

DETERMINING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POVERTY IN THE RADICALIZATION OF
AMERICAN RIGHT-WING EXTREMISTS

by

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A research study submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Master of Global Security Studies.

Baltimore, Maryland

April, 2020

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Abstract

The research question of this study is: how significant is the role of poverty in the radicalization of right-wing extremists (RWE) in America? This question is significant due to the exponential growth of RWE attacks in the US since 2012, and this study seeks to identify poverty as a major factor in the radicalization of individuals carrying out RWE attacks.

The subjects of this study are American RWE who carried out domestic attacks over the past 8 years. The past 8 years are significant because there were, on average, less than five RWE attacks per year in the US from 2007-2011, then the number jumped to 14 in 2012.¹

The data was gathered from a variety of news sources and journals, selected by the researcher. The articles chosen were those with the most detailed biographical information on the subjects of this study.

The analysis process was conducted by way of comparative analysis. Themes were developed after reading the data and reaching a conclusion about the major themes of each subject's background. The themes were identified as poverty, relative deprivation, childhood trauma, social exclusion, online presence, and mental health issues.

The findings of this study were that poverty alone cannot be considered a significant driver of radicalization of RWE in America. The results of the study show that other factors are more commonplace in the radicalization of RWE and though poverty may play a role in radicalization, it is not enough on its own.

In conclusion, this study shows that radicalization in RWE in America is driven by a multitude of factors and poverty alone is not enough to drive an individual to radicalize. Far

¹ Jones, Seth G. "The Rise of Far-Right Extremism in the United States." The Rise of Far-Right Extremism in the United States | Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 7, 2018. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/rise-far-right-extremism-united-states>. Jones is an established authority in radicalization and terrorism studies, this brief covers the resurgence of right-wing extremism in America during the mid-to-late 2010s.

more common, and troubling, is the online presence of vulnerable individuals, particularly those with mental health concerns.

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Introduction

By any metric, right-wing extremism is experiencing a boom in the United States, as well as in a host of other states in the Western world. Right-wing extremism is defined by Seth G Jones as, “the use or threat of violence by subnational or non-state entities whose goals may include racial, ethnic, or religious supremacy; opposition to government authority; and the end of practices like abortion.”² According to an article in the Center for Strategic and International Studies by Victoria DiSimone, deaths from right-wing extremist violence in the US rose by 26% from 2017 to 2018.³ With attacks from such extremists on the rise, and the casualty count from these attacks steadily rising, a number of questions come to mind. Firstly, and among the questions most to do with this paper, what is the cause, or causes, of this extremism? Is there a pattern to it, something at the core of these individuals that is similar to one another that if understood can help policy makers create effective means of countering this extremism? And, if such similarities exist, how can they be identified so that they might be singled out and dealt with? This paper seeks to understand whether poverty, or relative deprivation, is one of those core, common factors driving right-wing extremism.

To begin, how do we define radicalization? Peter Neumann offers a short and concise definition of the term, which will help in understanding the verbiage used throughout this study. In “The Trouble with Radicalization,” Neumann defines it as, “(T)he process whereby people

² Ibid.

³ DeSimone, Victoria. “From the Ground Up: Combatting the Rise of Right-Wing Terror.” From the Ground Up: Combatting the Rise of Right-Wing Terror | Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 1, 2019. <https://www.csis.org/ground-combatting-rise-right-wing-terror>. This article covers the rise of right-wing extremism touched on by Jones yet goes into deeper detail in regards to policy steps that can be taken to slow that rise and reduce the impacts of right-wing extremism.

become extremists.⁴ No two pathways to radicalization are identical. Much like a fingerprint though many individuals may have similarities with one another, radicalization pathways are unique to the individual treading down that path. In any given example of radicalization, there exists a litany of reasons that have led an individual to their extreme beliefs. Therefore, in order to better understand what factors are driving and pulling individuals to radicalization, it is necessary to examine each case on its own. For the purposes of this research study, the radicalization being studied is not simply cognitive radicalization, but behavioral radicalization, which means that the focus will be on actions rather than beliefs.⁵ The reason for this is that behavioral radicalization can be easily observed whereas cognitive radicalization is not necessarily observable at all times.

I believe that poverty is a driving factor in the radicalization of right-wing extremists in America. Poverty is an oft-touted explanation for right-wing extremism in America, and as such I want to uncover whether that explanation is accurate or not. Likewise, I believe that relative deprivation is a driving factor in the radicalization of right-wing extremists. Relative deprivation can be defined as a situation when one's expectations greatly outweigh their means. In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the impacts of poverty and relative deprivation on radicalization, I believe that it is necessary to focus this paper on extremist acts in order to limit the scope of events under review. Doing so will result in a product that is focused and coherent, rather than a conclusion drowned in a sea of data. Additionally, individuals who harbor extremist

⁴ Neumann, Peter R. "The Trouble with Radicalization." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 89, no. 4 (2013): 873-93. www.jstor.org/stable/23479398. Neumann is an important figure in the study of radicalization, and is mentioned in nearly every article used in this literature review. This article specifically testifies to the nuances and complexities associated with radicalization and the study of it.

⁵ Ibid.

beliefs yet do not act on them may be more difficult to identify, whereas behavioral extremists can easily be pinpointed by the attacks they have carried out.

The question this paper seeks to answer is: How does poverty, or relative deprivation, affect right-wing extremist radicalization in the United States? This research question is significant because it seeks to determine whether poverty or relative deprivation is a motivating factor in right-wing extremists and identifying it as such carries implications for its role in radicalizing those individuals. As stated earlier in this introduction, right-wing extremism is on the rise in the US (and the world), and efforts must be made to counter this rise. Should poverty prove to be a significant factor driving or pulling individuals towards radicalization, then steps should be taken to deter that. This question will be answered by examining case studies of right-wing extremists who carried out attacks in recent years in this country in order to determine whether poverty played a significant role in their radicalization. This will be done by conducting content analysis on empirical data gathered about the backgrounds of a given number of domestic right-wing extremists who have recently carried out terror attacks in the US. By examining the backgrounds of right-wing extremists, it is my intent that we will be able to determine whether poverty is a commonality in these attackers, and whether poverty plays an important role in their radicalization or is more coincidental in nature.

Literature Review

The problem of poverty in radicalization is one that has been studied frequently, particularly in the past 19 years. Studies in radicalization have accelerated since the 9/11 terror attacks and the subsequent US Global War on Terror. Furthermore, a rash of domestic and foreign terrorism in hotspots around the world have led to a burgeoning academia around the topic of radicalization. Radicalization is a notoriously fickle beast, as it is a problem that permeates into several different schools of thought, including sociology, psychology, politics, economics, and criminology, to name a few. As such, there are several competing theories in regards to the role played by poverty in radicalization.

Scholarship that supports a connection between poverty and radicalization

The division amongst scholars between what drives radicalization is neatly summarized by Taspınar in “Fighting Radicalism, Not Terrorism.” In that article, Taspınar argues that the two camps are divided by those who see radicalism/terrorism as a socioeconomic deprivation problem and those who soundly reject that notion.⁶ Taspınar’s argument for the impact of relative deprivation on radicalization is central to this research study. It highlights the importance of location when discussing the impact of poverty on radicalization. Additionally, Taspınar notes the significance of not only poverty, but of the feeling of stagnation of opportunity, as well. The other side of the divide posits that terrorism and radicalism is simply a security problem, and

⁶ Taspınar, Ömer. “Fighting Radicalism, Not ‘Terrorism’: Root Causes of an International Actor Redefined.” *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2009): 75–86. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.0.0059>. The theory of relative deprivation that Taspınar writes about is one with a significant backing amongst those who study radicalization and its causes.

attests that this can be seen in the number of extremists who are both educated and middle-class. Taspinar also outlines the case made by those backing a social development process for defeating radicalization. For him, the use of social welfare to combat radicalization is not a matter of counter-terrorism, rather it is an attempt to address root causes of terrorism, thereby nipping the problem in the bud before it develops.⁷ This philosophy can be seen in many studies that follow in the wake of Taspinar's article. Of course, the studies that fall in-step with Taspinar are those conducted by individuals who fall into the socioeconomic camp. Taspinar posits that simply dismissing socioeconomics as irrelevant to radicalization simply because extremists are middle-class and educated is overly simplistic and misleading.⁸ The real problem, Taspinar states, is relative deprivation "the absence of opportunities relative to expectations."⁹ Though he applies this term to the Arab world, it does not require much imagination to see relative deprivation being played out in areas across the United States.

Since 9/11 is significant in the study of radicalization and terrorism, it is important to note that many researchers point to the backgrounds of the Saudi hijackers as evidence that poverty has little connection to extremism. This fact is pointed out by Burgoon in "On Welfare and Terror," where he notes that "The official 2002 statement of US grand strategy emphasizes this view, pointing out that the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, were perpetrated by middle-class, educated misanthropes led by a rich religious fanatic."¹⁰ Burgoon argues that social programming that reduces poverty, inequality, and socioeconomic insecurity discourages

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Burgoon, Brian. "On Welfare and Terror." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 2 (April 2006): 176–203. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002705284829>. Burgoon's work is referenced throughout the more recent articles in this literature review, as he is seen as among the vanguard of those who believe in the importance of socioeconomics in radicalization. His nuanced approach to determining the effects of social welfare on terror participation is very important to this study.

participation in terrorism and terror-related activities. He believes that there is a connection between poverty and radicalization, and thus the importance of creating targeted social programs that can address the above issues. Furthermore, Lawrence Wright posits in his book *The Terror Years*, that although Saudis do enjoy a high standard of living, they also grapple with high rates of radicalization.¹¹ Wright argues that this is due to economic stagnation. While that is certainly different from poverty in general, Wright believes that it points to the need for economic mobility, as those who believe they have no way of doing better economically turn to radicalization as a way to escape what they believe is a path to nowhere. This is a clear example of Taspinar's theory on relative deprivation. Though the Saudis in question are educated and middle-class, the lack of opportunities versus their expectations creates resentment.

Basra and Neumann argue in "Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus," that a connection between poverty and radicalization does exist, as poor, disaffected youth in Europe turn to petty crime in order to better their economic standing.¹² They then wind up in jails and prisons that are populated with radical jihadists who are only too happy to have poor, disaffected youths with criminal talents amongst their recruits. It is important to cover the work done by Basra and Neumann because it sheds light on the crime-terror nexus, and shows how a connection between poverty and criminality, and criminality and radicalization.

¹¹ Wright, Lawrence. *The Terror Years: from Al-Qaeda to the Islamic State*. London: Constable, 2018. While this book is not scholarly, Wright is a journalist with years of experience operating in the Middle East. In particular, his chapter devoted to Saudi Arabia has him interviewing multiple Saudis who bemoan what can be recognized as relative deprivation, and how that has driven educated, middle-class people into the arms of extremists.

¹² Basra, Rajan, and Peter R. Neumann. "Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (2016): 25-40. Accessed February 29, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/26297703. This article is important because Neumann and Basra establish a clear linkage between crime and terror in western Europe, particularly in France. It is also a strong example of Tarsipan's relative deprivation theory, as seen in the innumerable young French immigrants who are disaffected by a society that seemingly does not wish to see them succeed. This could also tie into Piazza's research on minority economic discrimination.

Garzon tackles the disparity between studies that claim poverty is a significant factor when addressing radicalization and those that do not believe so in “Explaining the Enabling Environment.” In this article, Garzon concludes that scholars studying the effects of poverty on extremism that claim poverty is not significant study the issue from too broad a scope to truly grasp the issue.¹³ Garzon believes that too narrow a focus on poverty in general shrouds the lessons that can be gleaned from studying economic deprivation more closely, and that in doing so an individual can learn more by studying the nuances of socioeconomic stressors on individuals who are not considered impoverished.¹⁴ He notes that, in particular, focusing on issues of socioeconomic exclusion may provide insight as to the appeal of support for extremism and radicalization.

Another take on the matter of poverty and radicalization can be seen in “How do Education and Unemployment Affect Support for Violent Extremism?” by Bhatia and Ghanem. In that research study, the authors argue that lack of economic opportunity for educated people results in higher levels of support for extremist activities.¹⁵ Bhatia and Ghanem’s work is important in this field as it suggests that there exists a link between poverty and extremism, even though their work specifically is built on educated people. Bhatia and Ghanem found that economic standing is important in the radicalization of an individual when taken in relation to their education. Essentially, the more educated an individual is, the better they expect their

¹³ Garzon, Julio. “Explaining the Enabling Environment: The Terrorism-Poverty Nexus Revisited.” *The Yale Review of International Studies*, April 2011. http://yris.yira.org/essays/160#_ftn3. Garzon’s article is important to this study because he calls into question significant problems with the theories put forth by scholars who do not believe in the terrorism-poverty nexus.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bhatia, Kartika, and Hafez Ghanem. “How Do Education and Unemployment Affect Support for Violent Extremism?” *Global Economy and Development at Brookings*, March 2017. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/global_20170322_violent-extremism.pdf. Bhatia and Ghanem’s research points to a strong correlation between education, unemployment and support for violent extremism. This is significant because it shows that there is much more nuance to the debate surrounding the poverty-terrorism nexus than some would suggest. It also is a good example of relative deprivation theory.

financial or economic position to be. When individuals are working at what they believe is a lower standing than what they are capable and qualified for, they develop resentment. That resentment can then be used as fuel for radicalization. Bhatia and Ghanem based this understanding on data compiled on ISIS recruits. That data showed that many recruits were higher educated than most in their home countries, yet found themselves working lower-level jobs prior to their radicalization.¹⁶

Bhatia and Ghanem's work builds upon a foundation laid by a USAID policy report, "The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency Policy." In that article, USAID argues that significant driving factors for extremism are socioeconomic inequality, repression, corruption, and poor governance.¹⁷ The findings within this policy report tie neatly with those of Burgoon found above. Burgoon's argument that more social programming is necessary to avoid more dissatisfaction with the state and cause for radicalization is seen clearly within the USAID report. Essentially, this report stresses the importance of development as a means of disrupting radicalization rates and decreasing the number of people disaffected by their government for economic reasoning.¹⁸ Again, as seen in Taspinar's work above, this USAID policy report ties in with the theory of relative deprivation. This work digs more deeply into areas that experience serious poverty, such as Afghanistan, and yet still provides enough information to suggest that while poverty itself is not enough to radicalize an individual, poverty relative to an individual's surroundings is. This is an important distinction to make, as it implies

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ USAID's Policy Task Team. "The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency Policy," September 2011. USAID. September 2011. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/VEI_Policy_Final.pdf. This policy report outlines the importance of development as a tool for combating radicalization. USAID does not claim that development assistance is the single answer for defeating extremism, rather it falls in line with Burgoon in that it suggests that development can go a great distance in relieving economic distress and resentment directed towards governments.

¹⁸ Ibid.

that poor countries alone are not the only states subject to radicalization due to poverty. Rather, any state that experiences relative deprivation, which can most clearly be seen in states with pronounced economic inequality, is vulnerable to this kind of issue.

In “Relative Deprivation: when does it lead to Anger, Achievement, or Disengagement?” by Mark and Cook, the authors explain the utility of applying the relative deprivation theory to societal issues.¹⁹ This article does much to explain the theory of relative deprivation, and makes plain how it can be applied to situations outside those dealing directly with poverty. The authors state that relative deprivation is what occurs when “judgments of deprivation are made on the basis of comparison with some standard.”²⁰ The example provided by the authors is one where a college-educated couple move to a new, affluent neighborhood and experience relative deprivation because although their own circumstances have improved, they lag behind the standard of affluence held by their neighbors.²¹ The use of relative deprivation in this way can easily be used to describe the theory in action in such affluent places like Saudi Arabia, or, specifically for this study, in America.

Scholarship that argues against a connection between poverty and radicalization

On the opposite side of the argument of the viability of poverty as a significant factor in radicalization is that made by Krueger and Maleckova in “Education, Poverty, and Terrorism: Is

¹⁹ Mark, M., and T. Cook. "Relative Deprivation: When Does It Lead to Anger, Achievement or Disengagement?" *Alternatives* 8, no. 2 (1979): 12-50. Accessed March 22, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/45030106. Mark and Cook’s article is significant to this study because it is among the earlier works discussed here. Their work builds on the foundation of Gurr and Stouffer.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

There a Causal Connection.”²² The argument put forth by Krueger and Maleckova is that any connection between extremism and poverty is limited and tenuous. They believe that though there may be a nexus between poverty and criminality, the data they have viewed does not suggest that terrorism falls under the same umbrella as other forms of crime. This has to do with the fact that their data does not show a correlation between economics and violent crime, though it does show a connection between poverty and property crime. However, there are problems with the data put forth by Krueger and Maleckova as it pertains to right-wing extremism in the US. Krueger and Maleckova note that the data they gathered is “sketchy, incomplete, and possibly nonrepresentative.”²³ It should also be noted that Krueger and Maleckova’s study is from 2003, and considerable research has been done since then, though they continue to be frequently used as a citation. Krueger and Maleckova found no discernible connection between poverty and extremism, though their study focused on international terrorism. They pointed out that terrorism takes place in countries both rich and poor, though this view does away with the notion of relative deprivation by not taking into account socioeconomic factors that may be driving radicalization in wealthy states.

Ambassador David Shinn studied the correlation between poverty and extremism in Africa in “Poverty and Terrorism in Africa.” Drawing upon the vast amount of research conducted since 2001, Shinn noted that drawing a definitive line between poverty and extremism is exceedingly difficult in Africa.²⁴ Poverty is rife, as is repression, corruption, and relative

²² Krueger, Alan, and Jitka Maleckova. “Education, Poverty, and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (2003). <https://doi.org/10.3386/w9074>. As with Neumann, Tarsipan, and Burgoon, Krueger and Maleckova’s work on the terror-poverty nexus is among the most important in this field of study. Their research is mentioned frequently in most studies on this subject, and their findings are difficult to dismiss. While they reside in the school of thought that resists a connection between poverty and extremism, nearly every dissenting scholar references the work done by these authors as significant.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Shinn, Ambassador David. “Poverty and Terrorism in Africa: The Debate Continues.” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 17, no. 2 (2016): 16-22. Accessed March 1, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/26396167. Ambassador

deprivation. Many states in Africa struggle with domestic terror groups within their borders, and the insecurity of these states is preyed upon by international terror groups. Shinn notes that tying poverty to extremism is difficult because in certain cases Africa's poorest nations had fewer violent incidents per year than places like Nigeria, which has one of Africa's biggest economies.²⁵ Additionally, he notes that of Africa's five poorest countries only the Democratic Republic of the Congo has a significant problem with terrorism. Shinn does not explicitly attempt to suggest whether poverty is a significant motivator for radicalization in Africa, rather he points out the complex nature of such an argument. While Shinn states that poverty reduction alone cannot alleviate the issues Africa faces with extremism, he also says that attempts at doing so will return modest gains against extremism, and as such those efforts should be undertaken.²⁶

Piazza, who has consistently argued against the connection between poverty and extremism, argues in "Poverty, Minority Economic Discrimination, and Terrorism," that a significant factor driving extremism may be economic discrimination directed at minorities.²⁷ Piazza undertook this study because of the gap between the two different camps attempting to resolve the issue of poverty and terrorism. In his study, Piazza found that "countries that permit their minority communities to be afflicted by economic discrimination make themselves more vulnerable to domestic terrorism in a substantive way."²⁸ Additionally, and importantly for the research study undertaken in this paper, Piazza also found that there are limitations to relying on

Shinn's research on this topic is important because his findings do not fit neatly into one side of this argument or the other. Much like the findings of Bhatia and Ghanem, Shinn adds nuance and depth to this debate.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Piazza, James A. "Poverty, Minority Economic Discrimination, and Domestic Terrorism." *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 3 (2011): 339–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310397404>. Piazza is important to this debate because he weighs heavily on the side of those that do not believe in the poverty-terrorism nexus. This can be seen in the way that he is mentioned in nearly every other article in this literature review. This particular study is interesting because it implies that economic issues in minority communities can lead to radicalization.

²⁸ Ibid.

aggregate country indicators to determine which countries are most likely to experience terrorist activity. Piazza states that this means that since researchers are studying small, marginal groups of populations that actually carry out terrorist attacks, it is important to study statistics of those specific groups, rather than those of the entire state.²⁹

Conclusion

There is little consensus amongst scholars as to the connection between poverty and terrorism. As stated above, there are two main schools of thought surrounding the topic, with a clearly defined gap between them. This research study hopes to utilize techniques gleaned from research used in studies from both sides of this argument, while emphasizing the importance of socioeconomic factors in radicalization. Given that this research study will focus on small groups of radicalized individuals who hold right-wing extremist views, I will focus solely on those individuals and their backgrounds, rather than gathering data from the areas in which they lived. This will be done in the hopes of providing a clear picture about the individuals in question, as the above-mentioned literature points to the importance of not generalizing data by looking at statistics from an entire region. By zeroing in on the individuals, it is hoped that a clear and concise picture showing how socioeconomic factors, and relative depravity, acted as factors that pulled these people toward radicalization. I believe that the existing scholarship on this topic shows that the answer to my research question is that poverty does affect radicalization in right-wing extremists, particularly as it pertains to relative deprivation.

²⁹ Ibid.

Hypothesis and Methods

Poverty and relative deprivation play significant roles in the radicalization of right-wing extremists. This hypothesis will be tested by gathering background data on right-wing extremists who have carried out domestic terror attacks in the United States in the past ten years. Data will be gathered from attacks that took place in the past ten years because statistics show that right-wing extremist attacks went from making up 6% of domestic terror attacks to 35% from 2010 to 2016.³⁰ The extremists themselves will be selected by those that have the most detailed and complete profiles on them. Extremists with limited data about their radicalization or whose radicalization pathway is unclear will not be examined. This could limit how representative the sample of this study is, however, it is important that we narrow our focus to confirmed right-wing extremists in order to ensure that we examine appropriate samples. It is also important that the cases studied here have detailed background information available in order to make the examination of their background as thorough as possible.

Upon identifying the major themes of the profiles, a comparative analysis will be conducted to determine the relevance or importance that poverty, economic distress, or relative deprivation played in an individual's radicalization. Determining whether poverty plays an important role in radicalizing right-wing extremists will come from identifying major themes within the background profiles of the selected case studies and determining whether poverty or relative deprivation are consistently important themes in the case studies.

³⁰ Clark, Simon. "Confronting the Domestic Right-Wing Terrorist Threat." Center for American Progress, March 7, 2019. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2019/03/07/467022/confronting-domestic-right-wing-terrorist-threat/>. This article gives details and statistics into the rise of right-wing extremism in the US.

The independent variables of this hypothesis are poverty, relative deprivation, social exclusion, childhood trauma, online presence, and mental health issues, while radicalization is the dependent variable. Radicalization is dependent because, according to my hypothesis, it is dependent on the six independent variables. The individuals in question and studied over the course of this have already radicalized, as can be seen in the fact that they carried out extremist attacks. Comparative analyses will be used to compare the major themes of each of the extremists examined in this study.

Merriam-Webster defines poverty as “the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions.”³¹ This definition is important to this study because it suggests that poverty is relative. Measuring poverty in an individual can be difficult given the relative nature of the term. Therefore, themes that can be associated with poverty such as homelessness, joblessness, evictions and bankruptcy will be considered indicators of poverty. Additionally, when taking into consideration the term “relative deprivation,” defined above, the relative nature of poverty is dependent on where an individual resides.

Having a job as and a home are probably not enough to suggest that an individual is impoverished, but employment and housing are not enough to rule out relative deprivation. Establishing relative deprivation is more difficult than establishing poverty, therefore much of what this study looks for to prove that an individual experiences, or experienced, relative deprivation is reliant on how the person in question felt. If that individual feels as though their opportunities do not match up with their expectations than it may be said that they are experiencing relative deprivation.

³¹ “Poverty.” Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/poverty>. This definition is used for this research study because it implies that poverty is relative, rather than absolute. What constitutes poverty in one region can be considered relatively wealthy in another, and as such it is important to dive into detail when discussing the subject.

Social exclusion, as a variable in this study, is seen when an individual spends considerable time alone. If, in biographical articles on subjects of this study, an individual displays tendencies that suggest they do not engage with society by spending time with friends, family, or other social engagements, it may be said that the individual in question is experiencing social exclusion.

Childhood trauma can be seen in individuals in this study when they experience physical, psychological, or sexual abuse as children. This can be seen in reports of abuse from parents, caregivers, or other family members. Indicators that an individual was raised in a violent home, as seen in incidents of violence in the home, suggest that the individual in question experienced childhood trauma. Additionally, it can be seen in reports from mental health experts, family doctors, or other professionals who may have dealt with the individual at the time.

In this study, the variable “online presence” does not mean that an individual simply spent time on the internet. Rather, in this case, online presence means that a subject spent time online engaging with radical, right-wing extremist sites, individuals on those sites, and/or contributed to posts that suggested radical ideology. If it is discovered that a subject of this study spent time posting to extremist social media sites such as Gab, 4chan, or 8chan, it can be said that they meet the criteria for “online presence.”

The independent variable, mental health issues, is observable in subjects of this study when biographical information on the subjects mentions mental health diagnoses by mental health professionals. This can be seen in some of the individuals in this study over the course of their lives. Whether the individuals have diagnoses from the time they were children, or during adulthood, they meet the criteria for mental health issues as an independent variable.

Data

The data used in this research study was derived from news reports and previous research conducted on the individuals in question in this study. The news reports were used primarily to gain data about the attack, or attacks, carried out by the individual in question, as well as to provide brief background information. Previous research articles were used to build a more thorough understanding of the profile and background of each extremist, and then used to establish major themes in the radicalization of each extremist. Lengthier news articles, such as those from the New York Times and Washington Post, were also used to build well-rounded backgrounds of the extremists studied here. It should be noted that the more recent cases studied here have fewer research available on what drove their radicalization, whereas those who carried out their attacks years ago typically have more information available as they have been studied fairly extensively.

The data gathered from the sources of each individual is summarized in a Yes/No Chart for each case. Major themes identified in each case study are presented and a “Yes” or “No” is given to each major theme as an indicator of whether that theme was present in the data examined for each individual.

Table 1

Theme	Yes/No
Poverty	No
Relative Deprivation	No
Social Exclusion	Yes
Childhood Trauma	No
Online Presence	Yes
Mental Health Issues	No

Patrick Crusius, killed 20 people in a Walmart in El Paso in 2019.³² His father was a mental health therapist, and Crusius lived with his grandparents in Allen, Texas while he attended a local junior college.³³ According to a New York Times article, the path that led Crusius to radicalization is one that was directed primarily by the internet.³⁴ In a violent manifesto posted just minutes prior to Crusius’ attack, he speaks of reverence for recent right-wing extremist attacks, particularly the Christchurch mosque shooting in New Zealand.³⁵

³² Eiserer, Tanya. “El Paso Shooter Was Anti-Social Loner, Former Classmate Says.” WFAA, August 5, 2019. <https://www.wfaa.com/article/news/local/texas/el-paso/el-paso-shooter-was-anti-social-loner-former-classmate-says/287-010d60d7-f21b-4620-a4d4-062710f8e448>. The profile of Patrick Crusius here seems to be echoed in John Earnest’s case, where a seemingly middle-class young man winds up turning to extremism without the tug of poverty.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Arango, Tim, Nicholas Bogel-burroughs, and Katie Benner. “Minutes Before El Paso Killing, Hate-Filled Manifesto Appears Online.” The New York Times. The New York Times, August 4, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/us/patrick-crusius-el-paso-shooter-manifesto.html>. This article outlines Crusius’ path to radicalization through the internet.

³⁵ Ibid.

Additionally, in a research report titled, “Right-Wing Extremists’ Persistent Online Presence,” the authors discuss Crusius’ use of the social media site 8chan, which is rife with right-wing extremist rhetoric and seemingly a place where those with extremist views can congregate together and express their extreme views with one another.³⁶

In a Washington Post article, “As his environment changed, suspect in El Paso shooting learned to hate,” the authors discuss Crusius’ background beyond his apparent online radicalization.³⁷ Beyond laying the blame on Crusius’ online presence, the authors point to a significant demographic change in the neighborhood that Crusius grew up in as a potential reason for his turn to radicalization. The authors note that Crusius’ neighborhood went from being 80% white to just over 50%, while the number of Hispanic residents of the neighborhood grew exponentially throughout his lifetime.³⁸

Another aspect that may have been crucial in Crusius’ development as an extremist can be seen in the article, “Why Many Mass Shooters are Loners,” in The Atlantic.³⁹ In this article, the author points to social exclusion and loneliness as important factors in Crusius’ radicalization. This theory certainly holds weight, as the implication that loneliness led Crusius to turn to the internet and social media as a place where he could fit in highlights why his online

³⁶ Conway, Maura, Ryan Scrivens, and Logan Macnair. Report. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2019. doi:10.2307/resrep19623. This journal article details the frequent identification of the internet as a radicalizing factor in right-wing extremists.

³⁷ Nevins, Annette, Rachel Chason, Annie Gowen, and Hailey Fuchs. “As His Environment Changed, Suspect in El Paso Shooting Learned to Hate.” The Washington Post. WP Company, August 9, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/as-his-environment-changed-suspect-in-el-paso-shooting-learned-to-hate/2019/08/09/8ebabf2c-817b-40a3-a79e-e56fbac94cd5_story.html. This article provides important background information because it details changes in Crusius’ life that contributed to his eventual radicalization.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Khazan, Olga. “Why Many Mass Shooters Are 'Loners'.” The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, August 5, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2019/08/el-paso-shooting-when-loneliness-leads-mass-murder/595498/>. This article sheds light on a commonality shared by many of the subjects of this study, that of social exclusion or isolation.

presence is so significant in other studies into his background. This article, along with the others mentioned above, makes no specific mention or reference to poverty or relative deprivation.

Cesar Sayoc

Table 2

Theme	Yes/No
Poverty	Yes
Relative Deprivation	No
Social Exclusion	Yes
Childhood Trauma	Yes
Online Presence	Yes
Mental Health Issues	Yes

The second individual examined in this study was Cesar Sayoc, a Florida man who sent improvised explosive devices through the mail to prominent Democrats and critics of President Trump.⁴⁰ In an NPR article, it was made clear that Sayoc did struggle with poverty, which was noted by his lack of housing and unstable employment status.⁴¹ However, Sayoc’s radicalization pathway is not entirely clear, and it cannot be stated that poverty was the sole driving factor in his embrace of extremism. Yes, he meets the standards for poverty, but he also struggles with mental health and development issues, which can be seen in the references to his mental health status and his lack of education. Within the NPR article, a former attorney for Sayoc talks about not simply a lack of education, but more prominently a lack of intellect.⁴²

⁴⁰ Romo, Vanessa. “Who Is Cesar Sayoc? Bomb Suspect Has Criminal History, Attacked Democrats Online.” NPR. NPR, October 26, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/26/661183126/pipe-bomb-suspect-cesar-sayoc-had-criminal-history-regularly-attacked-dems-onlin>. Sayoc’s case is pertinent to this study because he seems to be a clear cut example of poverty or relative deprivation impacting radicalization, and yet there is the underlying factor of his steroid use affecting his mental health, making it more difficult to definitively say what role poverty played.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

A New York Times profile on Sayoc further delves into his struggles with mental illness, as well as how that mental illness drove feelings of isolation and paranoia.⁴³ A Business Insider profile of Sayoc also points to mental health issues as a significant driving factor in his radicalization.⁴⁴ While also re-affirming the role steroid usage played in Sayoc's mental state, as noted in the New York Times and NPR articles as well, Choi also points out that Sayoc suffered sexual abuse while in school, a significant development in understanding the major themes of Sayoc's profile.⁴⁵

⁴³ Weiser, Benjamin, and Ali Watkins. "Cesar Sayoc, Who Mailed Pipe Bombs to Trump Critics, Is Sentenced to 20 Years." The New York Times. The New York Times, August 5, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/05/nyregion/cesar-sayoc-sentencing-pipe-bombing.html>. This article outlines Sayoc's struggles with his mental health.

⁴⁴ Choi, David. "Attorneys for Convicted Mail Bomber Cesar Sayoc Claim He Watched Fox News 'Religiously' and Was Influenced by Sean Hannity's Rhetoric." Business Insider. Business Insider, July 22, 2019. <https://www.businessinsider.com/mail-bomb-cesar-sayoc-fox-news-sean-hannity-radicalization-2019-7>. This article is helpful in that it provides details about childhood trauma in Sayoc's life, possibly a significant factor in his radicalization.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Table 3

Theme	Yes/No
Poverty	No
Relative Deprivation	No
Social Exclusion	Yes
Childhood Trauma	Yes
Online Presence	Yes
Mental Health Issues	No

Robert Bowers is a white nationalist who killed 11 elderly Jewish worshipers at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.⁴⁶ This article in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette provides a significant amount of background information into Bowers. Bowers' case is interesting in that the Post-Gazette article shows how a confluence of factors may have contributed to his radicalization. Bowers had a turbulent childhood, as his mother married and divorced twice while he was still quite young, and his presumed birth father committed suicide while he was under investigation for attempted rape.⁴⁷ Additionally, Lord noted that Bowers did not finish high school, and that significantly limited his job opportunities, which suggests that he

⁴⁶ Lord, Rich. "How Robert Bowers Went from Conservative to White Nationalist." Gazette. Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, November 11, 2018. <https://www.post-gazette.com/news/crime-courts/2018/11/10/Robert-Bowers-extremism-Tree-of-Life-massacre-shooting-pittsburgh-Gab-Warroom/stories/201811080165>. Bowers could be another case of poverty or relative deprivation driving radicalization, yet interviews with his former co-workers in this article seem to suggest that he was not always extreme in his beliefs, at least not outwardly. It begs the question as to what changed in his life to push him to act on his extreme beliefs.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

may have experienced relative deprivation.⁴⁸ However, because Bowers did not finish high school, he may have known that his opportunities for well-paying jobs would have been limited, and as such he may not have had high expectations which would nullify the relative deprivation argument.

In a New York Times article, Bowers' presence and hate-filled posts on the far-right social media site Gab are examined.⁴⁹ Bowers' social media presence may have played a role in his radicalization, as sites such as Gab, similar to 8chan where Patrick Crusius posted his manifesto, provide an echo chamber for extremist views and inspire extremists to act on those views. Reuters also posted an article about Bowers and his online activity, where it was noted that he was part of anti-Semitic chat groups on Gab.⁵⁰

Another article in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette also pointed out that Bowers felt isolated, another major theme expressed in the other case studies here.⁵¹ However, while social isolation and an online presence seem to have contributed to the radicalization of Robert Bowers, the data examined here does not definitively point to poverty or relative deprivation as major themes in his radicalization. There is no mention of Bowers being homeless or jobless, and though he certainly was not a wealthy man, there is not enough evidence to say that he was impoverished or

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Roose, Kevin. "On Gab, an Extremist-Friendly Site, Pittsburgh Shooting Suspect Aired His Hatred in Full." The New York Times. The New York Times, October 28, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/28/us/gab-robert-bowers-pittsburgh-synagogue-shootings.html>. Roose provides information that shows how Bowers engaged in hateful rhetoric online, and how the echo chamber of Gab may have helped drive his radicalization.

⁵⁰ Renshaw, Jarrett. "Who Is Robert Bowers, the Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooting Suspect?" Reuters. Thomson Reuters, October 29, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pennsylvania-shooting-suspect/who-is-robert-bowers-the-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting-suspect-idUSKCN1N10S6>. Renshaw's article provides more detail about Bowers' online activity, and specifics about the chats he was engaged with.

⁵¹ Lord, Rich, and Scott Mervis. "A Violent Culture? The Roots of Radicalization Run Deep." Gazette, October 24, 2019. <https://www.post-gazette.com/news/crime-courts/2019/10/24/tree-of-life-synagogue-robert-bowers-white-nationalism-radicalization/stories/201910230002>. This article provides details about Bowers' social exclusion, which is interesting given that other articles also explain how Bowers drifted from being relatively socially engaged to a recluse.

that he struggled with relative deprivation. Therefore, neither of those can be considered major themes.

Table 4

Theme	Yes/No
Poverty	No
Relative Deprivation	No
Social Exclusion	No
Childhood Trauma	No
Online Presence	Yes
Mental Health Issues	No

John Earnest, the 19-year-old right-wing extremist charged with killing one woman and wounding three other people in a synagogue in Poway, California, is the next subject of this research study. A profile of Earnest by the San Diego Union-Tribune points to an individual who had zero apparent struggles with poverty, nor any discernible examples of relative deprivation.⁵²

In a Washington Post article on Earnest’s radicalization, the author spoke of Earnest’s Christianity as playing a role in his radicalization.⁵³ Zauzmer stated that Earnest’s religion

⁵² Grove, Jennifer Van. “Who Is John Earnest, the Suspect in the Poway Synagogue Shooting?” Tribune. San Diego Union-Tribune, April 29, 2019. <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/public-safety/story/2019-04-27/who-is-john-earnest-the-suspect-in-the-poway-synagogue-shooting>. Earnest’s profile in this article is of interest to this study because he seems to share a lot of commonalities with Patrick Crusius, in that both young men were from middle-class families and seemed to have plenty of opportunity in front of them, yet they turned to extremism.

⁵³ Zauzmer, Julie. “The Alleged Synagogue Shooter Was a Churchgoer Who Talked Christian Theology, Raising Tough Questions for Evangelical Pastors.” The Washington Post. WP Company, May 1, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/05/01/alleged-synagogue-shooter-was-churchgoer-who-articulated-christian-theology-prompting-tough-questions-evangelical-pastors/>. Zauzmer’s article is interesting because it sheds light on Earnest’s beliefs and how they may have affected his radicalization. Earnest’s case is intriguing given his background does not suggest that this his is the profile of an extremist of any kind, until we take into account his online presence.

factored into his radicalization which was predicated on anti-Semitism.⁵⁴ Earnest used religious justifications for his desire to kill Jews in his manifesto, though he used other reasoning to explain his views as well. A New York Times article on hate groups in California discussed Earnest's radicalization and noted that he appeared to have self-radicalized.⁵⁵ The article implies that Earnest's radicalization was driven by his online presence in right-wing extremist social media space.⁵⁶ Earnest's radicalization also appears to have happened quickly, with experts saying that it took place over a period of 18 months on 8chan.⁵⁷

Earnest's radicalization does not follow any pattern that most may expect from an extremist. He did not appear to suffer from poverty, he had a stable family life, and he was a student athlete throughout his time in high school.⁵⁸ Additionally, he was enrolled in a local college in a nursing program, where he made the dean's list during his two semesters at the school.⁵⁹ Earnest's case is interesting because there do not appear to be underlying motivators for his radicalization outside of his participation in extremist-filled social media sites. This certainly suggests that more research needs to be done on Earnest's case specifically, as it points to the dangers of the internet in radicalizing young men, as well as to the precarious situation that law enforcement and counterterrorism officials find themselves in while trying to prevent attacks. Earnest did not show signs of radicalization, outside of his online activity. He did not come from

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Dewan, Shaila, and Ali Winston. "In California, Home to Many Hate Groups, Officials Struggle to Spot the Next Threat." The New York Times. The New York Times, April 29, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/29/us/synagogue-shooting-fbi-warning.html>. The idea that Earnest, and many other "lone-wolf actors" self-radicalize is complicated and complex, as it suggests that there are not always obvious indicators that an individual is radicalizing.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ CBS News. "New Details Emerge on California Synagogue Shooting Suspect." CBS News. CBS Interactive, May 1, 2019. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/poway-synagogue-shooting-suspect-john-earnest-was-scholar-athlete-california-state-university-san-marcos-2019-04-30/>. This article is particularly interesting because it provides more evidence that suggests that Earnest was not a troubled youth or one seemingly on his way to radicalization, very unlike many of the other younger subjects in this study.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

a troubled home and was not known to law enforcement prior to his attack. He had no known mental health issues and did not appear to be socially isolated.

Jeremy Christian

Table 5

Theme	Yes/No
Poverty	No
Relative Deprivation	No
Social Exclusion	No
Childhood Trauma	No
Online Presence	Yes
Mental Health Issues	Yes

Jeremy Christian stabbed three people on a Portland train in May 2017, after he was confronted for directing a hate-filled rant at two teenage girls.⁶⁰ Christian's profile resembles that of Cesar Sayoc somewhat, where a history of mental health issues may have played a significant role in his radicalization.

Though poverty is not specifically mentioned in this article, references to Christian's job history, or lack thereof, and the fact that he lives with his mother, suggest that he lacked personal financial stability.⁶¹ Additionally, Christian has a significant criminal record, and not for petty crimes either. He spent eight years in prison for armed robbery, and the Vespa article states that a significant portion of that time was spent in solitary confinement.⁶²

⁶⁰ Vespa, Maggie, and Mila Mimica. "Who Is Jeremy Christian?" KGW, January 26, 2020. <https://www.kgw.com/article/news/local/who-is-jeremy-christian/283-4f2e6a6c-324f-466e-8175-4e257569e782>. Christian's case is particularly interesting study because it could very well be a prime example of poverty or relative deprivation driving radicalization, yet on its own, it is not quite definitive enough to declare that. It hints at the complexities of this issue.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

An article from a local Portland news organization points to troubling brushes with the law by Christian after his release from prison, including violations at a halfway house, stealing a firearm from a residence, and an incident on Facebook where he threatened to kill a woman on Facebook and threatening to kill then-US Attorney General Jeff Sessions.⁶³

A Washington Post article noted that Christian frequently posted racist messages to his Facebook, as well as posts praising Timothy McVeigh.⁶⁴ However, Christian's lawyers pointed to his behavior and criminal history as evidence of a steady mental health decline⁶⁵. While Christian was found guilty of first-degree murder and is currently awaiting sentencing, questions about the role his mental health played in his radicalization remain.⁶⁶

⁶³ Costello, Ian. "Here's What We Know about Jeremy Christian's History." KOIN.com, January 21, 2020. <https://www.koin.com/max-attack-trial/jeremy-christian-background/>. Christian's history is littered with criminality and violence.

⁶⁴ Shepherd, Katie. "Two Dead Heroes and a Stabbing on a Train: Hate-Crime Trial Forces Portland to Reckon with Its Dark Side." The Washington Post. WP Company, January 23, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/01/23/portland-trial-hate/>. This article sheds more light on Christian's history, including defense arguments raised by his lawyers regarding his mental health.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Lambert, Hannah Ray. "Jury Unanimous Again on Jeremy Christian Sentencing Factors." KOIN.com, February 28, 2020. <https://www.koin.com/max-attack-trial/jeremy-christian-sentencing-hearing-enhanced-factors-jury-deliberations-02272020/>. This article also references Christian's mental health and its impact on his trial.

James Fields

Table 6

Theme	Yes/No
Poverty	No
Relative Deprivation	No
Social Exclusion	Yes
Childhood Trauma	Yes
Online Presence	No
Mental Health Issues	Yes

James Fields drove a car into a crowd of protestors during the unrest surrounding a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017.⁶⁷ Fields drove his car directly into a crowd of counter protestors, killing Heather Heyer and injuring 19 other people. The article referenced above includes quotes from Fields' aunt, who said that Fields had trouble making friends as a child, which suggests he was socially isolated.⁶⁸ The same article provides quotes from Fields' teachers who noted that he was a troubled child and misguided.⁶⁹ While this is not enough to say that Fields experienced childhood trauma, it does seem to paint a picture of someone who was something of a loner, and isolated. Furthermore, Fields' teachers stated that he expressed an interest in Nazi ideology, something they found particularly troubling.

⁶⁷ Bromwich, Jonah Engel, and Alan Blinder. "What We Know About James Alex Fields, Driver Charged in Charlottesville Killing." The New York Times. The New York Times, August 13, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/us/james-alex-fields-charlottesville-driver-.html>. This article offers pertinent details about Alex Fields and his life leading up to his attack in Charlottesville. Much like any number of other individuals in this study, he seems to have been a loner and kept largely to himself.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

“The Road to Radicalism in Charlottesville” delves into Fields’ past and brings to light evidence that his troubled childhood actually had the telltale signs of an individual with mental health concerns.⁷⁰ That article says that Fields’ mother repeatedly called the police on him because he was physically violent toward her, including one time when he threatened her with a 12-inch knife.⁷¹ Additionally, one of Fields’ high school teachers said that Fields confided in the teacher a schizophrenia diagnosis.⁷²

In an NPR profile of Fields, conducted after he was found guilty of killing Heather Heyer, stated that Fields found a sense of community on social media, where extreme statements garnered him attention.⁷³ This suggests that the internet played some role in Fields’ radicalization, though it is difficult to say just how significant that role was, given that the other articles mentioned above make no mention of Fields’ online presence.

⁷⁰ Ioffe, Julia. “The Road to Radicalism in Charlottesville.” The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, October 12, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/08/charlottesville-radical-terrorism/536973/>. This article is particularly important to this study because it provides an exceptional level of detail regarding Fields’ childhood and his struggles with mental health.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Wamsley, Laurel, and Bobby Allyn. “Neo-Nazi Who Killed Charlottesville Protester Is Sentenced To Life In Prison.” NPR. NPR, June 28, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2019/06/28/736915323/neo-nazi-who-killed-charlottesville-protester-is-sentenced-to-life-in-prison>. This article says that Fields engaged in extremist rhetoric on Twitter, yet does not show as much evidence about the role played by the internet in his radicalization as seen in other subjects of this study.

John Houser

Table 7

Theme	Yes/No
Poverty	Yes
Relative Deprivation	No
Social Exclusion	Yes
Childhood Trauma	No
Online Presence	No
Mental Health Issues	Yes

John Houser shot and killed two women, wounded nine other people, and killed himself in Lafayette, Louisiana in 2015.⁷⁴ The article from the New York Times used to profile Houser paints a harrowing portrait of an individual with extreme views and serious mental health concerns. Mental health issues regarding Houser are mentioned frequently in this article, with most of those incidents also detailing either violence or the threat of it. Also, when taking into account the profile built of Houser by not only his own online content, but by that of people who knew him as well, it is clear that he was perceived as something of a loose cannon.⁷⁵ Additionally, another New York Times article painted a picture of Houser as someone who had

⁷⁴ Robertson, Campbell, Richard Pérez-peña, and Alan Blinder. “Lafayette Shooting Adds Another Angry Face in the Gunmen’s Gallery.” The New York Times. The New York Times, July 24, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/25/us/lafayette-theater-shooting-john-houser.html>. Houser’s case is interesting to this study because it appears to show a steady decline in mental health that, when coupled with financial instability, seems to have driven Houser from cognitive radicalism to behavioral radicalism.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

struggled with mental health for years, as evidenced by the ramblings in his journal.⁷⁶ Likewise, an article in the Washington Post points to Houser's struggles with his mental health as being the likely driver for his radicalization, though they noted that uncovering a deeper meaning or reason for his extremism would be difficult due to the fact that he committed suicide after carrying out his attack.⁷⁷

In terms of references to poverty, or things that may attribute to poverty or relative deprivation, the article mentions struggling finances three times. An NBC News article also described Houser as a "drifter," further suggesting that he was not financially stable.⁷⁸ Houser went bankrupt, lost jobs, had businesses shuttered, and was removed from his own home by court order.⁷⁹

While poverty may have played a role in radicalizing John Houser, it seems that mental health problems plagued him throughout his adult life and that may very well have been more central to his radicalization than was poverty. There is no mention of an online presence of Houser, nor any specific references to his childhood.

⁷⁶ Blinder, Alan. "Chilling Messages in Journal of Louisiana Theater Shooter." The New York Times. The New York Times, January 14, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/14/us/chilling-messages-in-journal-of-louisiana-theater-shooter.html?searchResultPosition=4>. Blinder's article provides details about Houser's personal journal leading up to his attack.

⁷⁷ Wan, William. "Louisiana Town Struggles to Make Sense of Movie-Theater Shooting." The Washington Post. WP Company, July 26, 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/louisiana-town-struggles-to-make-sense-of-movie-theater-shooting/2015/07/26/d05fb002-33c6-11e5-94ce-834ad8f5c50e_story.html. While this article notes Houser's struggles with his mental health, it does not draw larger conclusions about what drove Houser to radicalize.

⁷⁸ Ortiz, Erik, Tracy Connor, and Tom Winter. "Louisiana Theater Shooting: Gunman John Houser 'Disturbed,' Family Said in Docs." NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group, July 25, 2015. <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/lafayette-theater-shooting/louisiana-theater-shooting-gunman-john-houser-disturbed-family-said-docs-n397726>. This article, along with the others on Houser, describes Houser as an exceptionally troubled individual with a lengthy record of violence and mental health issues.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Robert Dear

Table 8

Theme	Yes/No
Poverty	Yes
Relative Deprivation	Yes
Social Exclusion	Yes
Childhood Trauma	No*
Online Presence	Yes*
Mental Health Issues	Yes

Robert Dear killed three people at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs, Colorado in 2015. An article in NBC News details his background, and paints a picture of a man living life on the fringes of society.⁸⁰ His only employment, according to that article, came from ad hoc self-employment, and his living conditions suggested that he did live in abject poverty.⁸¹ Though Dear appeared to have the means to live independently, he did so in ramshackle buildings with little connection to the outside world.⁸²

In a New York Times profile on Dear, the author painted Dear as someone who is troubled and conflicted by inner turmoil that seems to suggest that Dear struggled with mental

⁸⁰ Fieldstadt, Elisha. "Who Is Robert Dear? Planned Parenthood Shooting Suspect Seemed Strange, Not Dangerous, Neighbors Say." NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group, November 30, 2015. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/who-robert-dear-planned-parenthood-shooting-suspect-seemed-strange-not-n470896>. This article provides interesting background information on Robert Dear, as it was written shortly after his attack and provides the opinions of people who knew or lived near Dear, as well as providing details about his life and financial state.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

health issues.⁸³ Dear is someone who is at the same time deeply religious yet was a constant philanderer, having relationships with multiple women while married.⁸⁴ Dear also faced constant trouble with the law, being accused of rape, as well as numerous other episodes of violence.⁸⁵ The New York Times article also noted that Dear struggled financially, and that his financial troubles exacerbated his violent tendencies.⁸⁶ Whether or not those financial problems contributed to Dear's radicalization remains unclear, though they certainly factor into his profile.

An article in USA Today outlines Dear's outbursts after his attack as possible evidence of his unstable mental health.⁸⁷ This includes outbursts from Dear where he stated that he believed unborn babies would greet him in heaven after his death and thank him for carrying out his attack against Planned Parenthood.⁸⁸ Dear also said that he believed that Planned Parenthood clinics across the country were selling baby parts, and though believing in conspiracy theories may not be indicative of mental illness, it certainly causes some pause for thought and suggests that Dear struggled with mental health issues.⁸⁹ Considering Dear's history of violence and his odd behavior on the internet, as well as the above-mentioned mental health questions, it seems as though mental health played a significant role in his radicalization.

⁸³ Fausset, Richard. "For Robert Dear, Religion and Rage Before Planned Parenthood Attack." The New York Times. The New York Times, December 1, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/02/us/robert-dear-planned-parenthood-shooting.html>. Fausset's article details the role religion played in Dear's radicalization, but also details his online presence and anger issues prior to his attack.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Hughes, Trevor. "Planned Parenthood Shooter 'Happy' with His Attack." USA Today. Gannett Satellite Information Network, April 12, 2016. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/04/11/planned-parenthood-shooter-happy-his-attack/32579921/>. This article describes Dear's behavior after he was arrested following his attack, which seems to point to someone with mental health issues.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Vasilogambros, Matt. "What the Planned Parenthood Shooter Wanted." The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, April 12, 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2016/04/planned-parenthood-shooter/477825/>. This article highlights statements made by Dear that suggest he may have mental health issues. Of particular concern are his statements about dead baby parts and being greeted, upon arriving in heaven, by dead fetuses who thank him for killing people who conduct abortions.

Dylann Roof

Table 9

Theme	Yes/No
Poverty	No
Relative Deprivation	No
Social Exclusion	No
Childhood Trauma	Yes
Online Presence	Yes
Mental Health Issues	No

Dylann Roof shot and killed nine people in a church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015.⁹⁰ Roof’s family went through divorce, foreclosure, alleged spousal abuse, and a litany of other concerns during his childhood.⁹¹ These events had a serious impact on Roof’s performance in school, which is why he dropped out of high school after attempting ninth grade twice.⁹² This left Roof with few options as far as jobs were concerned, and though he did hold a job for a time with a landscaping company, he quit that job prior to his attack. Unlike some of the extremists above, Roof had no known mental health issues prior to his attack.

⁹⁰ Robles, Frances, and Nikita Stewart. “Dylann Roof’s Past Reveals Trouble at Home and School.” The New York Times. The New York Times, July 16, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/17/us/charleston-shooting-dylann-roof-troubled-past.html>. Roof’s childhood is very turbulent and, much like that of James Fields, seems to point to an individual vulnerable to radicalization.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

In a Washington Post profile of Roof, the author noted that prosecutors argued that Roof self-radicalized, and that he did so through the internet.⁹³ The New York Times wrote a similar article, discussing Roof's online presence as central to his radicalization.⁹⁴ Roof's case bears similarities to John Earnest's, with some significant differences. Earnest did not have a turbulent childhood, while Roof certainly did. Roof was successful in school, and had opportunities in front of him had he continued in his school work and graduated from college. Roof, on the other hand, had limited opportunities because of his poor performance in school. While Roof's path to radicalization certainly played out on the internet, it seems as though his childhood trauma and unstable home life also played a significant role. There is no mention of poverty nor instances of relative deprivation in the above profiles of Roof, therefore they are not major themes of his radicalization.

⁹³ Berman, Mark. "Prosecutors Say Dylann Roof 'Self-Radicalized' Online, Wrote Another Manifesto in Jail." The Washington Post. WP Company, August 23, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/08/22/prosecutors-say-accused-charleston-church-gunman-self-radicalized-online/>. This article is comparable to that of articles on John Earnest, who is also said to have self-radicalized online.

⁹⁴ Robles, Frances. "Dylann Roof Photos and a Manifesto Are Posted on Website." The New York Times. The New York Times, June 20, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/us/dylann-storm-roof-photos-website-charleston-church-shooting.html>. This article provides examples of Roof's, or what is believed to be Roof's, internet activity where he posts manifestos and pictures with right-wing extremist symbols and slogans.

Frazier Glenn Miller

Table 10

Theme	Yes/No
Poverty	No
Relative Deprivation	No
Social Exclusion	No
Childhood Trauma	No
Online Presence	No
Mental Health Issues	No

Frazier Glenn Miller, an avowed white supremacist, killed three people outside the Jewish Community Center Greater Kansas City and Village Shalom in 2014.⁹⁵ Miller was a prominent white supremacist for decades, and this attack was seen as the culminating event of a life spent in hate. The article from the New York Times detailed Miller’s path to radicalization. It appears as though Miller radicalized while serving as a Green Beret in the US Army.⁹⁶ He was forcibly retired from the Army after his views were made plain to his command.⁹⁷

According to a profile on Miller by the Southern Poverty Law Center, he radicalized in the early 1970s after reading a white supremacist newspaper his father gave him.⁹⁸ Miller has a lengthy criminal history, and created more than one white supremacist group.⁹⁹ In the Southern

⁹⁵ Yaccino, Steven, and Dan Barry. “Bullets, Blood and Then Cry of 'Heil Hitler'.” The New York Times. The New York Times, April 14, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/15/us/prosecutors-to-charge-suspect-with-hate-crime-in-kansas-shooting.html>. This article provides detailed background information on Frazier Glenn Miller, and provides an excellent example of cases where poverty may not be apparent in radicalization, as Miller does not seem to see poverty as a motivating factor for him.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ “Frazier Glenn Miller.” Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/frazier-glenn-miller>. This profile of Miller provides a detailed explanation of his background and history as a white supremacist.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Poverty Law Center profile, Miller explicitly stated that he carried out his attack because he suffered from advanced lung disease and he wanted to carry out an attack before he died.¹⁰⁰

Miller’s profile is one of someone who was radicalized for a long time. There is a dearth of information regarding what initially drove Miller to radicalize, but given that he began to radicalize while in the Army, poverty was not likely a significant factor. Additionally, there is little information available regarding his childhood, he radicalized before the internet was available to civilians, and there are no indicators that he was socially isolated or struggling with mental health issues.

Results

Table 11

Theme	Yes	No
Poverty	3	7
Relative Deprivation	1	9
Social Exclusion	6	4
Childhood Trauma	4	6
Online Presence	7	3
Mental Health Issues	5	5

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Discussion

As the data above shows, poverty may play a role in the radicalization of right-wing extremists. However, poverty alone is not the sole driving factor, nor can it be proven from the data provided here. Each case study varied, in some cases greatly, from one to the next with no two pathways the same. Some, like the cases of Crusius and of Earnest, bear similarities to one another, but also differ in important aspects. Both those individuals came from middle-class backgrounds and were attending college when they carried out their attacks. This points to something other than poverty driving them towards radicalization. Even if we factor in relative deprivation, both individuals were still in school which means that they had yet to attempt to seize the opportunities that lay before them, therefore they could not have known that their expectations were not being met.

The cases examined here in which poverty may have played a role, also had other factors in play. Poverty was only referred to in three of the ten cases studied here. Social exclusion, childhood trauma, online presence, and mental health issues all appeared more frequently as major themes than did poverty. Even when poverty may have played a role in the radicalization of an individual in this study, poverty was not the sole driving factor. For Cesar Sayoc, an individual who was homeless and by most measures impoverished, mental health issues related to steroids may be to blame more so than poverty. Likewise, with Robert Dear, poverty may have played a significant role in his radicalization, but so too did his religious beliefs.

The research conducted here is important because it proves that continued research on this subject must be undertaken. More has to be understood about the radicalization process as

well as the influence of individual factors, such as poverty, on that process in order to create a stronger link between the two, or a stronger case for denying such a linkage.

My hypothesis was not correct in that I was unable to create a definitive connection between poverty and radicalization. Poverty alone may be able to influence radicalization, but seldom will it be the only factor doing so. This makes it difficult to determine just how important poverty is to the process, particularly when there is no evidence of poverty whatsoever. Even when a link between poverty and radicalization seems to exist, there is not enough definitive evidence to prove poverty is a significant motivator to the radicalization process. The case studies above come from individuals from across the US, with great differences and influences in their backgrounds. The sole thing connecting each one to the next is extremism. And, as discussed in the introduction, radicalization is a highly personal process that is different for every person who goes through it. The findings in this study suggest that scholars in both camps of the debate around the poverty-terrorism nexus need to continue to study this problem and elucidate their findings in order to better understand this complex phenomenon.

Conclusion

What I found in the course of this research is that attributing the radicalization of an individual to any one thing is trivial. It is difficult to measure the impact of any one factor on an extremist's decision to radicalize. While poverty may seem to be an easy way to build resentment against a state, or a group of people seemingly responsible for an individual's poverty, most of the world is poor, yet most of the world are not extremists. This ties into a plethora of previous research on this subject, both in studies that support the poverty-terrorism nexus and those who deny it. This study was undertaken to view the problem of American right-wing extremism, and yet the results are as varied as they are for international terrorism, or for regional terrorism in other hot spots around the world.

One of the underlying themes seen in the majority of the cases studied here is the power of the internet as a force multiplier when it comes to radicalization. The majority of individuals in this study were described as loners, and oftentimes they had outsized profiles on the internet and social media. This might suggest that the internet plays a larger role in radicalization than does poverty, and that may be something that future research can focus on. In order to better understand radicalization, we need better profiles of the individuals who radicalize. I think there is a natural repulsiveness towards individuals who carry out such horrific attacks, and we are all too eager to distance ourselves from them. However, I believe that much like the study of the Holocaust provides us with a better understanding of human nature and how sane human beings are capable of such horrible things, so too does a better understanding of radicalization. If we can better see what factors drive radicalization, we can arguably do more to disrupt those factors.

Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that we continue to study this phenomenon and develop practical solutions or policy implications in order to diminish the effects of radicalization.

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Curriculum Vita

Caleb Taylor was born at Bridgeton Hospital in Bridgeton, New Jersey on December 3, 1990. Upon graduating from Bridgeton High School in June 2009, Caleb joined the United States Marine Corps and served as a rifleman until August 2014. Following his discharge from the Marine Corps, Caleb enrolled in Stockton University in Pomona, New Jersey. While attending Stockton, Caleb majored in Liberal Studies in order to focus on Middle Eastern Studies, as the school had no degree in that field. Majoring in Liberal Studies allowed Caleb to create his own degree plan, enabling him to take classes in a diverse array of fields. Caleb graduated from Stockton University with a Bachelor of Arts in May 2018.

Following his graduation from Stockton University, Caleb enrolled at Johns Hopkins University's Global Security Studies MA program in January 2019. While studying at Johns Hopkins, Caleb has researched and written about right-wing extremism in the United States, the radicalization of right-wing extremists in Europe, Islamist extremism in East Africa, the implementation of communications technology during World War One, how the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s allowed the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps to rise to prominence as a political powerhouse in Iran, as well as a multitude of other topics.