

Factors causing homegrown violent extremism



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Research Question and Hypothesis Exercise

Homegrown violent extremism has become an increasingly complex threat in the intelligence community, with continual changes in defining this threat and new, preventive approaches in combatting the threat. The puzzle of defining an individual who becomes self-radicalized by various influences at various points in time and in different situations results in unclear definitions in this field of study. However, for purposes of this research, homegrown violent extremism, as defined on the U. S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) website, states “ homegrown violent extremists are global-jihad-inspired individuals who are based in the U. S., have been radicalized primarily in the U. S., and are not directly collaborating with a foreign terrorist organization”. Homegrown violent extremists, hereinafter called HVEs, are determined to radicalize to violence for multiple reasons and at different paces but tend to follow a radicalization continuum and show signs of mobilization at different points in the continuum. Radicalization is far from a black and white process, but rather a set of processes, and therefore has varying definitions. For the purpose of this research proposal, radicalization will be defined as “ process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs” (Borum 2012, 9).

HVEs are currently the number one terrorism threat to the United States because finding a radicalized individual is like finding a needle in a haystack, and these radicalized individuals often go unnoticed until he or she reaches the resolve phase of the radicalization continuum wherein the individual commits a violent attack. If the HVE threat is the number one counter terrorism priority to the United States, the initial research area and general

question of interest is what is the United States specifically doing to understand and address the evolving and increasingly difficult HVE problem? Expert researchers in this field of study agree that HVEs are very different than the members of Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS) or al-Qaeda in that these ' lone wolf' actors tend to go through a " roughly predictable process of radicalization related to ideology", and the radicalization process could happen very quickly or over the course of years (Klausen et al. 2016, 68). In addition, it is unknown if all HVEs experience radicalization in the same way.

Field research on homegrown violent extremism indicates there are multiple social science approaches to looking at the process of radicalization. Social movement theory is a framework through which radicalization can be viewed in that a social movement provides an identity through a large group of people who display discontent through collective behaviors (Borum 2012, 17). Another framework for viewing radicalization is through social psychology, which views radicalization as a group related phenomenon, states that these group atmospheres cultivate extremist views and thinking which illuminate terrorist behavior, also referred to as " group polarization" (Borum 2012, 20). Lastly, a different paradigm to view radicalization is conversion theory, which depicts radicalization as a very personal, individual process through which an individual will convert their belief system into a radical ideology. Lewis Rambo describes conversion as having seven " stages": context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequence which ultimately come together to enhance the impact on the individual and reinforce their belief system (Borum 2012, 22-23).

The process in which a United States citizen is radicalized includes a multitude of factors, all of which vary depending on the individual's circumstances and ideological attachment. The most important aspect of radicalization is how the threat is countered, which can only be identified through mobilization indicators - that is, the intelligence community will only know about an HVE if they expose themselves to others in their inner circle or display mobilization indicators that may lead to things like dry runs or verbalizing a resolve to commit violence against other people.

I am studying the threat of homegrown violent extremism in the United States because I want to find out the various factors that contribute to the dynamic of radicalization so that readers understand the influence of foreign terrorist organization propaganda on the homegrown violent extremist ultimately immersing the individual into radicalization and mobilization to violence. My tentative research question is " how are homegrown violent extremists in the United States radicalized by foreign terrorist organizations and a need for significance amongst personal grievances, and how might this impact the ability of the individual to deradicalize or mobilize to violence?" And my tentative purpose statement is " this paper examines paths to radicalization in the United States, and the various indicators or factors that contribute to individual vulnerability to radicalization by a foreign terrorist organization, including mobilization indicators and resolve to commit violence.

Case studies of HVEs will help with measuring the influence that factors of radicalization have on an individual turning to homegrown violent extremism and ultimately conducting an attack against the United States. There are <https://assignbuster.com/factors-causing-homegrown-violent-extremism/>

research studies in the field that identified rejection or ostracization by others as strong factors in ultimately “ displaying irrational aggression against third parties not involved in the original rejection”, and these studies have allowed the same application of this concept to the risk factors in radicalization of HVEs (Jasko et al. 2017, 816). The various case studies available depict specific mobilization indicators as well as display opportunities for off-ramping/deradicalization from violence, and for this research project I would like to use homegrown violent extremism as the dependent variable in the study, defined earlier, to attempt to explain why HVEs radicalize and ultimately mobilize to violence. The independent variable here is the radicalization process; this proposal aims to show the influence or effect of radicalization processes on the individual that causes an HVE to mobilize and commit a violent attack against the United States.

I plan to measure the impact that the radicalization process has on the homegrown violent extremist by looking at the radicalization continuum which includes introduction, immersion, frustration, and resolve, as well as analyzing the dynamics of radicalization (personal grievances, community, global incidents, ideologies). Therefore, it is likely the relationship between these two variables will show the tendency or likelihood of an individual becoming radicalized. The proposed hypothesis of this paper is: if an individual or group displays vulnerability to radicalization based on risk factors, then the individual or group is more likely to adopt a violent form of action directly linked to an extremist ideology and display indicators of mobilization to conduct a violent attack. The HVE phenomenon and the lack of clarity in the radicalization process is an increasingly concerning threat

now and for the future, not only because of the inspired Islamic extremist ideology which has been around and freely available for a long time, but the rise of terrorist organizations and other extremists using social media promoting terrorist attacks with propaganda, all of which is inflated by the sheer number of al-Qaeda and ISIS supporters that exist across the world (Zekulin 2016, 47).

References

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