolutionary or an oppressed slave but McVeigh himself would. He perceived himself as the aggrieved party. In his mind he was not a terrorist but the victim of a tyrannical government. Because he perceived himself as the aggrieved party his actions are actions of "self-righteous violence."³

It is this perception of victimhood that is critical. Extremism has victimhood at its core. There is a mindset that the dominant culture is somehow a threat to a particular way of life. To say that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter is nothing new. But why does that individual see himself as a freedom fighter? A freedom fighter is by definition one who struggles against a dominant and oppressive power. They are victims striking back at their oppressors. They are already the underdog. Extremists then take this archetype of the freedom fighter and apply it to themselves. Racial extremist groups are the most obvious example of this. White supremacists perceive a nation that is becoming more and more multicultural. Racial minorities are becoming more successful educationally, economically, politically, etc., and this is seen as a threat to the once dominant white, protestant American. Here the white race is the victim of the minority takeover of the United States. Racial extremists then seek a return to what Brad Whitsel calls a period of "imagined greatness."⁴ There is a desire to return to a period in which the perceived victimized group was once dominant and prospering.

It should be made clear that not all perpetrators of acts of violence against a government are considered violent extremists. Groups engaged in an insurgency seek to overthrow and replace the existing government with a new one. For example, the American Revolutionaries sought to break free of the British Empire and establish a new government. That is revolution not violent extremism. What Timothy McVeigh wanted to achieve and what the groups discussed below are attempting is to do is to change laws and change societal perceptions of specific issues. There is no desire to do away with the U.S. government or the Constitution but there is a desire to interpret it in a specific way and to shape the manner in which laws are written and enforced.

McVeigh witnessed a series of what he thought were injustices perpetrated by the government. It is well documented that McVeigh was upset by the siege of Randy Weaver's home in Ruby Ridge in 1992 and the siege of the Branch Davidian complex in Waco, Texas, the following year.⁵ He felt the government was in the wrong in these cases and he himself identified with the victims, a view that was reinforced by those in his social circle. McVeigh spent time traveling to gun shows across the country and sold copies of *The Turner Diaries*, a white supremacist novel that depicts the violent overthrow of the U.S. government. The perception that Timothy McVeigh had of himself was not that of a terrorist or even an extremist but that of a freedom fighter or revolutionary. This is more than a semantic distinction. A criminal will accept the label of criminal but "a terrorist goes to extraordinary lengths to deny that he is a terrorist."⁶ He redefines himself as something heroic rather than something horrific.

The militia movement hit its apex in the early 1990s and declined after Oklahoma City. The attention the bombing attracted plus the extraordinary carnage of the attack itself led to a decrease in militia activity in the years afterward.⁷ While there was a decrease in militia activity, extremists did not go away. In recent years, especially since the election of Barack Obama, there has been a rise in extremist activity and rhetoric and an increase in the number of militia groups.⁸ There tends to be an increase in these groups during Democratic administrations although the fact that President Obama is an African-American has further agitated these groups.⁹ Again we have groups that perceive themselves to be the aggrieved party and seem prepared to act violently on those grievances.

THE FAR-RIGHT AND THE AGE OF GOVERNMENT PROTEST

We are currently in a period of right-wing extremism (although not exclusively as will be demonstrated later) but there have been periods of left-wing extremism as well. The 1960s had a number of radical leftist groups, the Black Panthers and the Weather Underground being the most notable. The current left-wing extremists will be discussed in the next section while this section will explore some of the extremist examples coming from the American right.

It should be stressed here that we are looking at groups that support or engage in violence. For example, while there have been a few acts of violence associated with the Tea Party Movement as a whole Tea Partiers engage in civil protests.¹⁰ The same could be said for the Occupy Movement on the left. So while one might find the political beliefs of the Tea Party or Occupy Movement extreme, their behavior falls into normal, mainstream acts of protest. That is not the case with the groups discussed below where violence is a critical aspect of the group's identity.

When discussing modern examples of right-wing extremism in the U.S. the Oklahoma City bombing seems to be the go-to example. Oklahoma City was such a large and notable event and seems to embody a good deal of the current thinking on extremism (perceived victimhood, looking back to an idyllic time, etc). Another example, and a bit more appropriate for our purposes here as it is an ongoing action, is that of the anti-abortion activists. Abortion is certainly a divisive issue and there are plenty of reasonable people on both sides. However, there have been a series of attacks on abortion clinics and doctors that exist outside of the normal pro-life context. Eric Rudolph set off a series of bombs in abortion clinics in the late 1990s. Paul Hill executed a doctor and clinic worker outside a clinic in 1994. James Kopp killed Dr. Barnett Slepian, a doctor who performed abortions, in his home in 1998. Clayton Waagner mailed letters to abortion providers with a white powder in them which the letters

claimed were anthrax in 2001 (it was later determined the letters did not contain anthrax). Most recently, Scott Roeder shot George Tiller, a doctor who performed abortions, while he was in church in 2009. What is of interest here is not that these attacks take place, but that there is an active and vocal network of supporters who encourage such actions.

The Army of God maintains a website that has martyrdom pages for Paul Hill, Clayton Waagner, Eric Rudolph and Scott Roeder. In addition to the martyrdom pages the AoG website has what it calls a manual, although manifesto may be a more accurate descriptor. In the manual and throughout the website they frame their struggle as a binary struggle of good versus evil. The AoG and those they support are on the side of God whereas the abortion providers are agents of Satan. Aborted fetuses, of which there are numerous graphic photographs, are “victims of the New Holocaust” and are described as “Holy Innocents.”¹¹

Just as the Crusades are a master narrative of Islam, the Third Reich is a master narrative of Western culture.

The language used in the manual is intended to reinforce the idea that the AoG is on the right side of the issue; God’s side of the issue. The term Holocaust obviously is intended to bring up a very specific cultural reference. The aborting of babies is the equivalent of the mass murder of millions of Jews. There is also the way the phrase frames the perpetrators of abortions. If babies are the equivalent of Holocaust victims, then abortion providers must be the equivalent of Nazis. There are explicit comparisons on the website of George Tiller and Adolf Hitler, for example. Just as the Crusades are a master narrative of Islam, the Third Reich is a master narrative of Western culture.¹² There is a culturally embedded narrative in the West to see Nazis as the ultimate, archetypal villains just as Crusaders are the archetypal villains in the Islamic world. Therefore, if you can link your enemy to Nazis you have succeeded in demonizing your opponent in a way no other comparison or amount of name calling could do.

Beyond the linking of anti-abortion activists to God and abortion providers to Nazis, the AoG also constantly spells America with a k (Amerika).¹³ Again they are trying to link their opponents, in this case the U.S. government, to a culturally accepted American enemy, in this case the Soviet Union or communism in general (America is spelled with a K in German as well so this can also be seen as a continuation of the Third Reich master narrative). The argument is not that the U.S. government is politically communist (although an element of godlessness might be at play here) but that they are an enemy of traditional America and need to be overcome. When people speak on the evils of the Soviet Union, the critique is rarely about the economic system but is more often referencing Soviet authoritarianism. Anti-abortion activists do not see the U.S. as economically communist but do fear a government that they perceive as exhibiting that Soviet-style authoritarianism. Using the master narrative of

the Cold War and the long struggle against communism as something that united Americans, the Army of God wants again to vilify their enemies while at the same time present themselves as the heroic champions.

The rhetoric of the Army of God is careful both in what they say and what they do not say. The AoG does not tell people to go out and shoot people, yet they also state they are not opposed to violence. When asked about non-violence as a means of protest a representative of the AoG stated: “Jesus Christ was never a pacifist except in His role as the Suffering Servant. As for Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., non-violence was only a tactic. King stated publicly on several occasions that they would resolve the ‘conflict’ with non-violence or with violence.”¹⁴ Later in the same interview the representative says: “...don't construe this to mean I recommend executing abortionists. I do not. Although I think it easily justified from Holy Writ.” The Army of God is very careful not to blatantly advocate murder, as there are legal implications for that, yet they make it abundantly clear that violence is often acceptable and even religiously justified. This is a tactic we also see among some Islamists. Abu Bakar Bashir, a Muslim cleric and one of the founders of Jemaah Islamiyah, a Southeast Asian terrorist network, has always been very careful in his statements on violence. He has praised martyrs who die fighting infidels without ever explicitly encouraging martyrdom attacks and has expressed his support for the actions of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Both Bashir and the AoG make it clear they support and approve of specific violent actions without inciting the violence themselves.

The Army of God seems to be the primary conduit for the ideology and philosophy of the extreme anti-abortion groups. One member, Reverend Michael Bray, who served four years in prison for his role in bombing abortion clinics, has attempted to provide religious justification for anti-abortion activities. Bray's book *A Time to Kill: A Study Concerning the Use of Force and Abortion* is considered the “definitive book on the ethical justification for anti-abortion violence.”¹⁵ Again we have an issue of perception. Bray is an ordained minister and has the perceived authority and gravitas that brings with it. He is not sensationalistic but instead tries to make a calm, reasoned argument in favor of violence towards abortion providers.

While the Army of God uses their interpretation of Christian doctrine as the basis and justification for their type of extremist protest, “sovereign citizens” use their interpretation of the Constitution to justify their acts of extremism. Sovereign citizens believe that the common law system of government established by the Founding Fathers was at some point replaced with admiralty law and laws of commerce.¹⁶ In addition, when the U.S. did away with the gold standard it meant that rather than having gold support our currency, U.S. citizens are now used as collateral.

Just as with the anti-abortion activists, sovereign citizens see themselves as the victims. They fear a big government that will infringe on their freedom such as restricting gun sales and increasing gun laws. Richard Mack, a former Arizona sheriff and member of the sovereign group Oath Keepers, was instrumental in a lawsuit that deemed some elements of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act unconstitutional.¹⁷ Sovereigns see the federal government as an instrument of tyranny and they need to resist it.

As with the anti-abortion movement, there are incidents that can be linked to sovereign citizens. Two law enforcement officers were killed by Arthur and Rita Bixby and their son Steven in 2003 in Abbeville, South Carolina, over an issue concerning the expansion of a near by highway.¹⁸ In 2010 Jerry Kane, Jr., and his son Joseph shot and killed two West Memphis, Arkansas, police officers after the two were pulled over during a routine traffic stop. Joseph Stack flew a plane into the Austin, Texas, office of the Internal Revenue Service also in 2010. In March, 2011 three members of the Alaska Peacemakers Militia, a sovereign citizen group, were arrested on weapons charges and plotting to kill federal employees, judges, and law enforcement personnel.¹⁹ All of these individuals were members of sovereign citizen affiliated movements.

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Just as with the anti-abortion activists, there is a large support system for the sovereign citizens. The World Freeman Society supports the common law and says a “freeman is human being living in a common law jurisdiction under God, who has revoked consent to be governed by human laws.”²⁰ They are anti-government, anti-police, and anti-authority. The WFS maintains a blog and produces videos all espousing the sovereign citizen ideology. Both the Army of God and the sovereign citizens see the conflict in binary terms. There is a clear right and a clear wrong, no middle ground or shades of grey. The conflict is not one of simple differing political opinions; there is a side of good, that is righteous and just, and a side of evil, that is sinister and oppressive. It is the duty of the righteous to resist evil.

The biggest proponent of the sovereign citizen movement is the Liberty Radio Network. The LRN is broadcast on a handful of stations but also has podcasts and live streaming via the web available. Their shows deal with the elimination of government, the idea that public schools are promoting propaganda, and abuses of governmental authority. Again we see a framing of oneself not as extremist but in a more heroic light. Who does not support liberty? Or freedom? The sovereign citizens are harkening back to a time of imagined greatness. They see themselves as the aggrieved party under the thumb of a tyrannical government and fighting for freedom.

One of the more controversial examples of sovereign citizen violence is the Tucson shooting which killed six and wounded another fourteen including Arizona Representative Gabrielle Giffords. The shooter, Jared Lee Loughner, has been diagnosed with schizophrenia and was initially considered not fit to stand trial due to issues concerning his mental health and sanity. After a year of being forcibly medicated he was deemed fit to stand trial and subsequently pleaded guilty. It would be easy to explain Loughner's actions as those of a mentally disturbed individual but insanity and being a sovereign citizen are not mutually exclusive states of being. Loughner had a YouTube channel in which he made his views on distrust of government very clear. Additionally he seems to have adopted the views of sovereign citizen David Wynn Miller who argues that by very specific uses of punctuation you can go from an ordinary person, and therefore taxable, to a non-taxable entity in addition to other far-right views.²¹ That Loughner is insane is not in dispute but it is also noteworthy that he held sovereign citizen beliefs and those beliefs helped shape his overall worldview. For the record, Miller has said he agrees with much of Loughner's statements and beliefs but was "appalled" at his actions.^{22 23}

For extremists on the right there is a sense of disenfranchisement. Somehow freedom is being taken away and it is the government that is doing it. Their language suggests that they are heroic freedom fighters and their enemies are tyrannical, dictatorial, or flat out evil. Their beliefs take on almost sacred status. Confronting them with facts that may disprove their beliefs are not likely to have any affect. Sacred beliefs are not based in logic or empirical evidence so appeals of that nature are ineffective.²⁴

THE FAR-LEFT AND THE AGE OF CORPORATE PROTEST

In May, 2001 a bomb went off in the University of Washington's Center for Urban Horticulture causing over a million dollars worth of damage. A few days later the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) released a statement taking responsibility for the bombing.²⁵ The ELF was targeting Toby Bradshaw, a professor who was working on genetically engineered poplar trees for the lumber industry.

While this attack got a good deal of media attention, it was not the first of its kind. In October, 1998 ELF burned down five buildings at a Vail, Colorado, ski resort. In 1999 they burned a logging company's office. Later that year they burned a building at Michigan State University due to their work with genetically modified food and their efforts encouraging "developing countries to abandon their current agricultural practices and to rely on genetically engineered plants and thus corporations like Monsanto."²⁶ ELF burned luxury home developments in Colorado and

New York in 2000. ELF members have vandalized or burned homes, businesses and cars every year from 1998 to at least 2010.

As with the anti-abortion website of the Army of God, we see a strong online presence supporting the mission of the ELF. Earth-liberation-front.org is a website dedicated to promoting the ideology of ELF. Just as the AoG website has photos of aborted fetuses, the ELF website has graphic photos of environmental disasters and dead animals. Just as the AoG has martyrdom pages for those imprisoned for attacking doctors or clinics, the ELF site has martyrdom pages for those who have participated in and been arrested for ELF actions. Just as the AoG condemns doctors who provide abortion services, ELF lists and condemns those who harm the environment, such as BP, and those members of ELF who have been arrested and cut deals with the authorities. These “snitches” and “rats” are vilified on the website. Spending time in prison without betraying the cause is seen as noble act. Just as the AoG do not overtly say to murder doctors yet excuse violence as an acceptable last measure, the ELF state that “direct action” is only to be utilized as a last resort. Non-violent protest “in the time-honored tradition of Mahatma Gandhi” is ideal.²⁷

ELF members see themselves as defenders of the planet. Corporate greed is destroying the environment and needlessly killing animals and only through direct action can they be stopped. Furthermore, as with other extremists, they are the oppressed minority. Will Potter runs the website www.GreenistheNewRed.com which compares the government pursuit of eco-activists to that of the persecution of communists in the 1940s and ‘50s. The argument is that during the Red Scare being a “communist” was a rhetorical way of harming one’s political enemies. If you did not care for someone’s views, you label them a communist. Potter argues that eco-activists are falsely being labeled “terrorists” to effect the same end. This is the Green Scare. Just as during the Red Scare, this has legal ramifications. If someone is arrested for a crime related to ELF activity an additional terrorism charge could be leveled at them. The prime example of this is Daniel McGowan who was convicted of arson for his participation in two fires in Oregon in 2001. McGowan does not dispute his role in the fires. When McGowan was sentenced however, a “terrorism enhancement” was applied.

A terrorism enhancement allows a judge to increase the amount of time a person must serve if it is deemed that person was involved in a crime related to terrorism. On the face of it the terrorism enhancement charge seems fairly straightforward but what Potter and other eco-activists argue is that what McGowan did was qualitatively different than killing people or attempts to kill people. Regardless of where one comes down on the issue of whether eco-related crimes are strictly criminal offenses or acts of

terrorism, it is clear that within the eco-activist community the terrorism label is something they reject.

The label of terrorism and the Green Scare idea that goes with it allow ELF to adopt the role of the oppressed and just as with the politically conservative extremists, the left leaning extremists also adopt the status of victim. Here the government is prosecuting ELF members, albeit at the behest of big corporations, and labeling them terrorists. The oppressors here are the corporations and the government is just the tool which corporations use to oppress. The ELF sees their actions as righteous and good and the corporations are greedy and destructive.

While ELF is concerned with the environment, Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) focuses on animal rights. The movement began after the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) released a video of Huntingdon Life Sciences laboratory employees punching dogs. PETA protested Huntingdon causing Huntingdon to sue PETA. PETA backed off and SHAC was born.²⁸ SHAC has been accused of harassing Huntingdon employees, destruction of property, and threatening violence.²⁹

The left uses the same model as the right as they all adopt the binary worldview.

SHAC follows the same methodology as the other movements. They list “top targets,” companies that do animal testing, and they vilify their opponents as “puppy killers.”³⁰ They post graphic videos of animal abuse as well as videos of successful protests. The SHAC 7, seven members who were accused of, among other things, violating the Animal Enterprise Protection Act, are compared on the website to Martin Luther King, Jr. Again we see members being compared to heroic figures, even martyrs.³¹ Six of the SHAC 7 were convicted of Animal Enterprise Terrorism because their website supported acts of protest against Huntingdon. Due to the label of terrorism, SHAC members adopt the language of Red Scare/Green Scare to show that they are the aggrieved party and they are fighting for the rights of the oppressed, in this case animals.

ANALYSIS

The language used by all four of these groups is very similar, regardless of whether they are fighting for a conservative or liberal cause. The left uses the same model as the right as they all adopt the binary worldview. They all see themselves as some type of freedom fighter engaged in a battle with a bigger, stronger, oppressive force. They all see their worldview as pure and good. They all seek to demonize their opponents by linking them to historical villains such as Nazis and communists, or times of great struggle such as the Red Scare. They all attempt to walk the fine line between promoting acts of violence and justifying them after the fact. In addition to the language they all employ graphic visual imagery to invoke a visceral response among those that view their websites.

This is all very similar to the techniques used by Islamist extremists. Islamist extremists see themselves as the oppressed minority and seek to identify themselves with heroes of the past.³² They vilify their enemies linking them to historical villains of the past such as the crusaders. Their websites contain graphic visual material intended to shock and appall the viewer. The one notable difference between the domestic extremists discussed above and the foreign Islamic extremists are the calls for violence. As foreign extremists are not concerned with American law they do not have to move delicately around the idea of violence.

It is clear that this binary rhetorical model is not necessarily Islamic or Christian, far-right or far-left, but it is extremist. The extremist rhetorical model adopts the narrative of victimhood and freedom fighter while simultaneously seeking to demonize their bigger, more powerful opponent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The above study suggests three general recommendations for strategic communication to curb the influence of domestic extremist groups.

Show how peaceful protest can be effective. When countering extremists it is often done by those with opposite worldviews. In other words pro-choice advocates try to convince anti-abortion extremists that abortion is not a sin. This usually falls on deaf ears, as when a pro-business lobby tries to convince environmental activists they are really not that bad for the environment. But that is a tactic that is almost certainly doomed to failure. It is very difficult to get someone to completely reverse a core belief.

The focus of those trying to counter extremism should really be on contested population.

The goal here is to minimize violence not convert someone's political ideology or beliefs to your own. Therefore it is not necessary to convince someone that bioengineered food is a good thing. It is enough to find examples of when peaceful protests, boycotts, petitions, and so on were successful in getting a corporation to change their policy. The individual can still be an environmentalist, still act out against corporations they see as doing evil, and still be successful but do so without causing harm.

Challenge the perception of victimhood. Studies have shown that the key factor in someone making a decision to leave an extremist group is positive contact with people outside of the group.³³ Other than creating community and outreach groups this is not something that can be readily manufactured. The focus of those trying to counter extremism should really be on contested populations, those who express interest in but have not yet committed to extremist groups. In this case it needs to be demonstrated to those on the fence why the extremists in question are not

victims. This does not mean that one must abandon their principles but that perception of victimhood needs to be debunked.

Challenge the freedom fighter narrative. So much of what the extremists do is based on the idea that they are on the side of the righteous minority. Simply arguing that point is unlikely to be effective. Instead point out the very unrighteous actions taken by extremists. Aborting fetuses is a sin? Well then certainly murdering a man while he is in church must also be a sin. This type of counter argument is not likely to convince extremists to take a less violent stance, but it may be effective in swaying those on the fence. One does not take to violent action over night, it is a process and if the hypocrisy of the extremists can be successfully demonstrated then it could possibly deter someone not yet committed from taking violent action.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁵ See Mark S. Hamm's *Apocalypse in Oklahoma: Waco and Ruby Ridge Revenged* (Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1997).
- ⁶ Bonnie Cordes. When Terrorists Do the Talking: Reflections on Terrorist Literature. *Journal in Strategic Studies* vol. 10, no. 4 (December, 1987).
- ⁷ Anti-Defamation League report "The Militia Movement" http://www.adl.org/learn/ext_us/Militia_M.asp?xpicked=4&item=mm.
- ⁸ Mark Potok, Larry Keller and David Holthouse. "The Second Wave: The Return of the Militias." A Special Report from the Southern Poverty Law Center. Aug, 2009. <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/publications/splc-report-return-of-the-militias>
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- ¹⁰ Michael Cooper. Accusations fly between Parties over threats and vandalism. *New York Times* 3/25/10. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/26/us/politics/26threat.html?_r=1 .
- ¹¹ Army of God Manuel. <http://www.armyofgod.com/AOGsel3.html> .
- ¹² See *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism* by Jeffrey R. Halverson, Steven R. Corman, and H.L. Goodall. (New York, Palgrave Macmillian, 2011).
- ¹³ The use of K has also been linked to the Ku Klux Klan. The KKK often spells America with a K. Furthermore, a number of hip-hop artists will spell America with a K or KKK.
- ¹⁴ Army of God website <http://www.armyofgod.com/AOGsel7.html> .
- ¹⁵ Mark Juergensmeyer *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000) p. 22.
- ¹⁶ Southern Poverty Law Center report "Sovereign Citizens Movement." <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement>.

¹⁷ U.S. Supreme Court Case 95-1478 and 95-1503, Jay Printz, Sherriff/Coroner, Ravalli County, Montana, Petitioner 95-1478 v. United States and Richard Mack, Petitioner 95-1503 v. United States.

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¹⁹ Jill Burke. “After Testimony by FBI agent, prosecution rests in Alaska militia case.” Alaska Dispatch May 30, 2012. <http://www.alaskadispatch.com/article/after-testimony-fbi-agent-prosecution-rests-alaska-militia-case>.

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