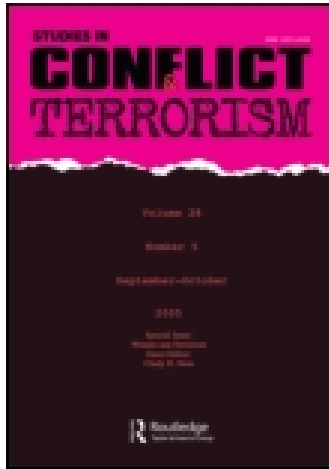


This article was downloaded by: [130.132.123.28]

On: 15 May 2015, At: 10:31

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Studies in Conflict & Terrorism

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uter20>

Lone Wolf Terrorist or Deranged Shooter? A Study of Ideological Active Shooter Events in the United States, 1970-2014

Joel A. Capellan^a

^a Criminal Justice Department, CUNY Graduate Center New York, NY, USA

Accepted author version posted online: 20 Jan 2015. Published online: 27 Feb 2015.



CrossMark

[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Joel A. Capellan (2015) Lone Wolf Terrorist or Deranged Shooter? A Study of Ideological Active Shooter Events in the United States, 1970-2014, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 38:6, 395-413, DOI: [10.1080/1057610X.2015.1008341](https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1008341)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1008341>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &

Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Lone Wolf Terrorist or Deranged Shooter? A Study of Ideological Active Shooter Events in the United States, 1970–2014

JOEL A. CAPELLAN

Criminal Justice Department
CUNY Graduate Center
New York, NY, USA

This study explores the threat of ideological active shooter attacks in the United States. In particular, to understand if these events constitute a new brand of “lone wolf terrorism” or if they are simply “deranged shooters” that happen to be ideological. The results show that ideological and non-ideological active shooters share very similar profiles. Despite the similarities, ideological extremism seems to influence the way these offenders prepare, execute, and conclude their attacks. Most ideological active shooters are “loners” whose attacks tend to be motivated by ideology. Given their sophistication and lethality, ideological active shooters represent a serious threat to national security.

On 26 November 2008, ten attackers engaged in a prolonged attack on eleven separate locations in Mumbai, India. The attack was deliberate and highly mobile; the four teams attacked several locations at the same time and employed a variety of tactics such as armed assaults, carjackings, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), drive-by shootings, building take-overs, and hostages.¹ By dispersing into teams and moving from target to target, the terrorists were able to completely overwhelm Mumbai’s large police force and continue their deadly assault for 60 hours. During this time span, the attackers killed 172 people, destroyed millions in property and traumatized a nation. This is the deadliest ideological active shooter incident in history and it, perhaps, represents a new trend in terrorism, as evidenced by a string of similar assaults all around the world.²

Acknowledging the potential danger, the Department of Homeland Security declared that lone wolves and small terrorist cells (like the attackers in Mumbai) represent the most dangerous threat to the national security of the United States.³ This is particularly the case for right-wing extremist groups. According to the report, right-wing extremists are actively and successfully recruiting throughout the states by playing on the fear of economic apocalypse, the “Muslim” president, immigration, and gun ownership. They

Received 5 October 2014; accepted 11 January 2015.

Address correspondence to Joel A. Capellan, CUNY Graduate Center, Criminal Justice Department, 524 West 59 St., Suite 2103 North Hall, New York, NY 10019, USA. E-mail: jcapellan@gc.cuny.edu

Color versions of one or more figures in this article can be found online at www.tandfonline.com/uter.

are particularly interested in recruiting disgruntled military veterans in the hope of using their skills and military training to enhance their capabilities of carrying out violent attacks. Furthermore, these groups have been encouraging right-wing extremists to engage in decentralized terror campaigns by acting alone in the commission of violent acts for ideological purposes.⁴

This is not the first time right-wing extremists have used such recruiting strategies. In the 1990s, right-wing extremists were able to increase their numbers using similar tactics, which led to a surge in violence against government facilities and employees.⁵ Today, they show no signs of changing their violent methods as they have shown the intent and capability to carry out lone wolf attacks. According to Bakker and de Graaf, lone wolf attacks are on the rise in the United States and as observed in the media, they often come in the shape of an active shooter.⁶ Take, for instance, Jared Lee Loughner, who in 2011, opened fired on a town hall meeting hosted by U.S. Representative Gabrielle Gifford, killing six and wounding 14 others.

Right-wing extremists, however, are not the only threat. The threat comes from across the ideological spectrum. *Jihadi* extremists have been actively looking to replicate Mumbai's attack on American soil. For some time, Al Qaeda has been trying to radicalize American citizens and encourage them to engage in lone wolf attacks, with some success.⁷ In 2009, 43 American citizens affiliated with *jihadi* extremist groups were charged or convicted of terrorism crimes in the United States or elsewhere. Also, a substantial number of plots foiled by law enforcement in the last 15 years have been inspired by radical Islamism.⁸ Unfortunately, the difficulty to identify self-radicalizing individuals means that some plots will be successfully executed. For instance, U.S. army psychiatrist Major Nidal Malik Hasan perpetrated one of the worst ideological active shooter events in U.S. history when he shot 30 people, killing 13, at Fort Hood military base on 5 November 2009.

Based on the seriousness of these attacks, as well as a paradigm shift toward decentralized terror campaigns, it is surprising that we know little about ideological active shooter events in the United States. The relevant literatures have overlooked ideological active shooter events as a phenomena on its own right for more popular topics. For instance, the mass murder experts have focused on non-ideological shooters, specifically and almost exclusively on school shootings. Likewise, researchers in the field of terrorism have aggregated ideological active shooters with other types of lone wolves. Consequently, we are left with many unanswered questions: how common are ideological active shooting events? Who are ideological active shooters? Do they differ significantly in planning, execution and resolution from non-ideological active shooter events? Are they driven by ideology or mental illness? Most importantly, are they lone wolf terrorist or deranged shooters that happen to be ideological? The goal of this study is to tackle these important questions and provide the foundation law enforcement needs to create policies and strategies designed to foil and/or mitigate the lethality of such attacks.

This study is presented in five sections. The second section reviews the small, but growing literature on active shooter events. This section also explores the intersection between mass murder and lone wolf terrorism literatures and its implications for new phenomenon. Operationalization of key concepts, data collection strategy, and active shooter dataset are discussed in the third section. Results are presented in the fourth section. The final section offers a discussion of the results as well as some concluding remarks.

Mass Murderers and Lone Wolves: Unifying Two Literatures

An “active shooter” is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill as many people as possible using a firearm.⁹ While it is connected to the mass murder literature, until very recently, the concept was exclusively used by law enforcement personnel. Today, however, active shooter events are beginning to be recognized as a phenomena on its own right by researchers, policymakers, and the media. There are at least two reasons for its growing popularity. First, research on the incidence of mass murder suggests that “mass shootings” is a new type of public massacre, one which originated sometime in the 1960s and it has been steadily on the rise ever since.¹⁰ Aside from the lethality, a unique aspects of this new type of massacre is the degree to which these events are perpetrated in schools by teenagers. Second, active shooter as an analytical framework overcomes definitional limitations of traditional concepts used in the mass murder literature. There is much debate on what number of victims constitute a mass murder or shooting.¹¹ While most of the literature has settled on a four-to-five victim criterion, others have argued that the number of casualties is not only arbitrary, but theoretically irrelevant to the causes of mass murder. Aitken et al. contend that mass murder by intention (i.e., those that did not meet the four-victim criteria, but intended to kill multiple people) are also theoretically relevant.¹² The concept of an active shooter is important not only because it describes a relatively modern phenomenon in America, but also because it places the perpetrator’s intentions, not the number of kills, at the core of the concept.

Because it is a recent analytical framework, little empirical research has been conducted on active shooters. To the author’s knowledge, Blair et al., Kelly, and Blair and Schweit’s studies offer the only empirical examinations of active shooter attacks in the United States.¹³ Kelly’s report finds that active shooters are overwhelming male (97 percent). The age distribution is bimodal with 32 percent of shooters falling in the 15–24 age category and 34 percent falling in the 35–39 age category. Similar to Kelly’s report, Blair et al. and the Blair and Schweit’s studies show that active shooter events are carried out overwhelmingly (>95 percent) by single attackers. All three studies find that active shooters tend to be members of the communities they target and thus they tend to have professional or academic relationships with their victims. While there is some variation by study, the average attack results in two injured and two dead victims. Approximately, 83 percent of these events end with the shooter committing suicide or suicide by cop. Interestingly, despite covering different time periods, all three studies offer the same general findings, suggesting that the characteristics of the events and perpetrators has not changed significantly since the 1970s.

While these studies offer interesting insights into active shooter events in the United States, their findings may not necessarily apply to ideological active shooters. Research on interpersonal violence suggests that ideological perpetrators not only look different from their non-ideological counter parts, but also differ in planning, weapon, and victim selection.¹⁴ On the same note, ideological active shooters may be more sophisticated, more methodical and consequently more lethal than non-ideological shooters. In sum, the existing research on active shooters does not allow for inferences on ideological shooters. The mass murder and lone wolf literatures may be more appropriate for this endeavor.

Profiling Mass Murderers and Lone Wolves

There is considerable overlap between mass murderers and lone wolves. In many instances these are one and the same, as many people that commit mass murder for ideological

purposes plan it and execute it on their own. It is perhaps for this reason that their profiles are remarkably similar. Research on mass homicide suggests that compared to regular homicide offenders, mass murderers are more likely to be male, White, and older.¹⁵ Research has established that mass murderers rarely target strangers.¹⁶ Their life histories are plagued with psychosis, paranoia, depression, and isolation.¹⁷ Perhaps because of their various mental illnesses, these individuals were often bullied as a child and rarely establish themselves in effective work roles as adults.¹⁸ These individuals externalize blame, holding others accountable for their misfortunes. Generally, mass murderers tend to be suicidal and, most take their own lives after completing the event.¹⁹ Similarly, lone wolves in the United States tend to be White, male, and older than the “average” violent offenders.²⁰ Lone wolves are likely to be socially awkward and isolated. Research suggests that they typically suffer from mental illness, which functions as a source of social ineptitude and inhibits their inability to adjust to a functional adult life.²¹ Lone wolves tend to use their extremist ideology as a way to channel their own personal frustrations and assign blame to others.²² Furthermore, research also suggests lone wolves tend to be suicidal and often view their attacks as suicide missions.²³

Given the similarities between mass murderers and lone wolves, it is natural to wonder if both types of offenses are caused by the same underlying social and psychological processes. Recent research seems to support this idea. For instance, Lankford compared the social backgrounds of suicide terrorists to workplace, rampage, and school shooters in the United States.²⁴ Lankford’s study revealed that aside from age, suicide terrorists do not differ significantly from other types of suicide shooters.²⁵ They all tend to suffer from problems at work, school and family, resulting in social marginalization. McCauley et al. compared school shooters to assassins and found that not only do they have similar characteristics, but that their profiles converges with known profiles of lone wolves.²⁶ According to the authors, they all share perceived grievance, depression, a personal crisis, and history of weapon use outside of the military. Importantly, McCauley et al. findings suggest that these seemingly different types of offenders are a part of a larger phenomenon they call lone-actor grievance-fueled violence.²⁷

Does Ideology Matter?

Having the same underlying social and psychological processes, however, does necessarily mean that lone wolves and mass murderers will not differ significantly in the way they carry out their attacks. In his study of suicide terrorists and workplace, rampage, and school shooters, Lankford found that despite similar risk factors, these events differ significantly in lethality, and resolution. According to the results, suicide terrorist are the least lethal and also less likely to commit suicide in a self-controlled, self-harming manner.²⁸ Instead, suicide terrorists either commit suicide as a way to harm others (e.g., suicide bomber) or they continue with the attack until killed by authorities (e.g., suicide by cop). Research on far-right extremist perpetrated (FREP) homicide also suggests that lone wolf terrorism may differ significantly from non-ideological forms of violence. Gruenewald compared FREP to the “average” homicide across a variety of event-level characteristics.²⁹ Gruenewald found that FREP homicides are more likely to involve multiple offenders and multiple victims than the average homicide in the United States. The analysis also shows that ideological offenders tend not to have a prior relationship with their victims.³⁰ In addition to the ideology of the perpetrator, the motivation for the attack itself may influence the manner in which it is executed. For instance, Gruenewald and Pridemore observed significant differences between ideologically motivated and non-

ideologically motivated FREP homicides.³¹ Their study revealed that ideologically motivated FREP homicides are more likely to involve multiple victims, as well as victims that are unknown, male, and minority.

In addition to ideological extremism, the level of association, if any, between the perpetrator and extremist organizations seems to play a role in the execution of violent acts. Recent research has recognized different types of lone wolves based on their level of association with terrorist organizations.³² “Loners” are individuals that act without ties with an established terrorist or extremist group. Conversely, “lone wolves” have formal or informal ties with a terrorist or extremist organization. A “wolf pack” consists of multiple ideological offenders. Empirical research has uncovered interesting differences across these categories. Gruenewald et al. report that most attacks are perpetrated by loners.³³ These far-right loners are more likely to have a reported history of mental illness compared to other types of far-right offenders. Loners are also more likely to rely on firearms, target multiple victims and engage in suicide missions compared to their far-right counterparts.³⁴ Extending their comparison groups to lone wolf and wolf packs, Gruenewald and colleagues find that far-right loners are more likely to be White Supremacists concerned with antigovernment and abortion-related issues.³⁵ Lone wolves and wolf packs tend subscribe to neo-Nazism and concerned with race/ethnic minorities.

Implications for Ideological Active Shooters

Based on the literature reviewed, it is reasonable to expect that active shooters will fit the general profile of mass murderers. In other words, active shooters will tend to be White males that are isolated, unsuccessful in life, with some type of mental illness (either confirmed or suggested). Because mass murder and lone wolf events are likely the result of the same psychological and social processes, we can expect that ideological and non-ideological active shooters will not differ significantly in their personal characteristics and background. Since the literature also suggests that ideology influences how violence is carried out, we can expect that ideological and non-ideological active shooters will have significant differences across all three stages of the active shooter event: preparation, execution, and conclusion. Based on the research discussed above, ideological active shooters are expected to target strangers, have high levels of planning, target a greater number of people and consequently be more lethal than their non-ideological counterparts.³⁶ Based on research by Lankford, we can expect ideological active shooters to be less likely to commit suicide with their own hands and more likely to be killed in the commission of the event.³⁷ Research on lone wolf terrorism suggests that most ideological active shooters will likely be “loners” in that they have no formal or informal ties to extremist organizations.³⁸

Methods

Key Concepts: Defining Ideological Active Shooter

Before a full discussion of the methods used in this study, it is important to define an ideological active shooter. There are two parts to this concept: “ideological” and “active shooter.” The Department of Homeland Security defines an active shooter as an individual “actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined or populated area.”³⁹ This study adds four elements to this definition.

1. It may involve more than one individual at multiple locations.
2. It may include instances where the violence spills to other unintended victims.
3. Failed attempts or attempts where victims were only wounded will be included.
4. While the primary weapon must be a firearm, the offender is not limited to just firearms (e.g., knives, bats, explosives).

This study is interested in a subset of all active shooter incidents in the United States—those committed by an ideological perpetrator. Therefore, to be categorized as such, the attacker must hold extremists values and beliefs, but the event itself does not have to be ideologically motivated. Determining ideological extremism is not always straight forward. To minimize validity problems, this study relies on the Extremist Crime Dataset's (ECDB) *Strength of Association* measurement protocol, which tells us, based on individual pieces of “pro association” and “con association” evidence, how certain we are that this suspect is an extremist.⁴⁰ It ranges from 0 to 4, with four being the highest level of certainty of ideological extremism.⁴¹ Perpetrators that scored one and above would be categorized as an “ideological active shooter.” These ideological perpetrators may come from either extreme of the political spectrum. Some will come from the far right, in the form of racist and antigovernment groups. On the left, we have environmental, animal right extremists, and *ihadists*. There are also movements that focus on a single issue such as anti-abortion groups. See Table A1, Appendix A, for a list of extremist groups included in this study.

Data and Data Collection

The active shooter dataset was compiled from government reports, previous scholarship, and media reports of events that occurred between 1970 and June 2014. The primary source, however, was the Kelly's active shooter report.⁴² The report identified 324 events that occurred between 1960 and 2012, including foiled attempts. Using the criteria discussed above, 225 cases were identified. This initial list was cross-referenced with over 50 sources, resulting in 57 additional cases. After the final list of active shooter events was generated, eight online search engines were used to obtain more detailed information on the offenders, victims, and incidents. See Table A2, Appendix A, for a complete list of search engines. Open-source materials such as media accounts, legal documents, blogs, videos, and government documents were used to piece together the most complete picture possible on the offender, his or her motivation, the location(s), victim information, and the manner in which the attack was executed. Variables collected fall into five groups: offender characteristics, preparation, execution, conclusion, and ideological variables. For a complete list of variables with operationalizations see Table A3, Appendix A.

Operationalization of Key Variables

While the operationalization for most variables are rather straightforward, *Mental Health Status* and *Level of Planning* are two key variables that require further clarification. *Mental Health Status* is measured as a categorical variable (0 = no evidence of mental illness, 1 = confirmed mental illness, 2 = suggested mental illness). Only offenders that had a formal diagnosis, confirmed by additional sources, were coded as “confirmed mental illness.” Those whose diagnosis could not be confirmed by other sources, or whose family members and close friends suggested mental illness were coded as “suggested mental illness.” Another key variable is *Level of Planning*. While in most cases it is impossible to

know the full extent of the preparatory actions taken by the offender, it is still possible to use pre and event-level observable indicators to estimate the level of planning. *Level of Planning* is an ordinal level variable with 0 = no planning, 1 = low level, 2 = medium level, and 3 = high level of planning. “No planning” involves an individual that literally had no time to plan as the precipitator happened seconds or minutes away from the shooting. Typically, these individuals carry weapons with them when precipitator occurred. In a “low level of planning” typically minutes elapse from the precipitator and shooting. Normally, these individuals go back to their cars/homes to get a firearm to carry out the shooting. These offenders did not use any additional weapon, tools, and armor. Individuals who bought a gun/s, practice with the gun, and made threats before the event fall under “medium level of planning.” “High level of planning” involves individuals who, in addition actions in with level 2, also acquired tactical information, carried out event rehearsal/s, brought additional guns/weapons/ammunition and some type of protective gear.

Analytic Strategy

This study relies mainly on describe means to answer all the questions of interest. There are four parts to the analysis. First, the temporal and spatial patterns of ideological and non-ideological active shooter events are analyzed in order to gauge its prevalence. Second, the demographic and personal profiles of ideological and non-ideological shooter are compared. In addition to their personal profiles, ideological and non-ideological active shooters are also compared across three stages of the shooting event: preparation, execution, and conclusion. Bivariate comparative tests (i.e., Chi-Square, *T*-tests, and Fisher Exact Test) were conducted to test for significant differences across these groups. Lastly, the ideological profile of ideological shooter is examined in greater detail.

Results

Incidence of Ideological and Non-Ideological Active Shooter Events

Compared to normal homicide, active shooter attacks are rare. From 1970 to June 2014, 282 active shooter events took place in the United States, averaging to six events per year. While relatively uncommon, these attacks are quite deadly. The 282 active shooter attacks left 905 casualties and 1,094 injured victims. The data collected for this study indicate that these assaults have been steadily increasing since 1970. Of 282 events that have occurred, more half (160 events) took place in the last ten years. Compared with the total number of events, ideological active shooter attacks make up a relatively small portion. On any given year, ideological shooters may make up anywhere from 5–33 percent of events. But, as seen in Figure 1, these events are also on the rise.

Given the relatively low incidence, active shooter attacks are highly clustered in space. As seen on Figure 2, these events cluster around the Mid-Atlantic, Appalachian Highlands, Southeast, and the Pacific Coast. Ideological active shooters do not seem to differ in their spatial distribution from non-ideological shooter events. Generally, ideological shooters strike near places where non-ideological shooter events have occurred and *vice versa*.

Comparing Ideological and Non-Ideological Active Shooters

Ideological and non-ideological active shooters are first compared on a range of demographic and background characteristics. The results, listed in Table 1, show that, as expected, both types of shooters not only “look” alike, but also share similarities in their personal background. Ideological and non-ideological active shooters tend to be White

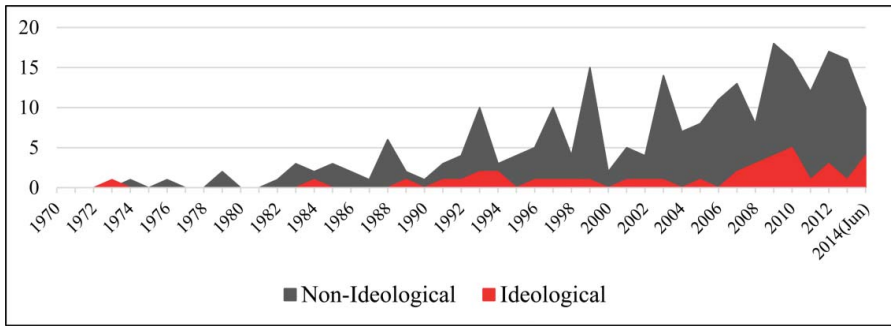


Figure 1. Ideological and non-ideological active shooter events, 1970–June 2014.

males in their 30s, with approximately 50 percent suffering from confirmed or suggested mental illness. Both types of active shooters seem to have rather dysfunctional adult lives. They tend to be single/divorced, unemployed, and have low levels of education. Despite these similarities, they are some key differences. Ideological active shooters are significantly more likely to hold a blue collar job and have a criminal record than their non-ideological counterpart. Shooters of Arab decent are also significantly more likely to be ideological. This is probably the result of number of *jihad*-inspired active shooter events during the time period.

As expected, most of the differences between ideological and non-ideological active shooters are not in their personal characteristics, but in the way they prepare, execute, and conclude their attacks. Ideological active shooters are significantly less likely to be prompted into engaging in an attack. For most ideological perpetrators, there is no clear precipitating event or crisis leading to their attack. This finding makes sense, since ideological shooters are more methodical than non-ideological shooters. Results, in Table 2, show that ideological active shooters are significantly more likely to have higher levels of planning and significantly less likely to have lower levels of planning compared to non-ideological perpetrators. They are also significantly more likely to train, and research their target. Interestingly, while more methodical, ideological shooters are also significantly more likely discuss their plans with others. However, this potential “red flag” is likely to go unnoticed since they probably discuss their plans with people that hold similar ideological beliefs.

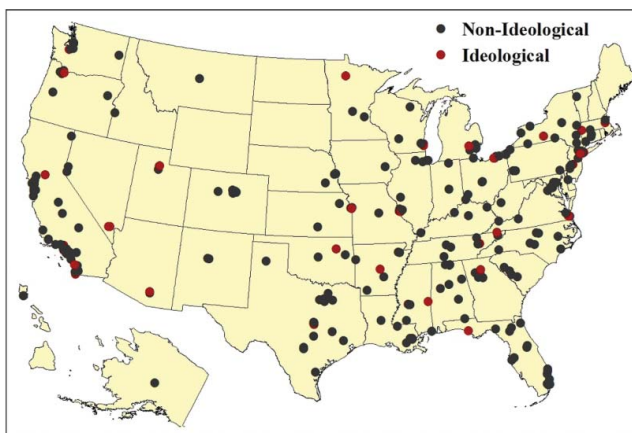


Figure 2. Spatial distribution of ideological and non-ideological active shooter events.

Table 1
Personal characteristics of ideological and non-ideological active shooters

Offender Characteristics	Non-ideological active shooter (<i>n</i> = 242)		Ideological active shooter (<i>n</i> = 40)		<i>x</i> ² / <i>T</i> -test
	<i>n</i>	Percent	<i>n</i>	Percent	
Male	235	96.3	39	97.5	
Age	242	34(Avg.)	40	38(Avg.)	
Race/Ethnicity					
White	141	59.2	28	70	
Black	60	25.2	7	17.5	
Latino	22	9.2	0	0	
Asian	10	4.2	1	2.5	
Arab	2	0.8	4	10	***
Mixed Race	3	1.3	0	0	
Marital Status					
Single	123	62	23	62	
Relationship	14	7	2	5.4	
Married	36	18	9	24.3	
Divorced	25	12.6	3	8	
Familiar with Firearms	181	90.5	34	97.1	
Mental Health Status					
No Mental Illness	136	57	19	48.7	
Suggested Mental Illness	41	17.3	10	25.6	
Confirmed Mental Illness	61	25.6	10	25.6	
Education Level					
High School	115	67.6	17	51.5	
Some College	16	9.4	6	18.2	
College	26	15.3	7	21.2	
Graduate	13	7.6	3	9.1	
Employment Status					
Unemployed	106	53	25	67.6	
Blue Collar	79	39.5	8	21.6	*
White Collar	15	7.5	4	10.8	
Criminal Record	47	25	17	43.6	***
Gun Ownership	181	90.5	34	97.1	

**p* ≤ .05.

***p* ≤ .01.

****p* ≤ .001 (Two-tailed tests).

In the execution stage, ideological and non-ideological active shooters share only two similarities: both types of shooters tend to attack places to which they have authorized access and the majority of events end within 60 minutes. The similarities, however, stop there. The results show that, as expected, ideological active shooters are more likely to attack people and places with which they have no prior personal or professional relationships. Similar to the Kelly report,⁴³ non-ideological shooters are more likely to attack people and places they know. Compared to non-ideological shooters, ideological attackers are significantly more likely to use more guns and use additional weapons in their

Table 2
Comparing ideological and non-ideological shooters on event-level characteristics

	Non-ideological active shooter (<i>n</i> = 242)		Ideological active shooter (<i>n</i> = 40)		<i>χ</i> ² / <i>T</i> -test
	<i>n</i>	Percent	<i>n</i>	Percent	
Precipitator					
No Clear Event	88	36.7	21	55.3	***
Change of Employment	50	20.8	2	5.3	***
Change of Relationship	12	5	1	2.6	
Other	90	37.5	14	37.4	
Acquired Firearm	68	38	12	36.4	
Training	22	11.3	9	26.5	*
Researched Location	20	10.9	8	23.5	*
Discussed Plan	53	27.2	22	61.1	**
Surveillance of Location	15	7.7	4	15.4	
Level of Planning					
No Planning	21	9.4	1	2.6	
Low Level of Planning	73	32.7	5	12.8	*
Medium Level of Planning	86	32.8	17	43.6	
High Level of Planning	42	19.3	16	41	**
Relationship to Target					
Stranger	70	29	31	77.5	***
Professional	134	55.6	7	17.5	***
Personal	17	15.4	2	5	
Relationship to Location					
No Relationship	37	15.5	21	52.5	***
Professional	157	65.7	9	22.5	***
Personal	18	7.5	3	7.5	
Other	27	11.3	7	17.5	
Authorized Access to Location	168	70.6	23	60.5	
Duration of Event					
Less Than an Hour	199	85.8	34	85	
More Than an Hour	33	14.2	6	15	
Number of Injured	244	3.48(Avg.)	40	6.13(Avg.)	***
Number of Fatalities	244	3(Avg.)	40	4(Avg.)	*
Number of Weapons	244	1.55(Avg.)	40	1.88(Avg.)	*
Type of Firearm					
Handgun	133	56.4	17	43.6	
Shotgun	23	9.7	2	5.1	
Rifle	25	10.6	2	5.1	
Combination	55	23.3	18	46.2	**

(Continued on next page)

Table 2
Comparing ideological and non-ideological shooters on event-level characteristics
(Continued)

	Non-ideological active shooter ($n = 242$)		Ideological active shooter ($n = 40$)		χ^2/T -test
	n	Percent	n	Percent	
Additional Weapons	33	14	10	25	*
Surrenders	115	47.5	17	42.5	
Lethal Force	28	11.6	10	25	*
Suicide	99	40.9	13	32.5	
Encounters Non-Lethal Force	55	23.3	16	40	*
Encounters Lethal Force	26	10.8	13	32.5	*

* $p \leq .05$.

** $p \leq .01$.

*** $p \leq .001$ (Two-tailed tests).

attack (e.g., IEDs, blunt object, knives). Ideological active shooters are also more likely to use a combination of firearms. Despite popular belief, handguns are the weapon of choice for both type active shooters. Even shooters that opted for a combination of firearms tended to use a handgun as the additional firearm. Based on the results, it is clear that higher levels of planning, training, researching, and more firepower translated into more lethality for ideological shooters. Ideological attackers, on average, killed and injured a significantly higher number people than their non-ideological counterparts.

The majority of active shooter events conclude either with the shooter surrendering or committing a self-contained, self-harming suicide. But as expected, ideological active shooters are more likely to be killed by police and potential victims than non-ideological shooters. Interestingly, non-ideological active shooters are more likely to encounter non-lethal forms of resistance during their attack. Conversely, ideological shooters are more likely to encounter lethal forms of resistance during the course of the event. Similarly to Lankford,⁴⁴ these differences may be due to the preference of ideological attackers to be killed during the event over committing a self-contained suicide. These differences, however, hide that, in most cases, active shooters met no form of resistance. Generally, shooters attacked a location and often before the police got there, they either surrender/fled or committed suicide.

A Closer Look at Ideological Active Shooters

A closer look at ideological active shooters reveals that most attacks (70 percent) are motivated by ideological extremism (Table 3). Most ideological shooters subscribe to the Far-right movement, followed by Jihad inspired ideologies. A small number of ideological offenders subscribed to a Black Nationalist Ideology. About 12 percent of offenders did not fall under any particular ideology. Ideological shooters' main belief system tends to resolve around Racism or some hot bottom issue. Particularly, 55 percent of attackers were motivated by racial hatred—whether it was Whites versus Blacks, Arab decent versus Jews or Blacks versus Whites. Twenty-seven percent held strong antigovernment sentiments and 10

Table 3
Ideological active shooters

	<i>n</i>	Percent
Ideological Motivation	28	70
Ideological Connection		
Far-Right	26	65
Jihad Inspired	7	17.5
Black Nationalist	2	5
Other	5	12.5
Belief System		
Whites are Superior to Other Races	18	45
We are Near Apocalypse	1	2.5
Willingness to Die for Freedom	1	2.5
Hot Bottom Issue	19	47.5
Black Revolution	1	2.5
Specific Issue		
Anti-Government	11	27.5
Tax-Related	1	2.5
Anti-Western	4	10
Abortion Related	1	2.5
Anti-Race	22	55
Survivalist	1	2.5
Formal Affiliation		
Loner	31	77.5
Lone Wolf	7	17.5
Wolf Pack	2	5
Target		
Government	11	27.5
Civilians	26	65
Business	0	0
Religious Institutions	3	7.5

percent were motivated by hatred toward values, people, and governments from Western societies. Ideological shooters are more likely to target civilians, followed by government agencies and employees. As expected, most ideological active shooters would be classified as “loners” since they do not have formal ties to a terrorist or extremist organization. Only seven attackers had formal ties with an extremist organizations and only two attacks were perpetrated by wolf packs, composed of two individuals each time.

Discussion and Conclusions

As the results highlight, the United States is currently experiencing an unprecedented number of active shooter attacks, both by ideological and non-ideological shooters. More attacks have occurred since 2004, than in the previous 33 years. Not only are these events clustered in time, but they are also clustered in space. One of the most interesting findings in this study are the similarities that ideological and non-ideological active shooters share in their demographic and personal profiles. Both Ideological and non-ideological active

shooters tend to be White males in their 30s, with rather dysfunctional adult lives. They tend to be single/divorced, unemployed, have low levels of education, and suffer from mental illness. These similarities suggests that “lone wolves” and “deranged shooters” may be outcomes of the same social and psychological processes. The only meaningful difference may be that for ideological shooters ideological extremism is intertwined with their personal frustrations and aversions toward society. These findings are consistent with the idea that lone wolves and deranged shooters are but a part of a larger phenomenon of lone-actor grievance-fueled violence.⁴⁵ And as such, it is not surprising that they share very similar personal profiles.

Despite being part of the same phenomenon, ideology plays a significant role in the way these perpetrators plan, execute, and conclude their attacks. The results show that ideological active shooters are more methodical than their non-ideological counterparts. They are significantly more likely to have higher levels of planning, use a greater number of firearms and additional weapons. For these reasons, ideological active shooter events have, on average, a greater number of fatalities and injured victims. These findings are in line with previous research that suggest that ideological offenders carry out violence differently than their non-ideological counterparts.⁴⁶ Similar to this study, Gill et al. also found that “loner-actors” (i.e., lone wolves) are very methodical.⁴⁷ They typically receive some type of training and commit their attack after considerable planning. Given these findings, one must wonder how does ideology influences these offenders to be more methodical. Dietz’s typology of mass murderers may have the answer.⁴⁸ Dietz found that ideological mass murderers, or *pseudo commandos*, tend to be fixated with the military, weaponry, tactics, and movies/books about lone attackers.⁴⁹ It is perhaps this fixation that influences them to care more about tactics and preparation.

Most ideological active shooter attacks could be considered lone wolf terrorism, as 70 percent of events were motivated by ideological extremism. As expected, most ideological offenders subscribe to the far-right, followed by *jiha*d-inspired ideology. Most surprisingly is the number of offenders that subscribed to Black Nationalist ideology. These individuals were radicalized by the perceived racism in society and the life failures associated with it. A significant portion of the sample (12 percent) did not fall under any particular ideology. These individuals suffered from severe mental illness, and would typically subscribe to several distinct, and often opposing, ideologies. Seventy-seven percent of ideological shooters had no formal ties to extremist organizations, which means they self-radicalized through Internet forums and other forms of media, such as music, book, and magazines. Similar to Gruenewald et al. these loners’ hot-bottom issues revolved around anti-race and antigovernment sentiments, and subsequently civilians and government agencies are targeted most often.⁵⁰

In sum, this study was a worthwhile endeavor. This is the first study to compare ideological and non-ideological active shooters, not just on their personal characteristics, but also across a series of pre and event-level behaviors. This analysis shows that while these individuals have remarkably similar demographic and personal profiles, ideological extremism has a significant influence on the way these offenders prepare, execute, and conclude their attack. This study is also the first to explore the connection between the lone wolf terrorism and mass murder literatures. This study finds that these literatures are not only compatible, but that their findings are applicable to active shooter phenomenon. The connections between these literatures as well as the results in this study suggest that “mass murderers,” “deranged shooters,” “lone wolves,” and “active shooters” are all part of a larger phenomenon of lone-actor grievance-fueled violence.⁵¹ Most importantly, the findings show that ideological active shooter events are on the rise. And given their

motivations, sophistication, and lethality, ideological active shooters represent a serious threat to national security.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks Joshua Freilich and Deborah Koetzle for their comments and suggestions on previous drafts of this article.

Funding

This research was supported by the Science and Technology Directorate of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security through the Center for the Study of Terrorism and Behavior (CSTAB—Center Lead) Grant made to the START Consortium (Grant # 2012-ST-61-CS0001). The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the author and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or START.

Notes

1. Angel Rabasa, Robert D. Blackwill, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Christine Fair, Brian A. Jackson, Michael Michael Jenkins, Seth G. Jones, Nathaniel Shestak, and Ashley J. Tellis, “Lessons of Mumbai,” *RAND Corporation* (2009). Available at http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2009/RAND_OP249.pdf (accessed 7 September 2014).

2. Brian Michael Jenkins, “The Threat of a Mumbai-style Terrorist Attack in the United States,” *RAND Corporation* (2013). Available at http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT300/CT391/RAND_CT391.pdf (accessed 7 September 2014).

3. U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), “Right Wing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment,” *Office of Intelligence and Analysis Assessment*(2009). Retrieved from <http://fas.org/irp/eprint/rightwing.pdf> (accessed 7 September 2014).

4. Roger Bates, “Dancing with Wolves: Today’s Lone Wolf Terrorists,” *The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology* 4(2012), pp. 1–14.

5. DHS, “Right Wing Extremism.”

6. Edwin Bakker and Beatrice de Graaf, “Lone Wolves: How to Prevent this Phenomenon?” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism-The Hague* (2010). Available at <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Bakker-deGraaf-EM-Paper-Lone-Wolves.pdf> (accessed 9 September 2014).

7. See Bakker and De Graaf, “Lone Wolves: How to Prevent this Phenomenon;” Bates, “Dancing with the Wolves;” and Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, “Assessing the Terrorist Threat,” *Bipartisan Policy Center* (2010). Available at <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/sites/default/files/NSPG%20Final%20Threat%20Assessment.pdf> (accessed 9 September 2014).

8. Erik J. Dahl, “The Plots that Failed: Intelligence Lessons Learned from Unsuccessful Terrorist Attacks Against United States,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34(2011), pp. 621–648.

9. U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), “Active Shooter: How to Respond,” *Office of Intelligence and Analysis Assessment*, (2008). Available at http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/active_shooter_booklet.pdf (accessed 7 September 2014).

10. See Grant Duwe, *Mass Murder in the United States: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2007).

11. See Marissa A. Harrison and Thomas G. Bowers, “The Autogenic Massacre as a Maladaptive Response to Status Threat,” *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology* 21(2010), pp. 916–932.

12. Lisa Aitken, Piet Oosthuizen, Robin Emsley, and Soraya Seedat, “Mass Murders: Implications for Mental Health Professionals,” *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine* 38 (2008), pp. 261–269.

13. See John P. Blair, Terry Nichols, and John R. Curnutt, *Active Shooter: Events and Responses* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2013); Richard Kelly, “Active Shooter: Recommendations

and Analysis for Risk Mitigation,” *New York Police Department*, (2012). Available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/downloads/pdf/counterterrorism.pdf> (accessed 1 October 2014); John P. Blair and Katherine Schweit, “A Study of Active Shooter Incidents, 2000–2013,” U.S. Department of Justice (2014).

14. See Jeff Gruenewald, “A Comparative Examination of Perpetrated by Far-Right Extremists,” *Homicide Studies* 15 (2011), pp. 177–203; Jeff Gruenewald and Willam A. Pridemore, “A Comparison of Ideologically-Motivated Homicides from the New Extremist Crime Database and homicides from the Supplementary Homicide Reports Using Multiple Imputation by Chained Equations to Handle Missing Values,” *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 28 (2012), pp. 141–162.

15. Grant Duwe, “Patterns and Prevalence of Mass Murder in Twentieth-Century America,” *Justice Quarterly* 21 (2004), pp. 729–761.

16. James Allan Fox and Jack Levin, *Extreme Killing: Understanding Serial and Mass Murder* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012).

17. See Matt Delisi and Aaron M. Scherer, “Multiple Homicide Offenders: Offense Characteristics, Social Correlates, and Criminal Careers,” *Criminal Justice Behavior* 33 (2006), pp. 367–391.

18. Paul E. Mullen, “The Autogenic (Self-Generated) Massacre,” *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 22 (2004), pp. 311–323.

19. Ronald M. Holmes and Stephen T. Holmes, *Mass Murder in the United States* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003).

20. See Paul Gill, John Horgan, and Paige Deckert, “Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivations and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists,” *Journal of Forensic Science* 59 (2014), pp. 425–435; Gruenewald, “A Comparative Examination of Perpetrated by Far-Right Extremists;” and Gruenewald and Pridemore, “A Comparison of Ideologically-Motivated Homicides.”

21. See Gill et al., “Bombing Alone;” Jeff Gruenewald, Steven Chermak, and Joshua D. Freilich, “Far-Right Lone Wolf Homicides in the United States,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 12 (2014), pp. 65–91; Ramon Spaaij, “The Enigma of Lone Wolf Terrorism: An Assessment,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33 (2010), pp. 854–870.

22. See Spaaij, “The Enigma of Lone Wolf Terrorism,” p. 863.

23. Adam Lankford, “Do Suicide Terrorist Exhibit Clinically Suicidal Risk Factors? A Review of Initial Evidence and Call for Future Research,” *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 15 (2010), pp. 334–340.

24. Adam Lankford, “A Comparative Analysis of Suicide Terrorists and Rampage, Workplace, and School Shooters in the United States from 1990 to 2010,” *Homicide Studies* 17 (2013), pp. 255–274.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Clark McCauley, Sophia Moskalenko, and Benjamin Van Son, “Characteristics of Lone-Wolf Violent Offenders: A Comparison of Assassins and School Attackers,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 17 (2013), pp. 255–274.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Lankford, “A Comparative Analysis of Suicide Terrorists.”

29. Gruenewald, “A Comparative Examination of Perpetrated by Far-Right Extremists.”

30. *Ibid.*

31. Gruenewald and Pridemore, “A Comparison of Ideologically-Motivated Homicides.”

32. See Gruenewald, “A Comparative Examination of Perpetrated by Far-Right Extremists;” Gruenewald and Pridemore, “A Comparison of Ideologically-Motivated Homicides;” and Raffaello Pantucci, “A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists,” *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence*, (2011). Available at http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/1302002992ICSRPaper_ATypologyofLoneWolves_Pantucci.pdf (7 September 2014).

33. Jeff Gruenewald, Steve Chermak, and Joshua D. Freilich, “Distinguishing ‘Loner’ Attacks from other Domestic Extremist Violence,” *Criminology & Public Policy* 12 (2013), pp. 65–91.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Gruenewald et al., “Far-Right Lone Wolf Homicides in the United States.”

36. See Gruenewald, “A Comparative Examination of Perpetrated by Far-Right Extremists;” Gruenewald and Pridemore, “A Comparison of Ideologically-Motivated Homicides;” and Gill et al., “Bombing Alone.”

37. Lankford, “A Comparative Analysis of Suicide Terrorists.”

38. Gruenewald et al., “Distinguishing ‘Loner’ Attacks from other Domestic Extremist Violence.”

39. DHS, “Active Shooter: How to Respond,” p. 2.

40. See Joshua Freilich, Steve Chermak, Roberta Belli, Jeff Gruenewald, and William Parkin, “Introducing the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB),” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26 (2014), pp. 372–384.

41. For instance, suspect A gets arrested after engaging in an active shooting event. He is not affiliated with any extremist groups; according to people that knew him he holds extreme anti-Black and antisemitic views. After being arrested, he does not deny that he is responsible for the shooting, but he denies being racist. At this point we have two pieces of evidence, one that support and counter the extremist association. Under the Strength of Association Scale, this individual would receive a score zero. Let us assume, we dig a little deeper and we find that, among all the victims, the shooter selectively picked only those that were Black and Jewish. Now there are two pieces of evidence for and one against the extremist association—there is a higher degree of certainty that the suspect is an extremist. Under the scale, this attacker would get a score of 1. If for instance, we obtain evidence that he visited extremist websites, the then increased score would reflect that new piece of pro-association evidence.

42. Kelly, “Active Shooter: Recommendations and Analysis for Risk Mitigation.”

43. Ibid.

44. Lankford, “A Comparative Analysis of Suicide Terrorists.”

45. McCauley et al., “Characteristics of Lone-Wolf Violent Offenders.”

46. See Gruenewald, “A Comparative Examination of Perpetrated by Far-Right Extremists;” Gruenewald and Pridemore, “A Comparison of Ideologically-Motivated Homicides.”

47. See Gill et al., “Bombing Alone.”

48. Park Elliot Dietz, “Mass, Serial, and Sensational Homicides,” *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 62 (1986), pp. 477–491.

49. Ibid.

50. Gruenewald et al., “Far-Right Lone Wolf Homicides in the United States.”

51. McCauley et al., “Characteristics of Lone-Wolf Violent Offenders.”

Appendix

Table A1

Extremist groups included in the study

Far-right groups	Far-left groups	Single-issue groups
Militias	Left Wing Revolutionaries	Anti-Tax
Freemen/Sovereign Citizens	Black Nationalists	Anti-Abortion
KKK	ELF	Anti-Immigration
Christian-Identity	ALF	
Skinheads	Jihadists	

Table A2

Web search engines used in the data collection

1. Lexis-Nexis
2. Proquest
3. Yahoo
4. Google
5. Copernic
6. News Library
7. Westlaw
8. Google Scholar

Downloaded by [] at 10:31 15 May 2015

Table A3
Definition and operationalization of variables

Variable	Definition	Measurement
<i>Offender Characteristics</i>		
Race/Ethnicity	Offender's Race/ Ethnicity	0 = White, 1 = Black, 2 = Latino, 3 = Asian, 4 = Arab, 5 = Mixed
Gender	Offender's gender	0 = Female, 1 = Male
Age	Offender's age	
Marital Status	Offender's marital status	0 = Single, 1 = Relationship, 2 = Married/ Widowed
Familiar with Firearms	Offender's familiarity with firearms	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Mental Health Status	Offender's mental health status	0 = No mental illness, 1 = Suggested Mental Illness, 2 = Confirmed mental illness
Education Level	Offender's level of education	0 = HS, 1 = Some college, 2 = Graduate
Employment Status	Offender's employment status	0 = Unemployed, 1 = Employed-Blue collar, 2 = Employed-White collar
Criminal Record	Offender has a criminal record	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Gun Ownership	Offender owned a firearm prior to attack	0 = No, 1 = Yes
<i>Preparation Stage</i>		
Precipitator	Offender experienced an event or crisis that led to the attack	0 = No clear events, 1 = Change of unemployment, 2 = Change in relationship status, 3 = Other
Acquired Firearm	Offender acquired a firearm/s in preparation for the attack	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Training	Offender engaged in some type of training for the attack	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Researched Location	Offender researched the location of the attack	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Discussed Plan	Offender discussed plans of the attack	0 = No, 1 = Yes

(Continued on next page)

Table A3
Definition and operationalization of variables (*Continued*)

Variable	Definition	Measurement
Surveillance of Location	Offender surveyed the location where the attack took place	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Level of Planning	Offender's level of planning	0 = No planning, 1 = Low level, 2 = Medium level, 3 = high level
<i>Execution Stage</i>		
Relationship to Target	Offender's relationship to target	0 = Stranger, 1 = Professional, 2 = Personal
Relationship to Location	Offender's relationship to location	0 = No relationship, 1 = Professional, 2 = Personal, 3 = Other
Authorized access to Location	Offender had authorized access to location	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Duration of Event	Estimated duration of incident	0 = Less than an hour, 1 = More than an hour
Number of Injured	Number of injured victims	
Number of Fatalities	Number of fatalities	
Number of Weapons	Number of firearm used by offender	
Type of Firearm	Type of firearm used by offender	0 = Handgun, 1 = Shotgun, 2 = Rifle, 3 = Combination
Additional Weapons	Offender used additional, non-firearm, weapons during the attack	0 = No, 1 = Yes
<i>Conclusion Stage</i>		
Surrenders	Offender surrenders to authorities	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Killed	Offender is killed during commission of event	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Suicide	Offender commits suicide	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Encounters Lethal Force	Offender encountered lethal force during the event (whether or not it led to death)	0 = No, 1 = Yes

(*Continued on next page*)

Table A3
Definition and operationalization of variables (*Continued*)

Variable	Definition	Measurement
Encounters Non-Lethal Force	Offender encountered non-lethal force during the event	0 = No, 1 = Yes
<i>Ideology</i>		
Ideological Motivation	Attack is ideologically motivated	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Ideological Connection	Offender's ideological connection	0 = far-right, 1 = Jihad inspired, 2 = Black nationalist, 3 = Other
Belief System	Offender's main belief system	0 = Whites are superior to other races, 1 = We are near apocalypse, 2 = Willingness to die for freedom, 3 = Black revolution, 4 = Hot bottom issue
Specific Issue	Offender's hot bottom issue	0 = Anti-government, 1 = Tax-related, 2 = Anti-Western countries, 3 = Abortion related, 4 = Anti-race, 5 = Survivalist
Formal Affiliation	Offender's affiliation with extremist organization	0 = Loner (no affiliation), 1 = Lone wolf (formal affiliation), 2 = Wolf pack (two or more offenders with formal affiliation)