

Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS)

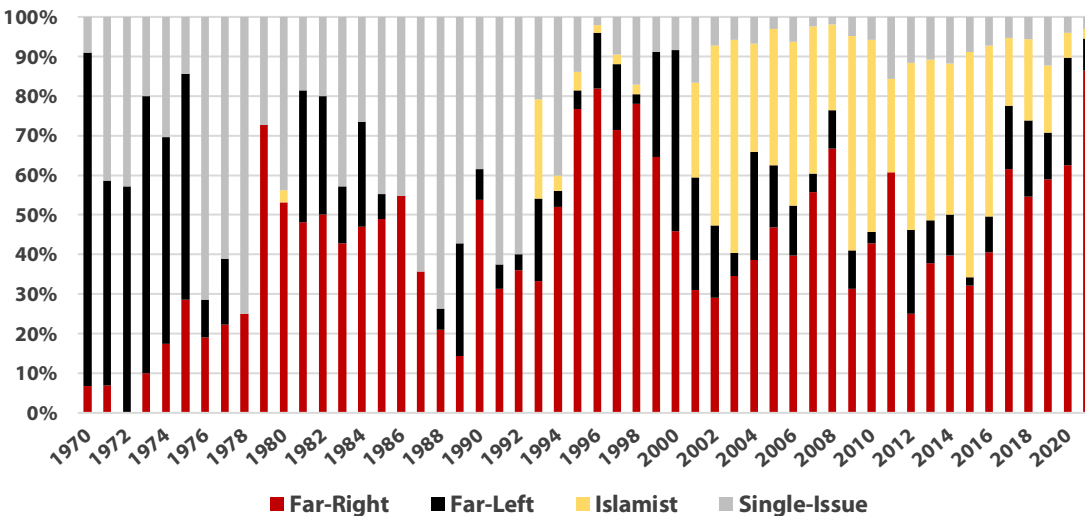
PROJECT OVERVIEW

Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) is a database of 3,203 Islamist, far-left, far-right, and single-issue extremists who have radicalized to violent and non-violent extremism in the United States from 1948 through 2021. This update adds 955 subjects to the database who were charged with committing extremist crimes in the United States from 2019-2021.¹ The database is freely available for download on START's webpage at <https://www.start.umd.edu/profiles-individual-radicalization-united-states-pirus-keshif>. The analysis for this research brief draws on the full dataset and illustrates the important differences that exist across ideological groups and highlights recent trends in the data.

COMPARING IDEOLOGICAL GROUPS

The PIRUS data can be used to explore the radicalization trajectories of individuals from far-right, far-left, Islamist, and single-issue ideologies.

Extremism in the United States by Ideology as a Percentage of Overall Cases, 1970-2021



Note: Graph above displays year of exposure of each individual in PIRUS by ideology. Exposure is most commonly the time at which an individual is arrested for or commits an ideologically motivated illegal act.

The data show that radicalization in the United States has generally occurred in several waves.

These waves roughly correspond to the rise of far-left extremism in the 1970s, far-right extremism beginning in the 1980s, and Islamist extremism after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Since 2016, there has been a pronounced increase in far-right extremism in the United States.

Far-right extremists make up the largest ideological group in the database (n=1678), followed by Islamist extremists (n=579). The remainder of the individuals in the data are far-left extremists (n=537) or individuals in the "single-issue" category (n=409), whose beliefs vary, but include anti-abortion extremists, Puerto Rican nationalists, and members of the Jewish Defense League.

2021 PIRUS data continued to show a decrease in the number of individuals inspired by Salafi Jihadism, with only 10 cases. That is down from 22 in 2020 and 36 in 2019.



¹ These subjects include 219 individuals who were arrested in 2021 on charges related to the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol building. To avoid introducing significant bias into the PIRUS data, we decided to only include Capitol riot defendants arrested in 2021 who have known links to extremist groups and movements.

Far-Right Extremists

The PIRUS data show that, on average, far-right extremists tend to be older, have lower rates of college experience, and higher rates of military experience and pre-radicalization crime than other types of extremists.

Far-Left Extremists

Far-left extremists tend to be young and well educated and are significantly more likely to be female than far-right, Islamist, or single-issue extremists.

Islamist Extremists

Islamist extremists tend to be young and male and show high rates of internet radicalization.

	Far-Right	Far-Left	Islamist	Single-Issue
Age at Public Exposure (mean)	37.3	29.8	28.7	35.5
% Female	7.3%	26.1%	7.6%	11.7%
Low Education (no college)	47.1%	27.8%	41.9%	27.1%
Unemployed	20.9%	19.2%	23.8%	16.9%
Married	36.1%	18.8%	34.5%	43.5%
Military Experience	25.3%	9.9%	8.1%	18.4%
Criminal History	48%	32.2%	32.5%	29.6%
Internet Radicalization (since 2005)	94.3%	98%	95%	88.5%
Evidence of Mental Illness	20.7%	12.9%	18%	14.9%

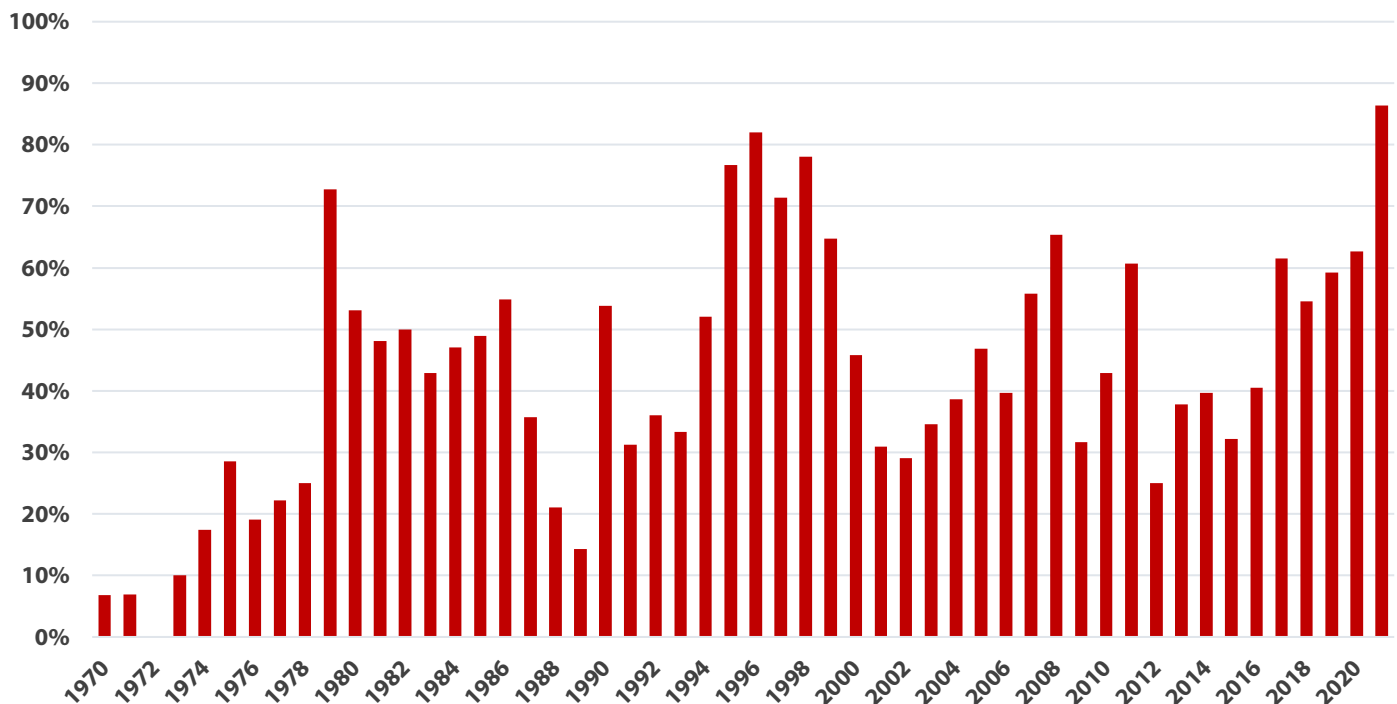
Single-Issue Extremists

Single-Issue extremists are comparable to their far-right counterparts on measures of age, gender, and military service, but tend to be better educated and have lower overall rates of pre-radicalization crime.

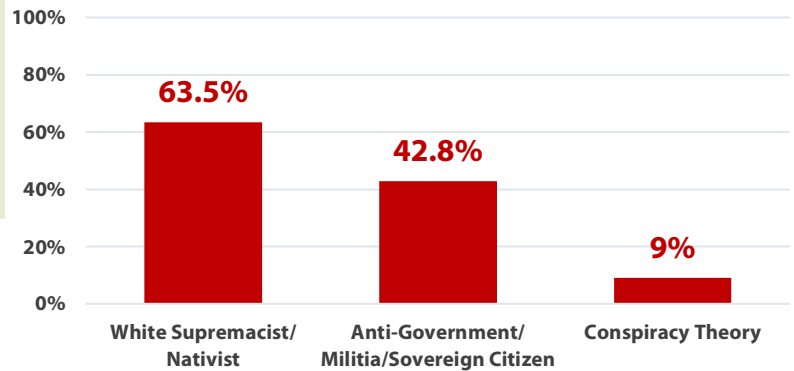
Far-Right Extremists in the United States, 1948-2021 (N=1678)

Far-right extremism is the single largest ideological category in PIRUS, making up 54.2% of all cases in the data.

Per Year Percentage of Subjects in PIRUS Classified as "Far-Right," 1970-2021



The PIRUS data also capture the sub-ideological affiliations of U.S. offenders, showing both distinct and overlapping views within domestic extremist movements.



Note: Chart reflects the percent of far-right extremists in PIRUS who are associated with specific sub-ideologies. Individual extremists may be coded for up to three sub-ideologies and thus the total percent of cases does not equal 100.

Among far-right extremists, the majority (63.5%) demonstrated some expression of white supremacism or nativist extremism. Many of these offenders expressed the view that people of European descent (typically Christians and especially men) are inherently superior to others and should therefore dominate social, political, and cultural institutions.

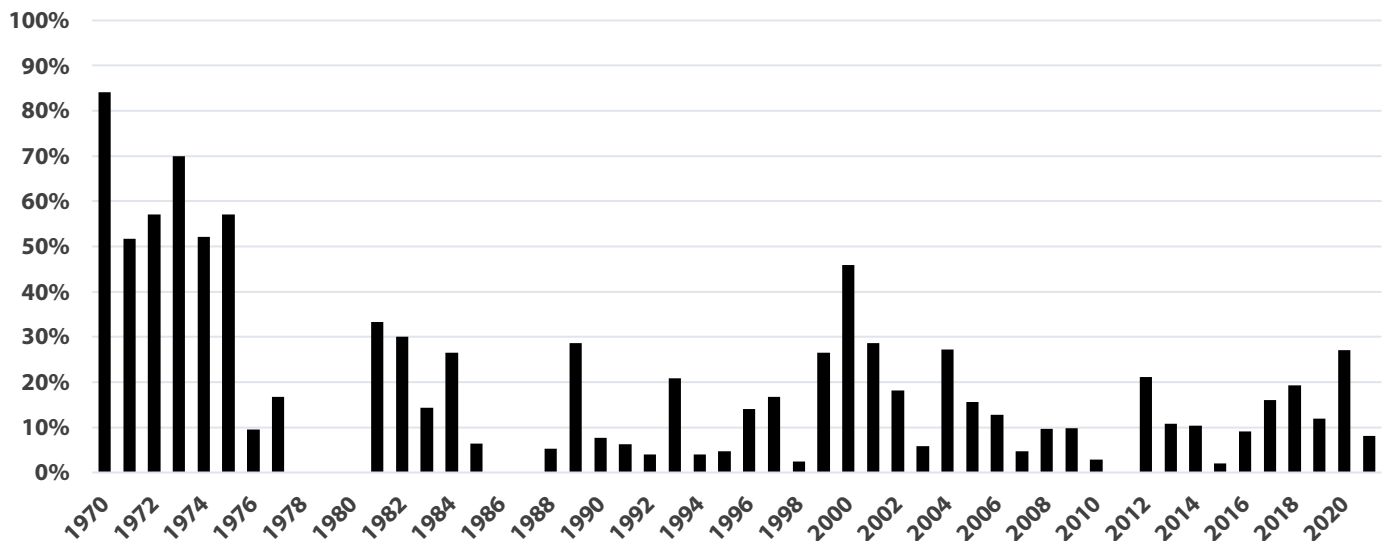
Nearly 43% percent of the far-right extremists in the PIRUS database were members of the Sovereign Citizen movement, anti-government militias, and/or expressed anti-government views. While some anti-government extremists in PIRUS also subscribed to racist, nativist, and anti-Semitic views, others were motivated by a belief that the federal government lacks legitimate governing authority and they worked actively to disrupt the enforcement of tax, land, traffic, and weapons laws.

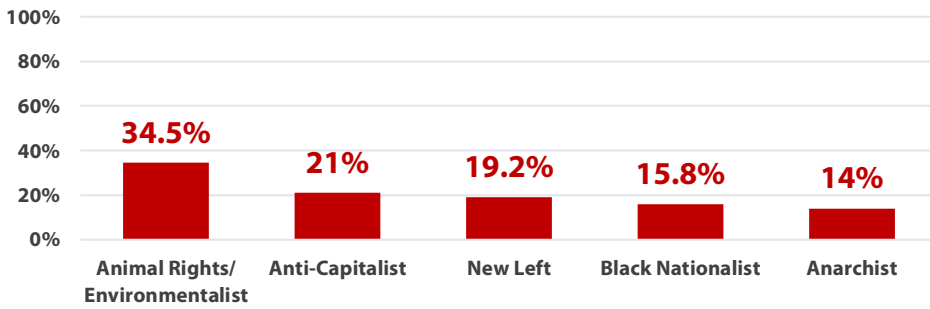
Approximately 10% of the far-right extremists in PIRUS were motivated by recent conspiracy theories. While most extremist movements promote conspiracy theories, over the past five years there has been a pronounced increase in offenders motivated by conspiratorial beliefs tied to QAnon, 5G technology, and the anti-vaccination movement.

Far-Left Extremists in the United States, 1948-2021 (N=537)

Far-left extremists make up 16.8% of all offenders in PIRUS; although, a large percentage of these cases are tied to the "New Left" movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Per Year Percentage of Subjects in PIRUS Classified as "Far-Left," 1970-2021





Note: Chart reflects the percent of far-left extremists in PIRUS who are associated with specific sub-ideologies. Individual extremists may be coded for up to three sub-ideologies and thus the total percent of cases does not equal 100.

Traditionally, far-left ideologies in the U.S. have been oriented around an opposition to capitalism, as well as racial, gender, and other inequalities.

Black Nationalists and "New Left"

Beginning in the 1960s and through the 1980s, the Black nationalist and "new left" movements dominated the far-left. Some members of these groups advocated for violence and other illegal activities to advance specific political agendas, including opposition to the Vietnam War and support for Black separatism.

Animal Rights and/or Environmentalist

However, beginning in the 1980s, far-left extremists were increasingly motivated by animal rights and/or environmental concerns. Animal rights and extremist environmentalists comprise the largest far-left group in PIRUS (nearly 35%).

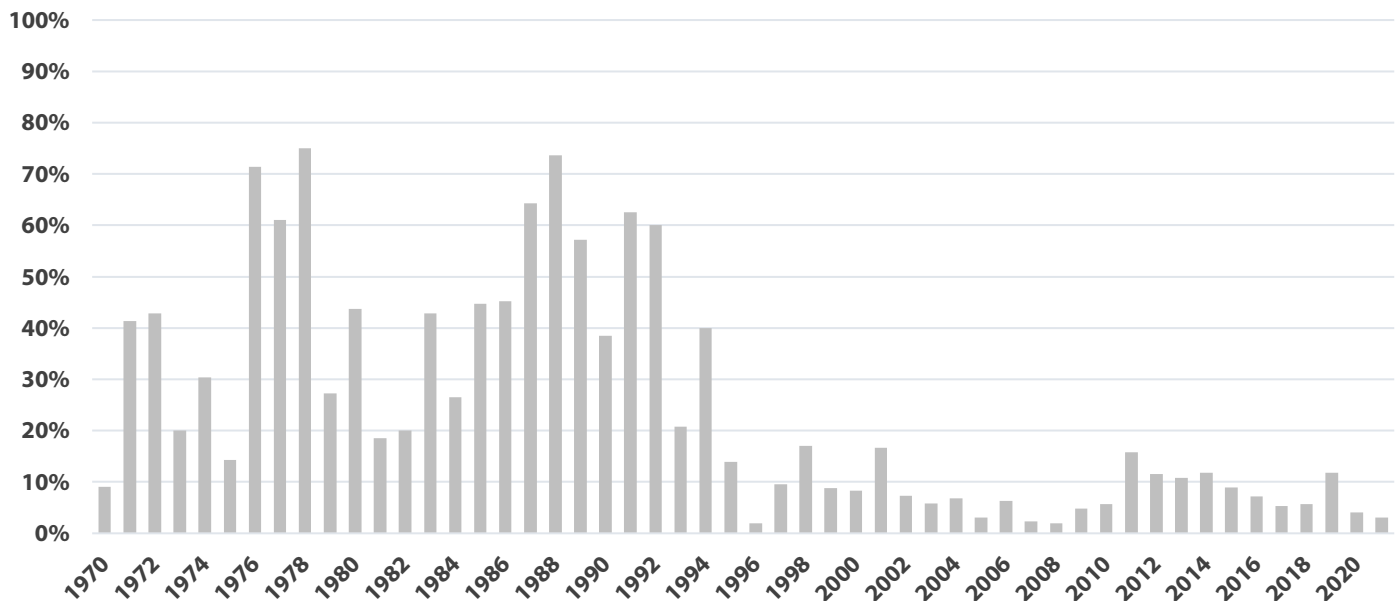
Anarchist

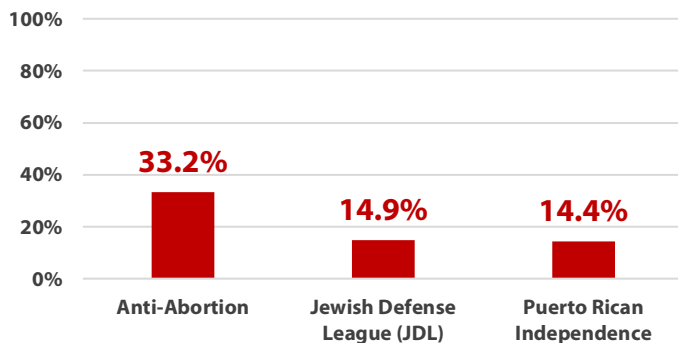
Anarchist movements, which generally argue that state power is oppressive and advocate for voluntary, collective social arrangements, make up 14 percent of total far-left cases in the PIRUS data. However, in 2021, the number of anarchists in the data, which includes anti-fascist extremists, grew to 53 percent of all far-left cases for the year.

Single-Issue Extremists in the United States, 1948-2021 (N=409)

Single-Issue extremism is the smallest ideological category in PIRUS, making up just 12.8% of all cases.

Per Year Percentage of Subjects in PIRUS Classified as "Single-Issue," 1970-2021





More than 400 of the subjects in PIRUS were motivated by views and grievances that do not fit neatly into traditional conceptions of far-right or far-left extremism.

Anti-Abortion Extremism

Approximately one-third of the subjects in PIRUS who are coded as single-issue extremist offenders were motivated by their opposition to abortion in the United States. More than half (56.3%) of the anti-abortion offenders in PIRUS committed crimes between 1985-1995 at the height of the anti-abortion movement. While it is not uncommon for anti-abortion offenders to also promote the views associated with white supremacy and Christian Identity extremism, those who are coded as single-issue in PIRUS did not espouse the racist or anti-government views that are traditionally associated with the extremist far-right.

Jewish Defense League (JDL)

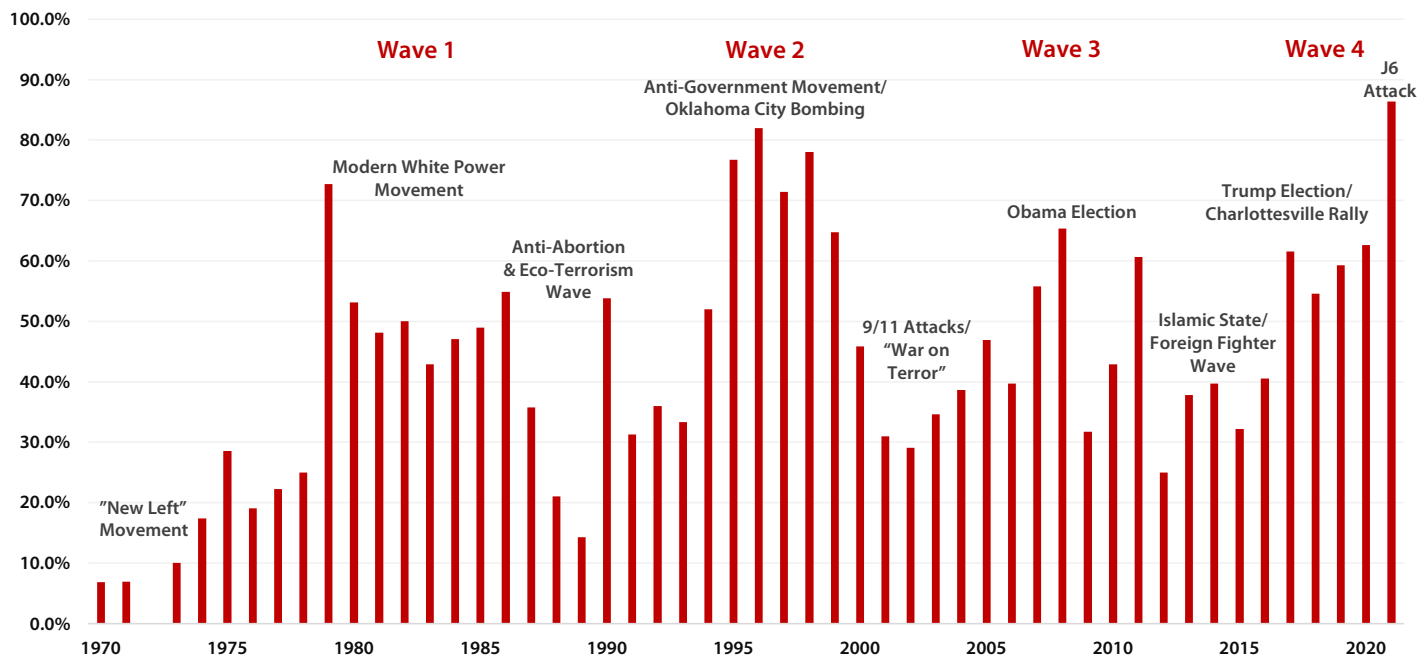
Approximately 15% of the single-issue subjects in PIRUS were members of the Jewish Defense League, which was active in the United States from the early 1970s through the mid 1990s. The JDL members in PIRUS waged a campaign of property crime and violence against targets that the group deemed to be hostile to Jewish communities around the globe.

Puerto Rican Independence

Active predominantly in the 1970s and 1980s, the Puerto Rican independence movement spawned numerous groups and individuals who engaged in acts of property crime and violence in pursuit of their goals. Approximately 14% of the single-issue extremists in PIRUS were associated with Puerto Rican independence groups, such as the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN).

RECENT TRENDS: THE RISE IN FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM

Four Waves of Far-Right Extremism, 1970-2021



Note: Columns show the percentage of offenders in PIRUS who are classified as "far-right" by year from 1970-2021.

The PIRUS data demonstrate a significant increase in far-right criminal activity in recent years.

In 2015, when extremism inspired by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) was at its peak, far-right subjects made up just 32.2% of the offenders included in the data for the year. In 2021, nearly 90% of the offenders included in PIRUS were affiliated with the extremist far-right—the highest percentage of any year recorded in the database.

RECENT TRENDS: MOST ACTIVE GROUPS AND MOVEMENTS

From 2019-2021, extremist offenders in the United States were associated with 165 unique domestic extremist groups and movements and international terrorist organizations. More than 75% of offenders who committed extremist crimes between 2019-2021 were affiliated with at least one extremist group or movement. Nearly 20% of the offenders had links to more than one extremist group or movement.

During this period, more U.S. extremist offenders were connected to the QAnon conspiracy theory than any other extremist group or movement. The conspiracy theory, which falsely claims that former President Donald Trump is combating a network of democratic politicians, Hollywood celebrities, and global elites who run a child sex trafficking ring, was promoted by more than 125 offenders who committed extremist crimes in the United States from 2019-2021.

During this period, QAnon-inspired subjects committed crimes ranging from vandalism to kidnapping to homicide and were responsible for nine victim deaths and two injuries.

However, most (85) of the QAnon-inspired offenders in PIRUS were arrested in 2021 for participating in the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol. Given the unprecedented nature of the Capitol attack, defendants facing charges for the events of

The current trend in increased far-right activity, which began in 2016, continues a wave-like pattern in the data.

Beginning in the 1980s with the emergence of the modern white power movement, the data show successive periods where actors on the far-right make up the majority of the offenders in the PIRUS data. Periodic declines in far-right crime, which likely reflect changing law enforcement priorities as much as they do real declines in far-right activity, are present in the data and correlate broadly with the emergence of the anti-abortion movement and ecoterrorism in the 1980s, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and subsequent “global war on terrorism,” and the foreign fighter phenomenon linked to ISIL. Each of these periods of decline lasted only a few years, giving way to a reemergence of far-right extremist crime that far out-paced the illegal activities associated with other domestic and international extremist movements.

January 6th make up disproportionate numbers of the offenders associated with several other domestic extremist groups, including the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and Three Percenters. For example, between 2019-2021, more than 100 Proud Boys offenders were charged for committing crimes in the United States. Of these, 79 (77.5%) were arrested in 2021 on charges related to the Capitol breach.

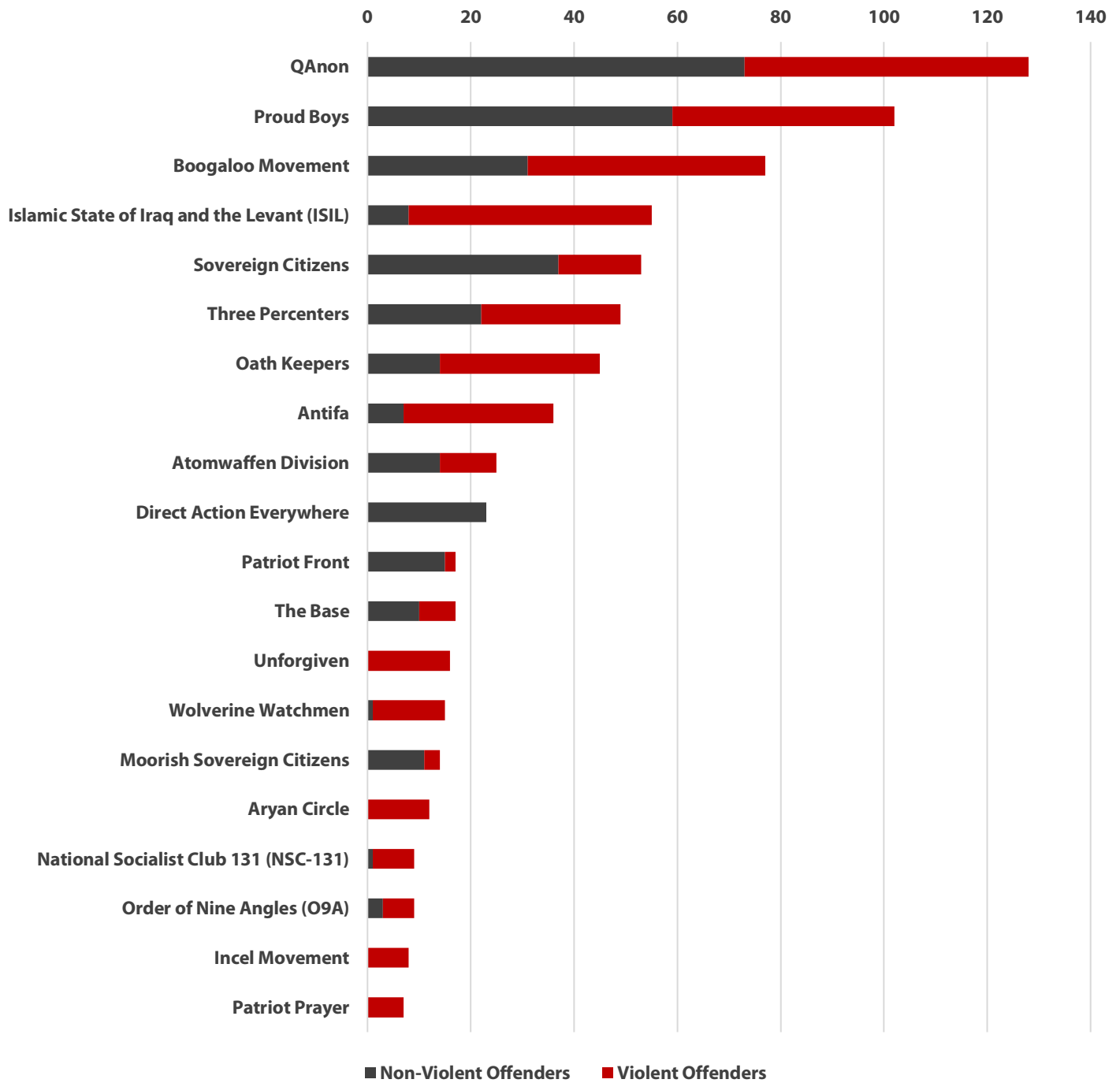
Offenders associated with the Boogaloo Movement were the most active between 2019-2021 when the Capitol attack is removed from consideration. Of the 77 Boogaloo subjects who committed crimes between 2019-2021, only one was charged in relation to the Capitol attack. The remaining 76 offenders committed crimes ranging from illegal weapons possession to conspiracy to commit kidnapping to homicide.

Two far-left movements—Antifa and Direct Action Everywhere—were among the most active in terms of extremist offenders from 2019-2021, while one other—Moorish Sovereign Citizens—is classified as single-issue.

Subjects inspired by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) remained active from 2019-2021, with 55 committing criminal offenses in the United States. However, this figure represents a sharp decline from the previous three-year period from 2016-2018 when more than 100 offenders were inspired by, or connected to, the group.

From 2019-2021, 75% of the 20 most criminally active groups and movements in the United States came from the extremist far-right. Seven of the top 20 groups are white supremacist organizations.

Number of Offenders by Group/Movement and Criminal Severity, 2019-2021



RECENT TRENDS: LONE OFFENDERS AND ISOLATED CLIQUES

Percentage of Lone Offenders and Isolated Cliques in PIRUS, by Decade



The PIRUS data reveal a sharp increase in crimes committed by lone offenders and isolated cliques, which are defined as small, interconnected groups of co-conspirators whose plots or crimes were not planned by or committed in concert with organized extremist groups or international terrorist organizations.

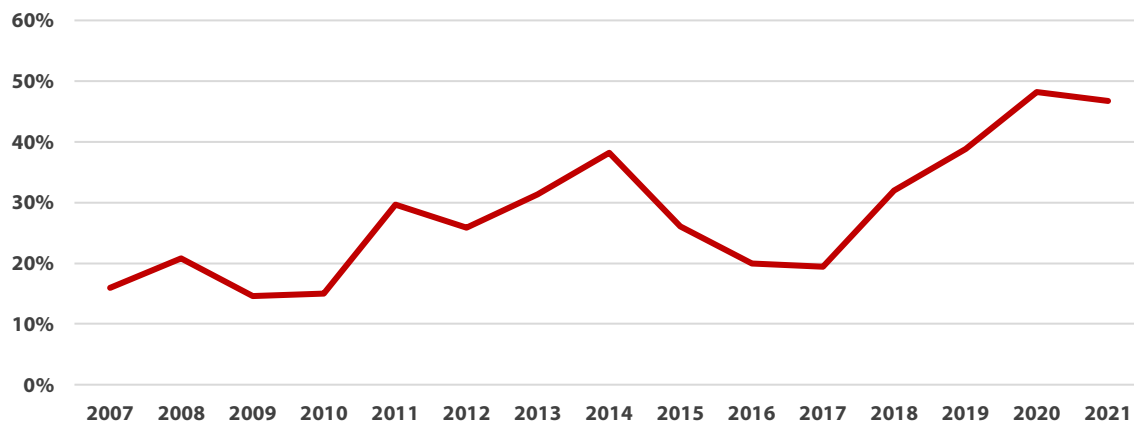
Only 30% of the offenders in PIRUS who committed crimes in the 1970s and 1980s were lone offenders or members of cliques. By comparison, more than 70% of offenders in PIRUS who committed crimes since 2010 either acted alone or with a small number of isolated co-conspirators.

The increase in small offender groups and lone actors is important because these types of offender dynamics correlate with violence in the PIRUS data. Lone offenders, for example, are 49% more likely to be classified as violent in PIRUS than subjects who have at least one co-offender.

The prevalence of lone offenders in the data is especially pronounced among mass casualty plots, which average just 1.64 offenders per event.

RECENT TRENDS: RADICALIZATION TO MOBILIZATION

Radicalization to Mobilization* in Less than 1 Year



* Measured as the length of time between an individual's first exposure to extremist views and their date of arrest and/or criminal activity.

The PIRUS data demonstrate that extremist offenders in the United States are mobilizing to criminal activity faster than in previous years.

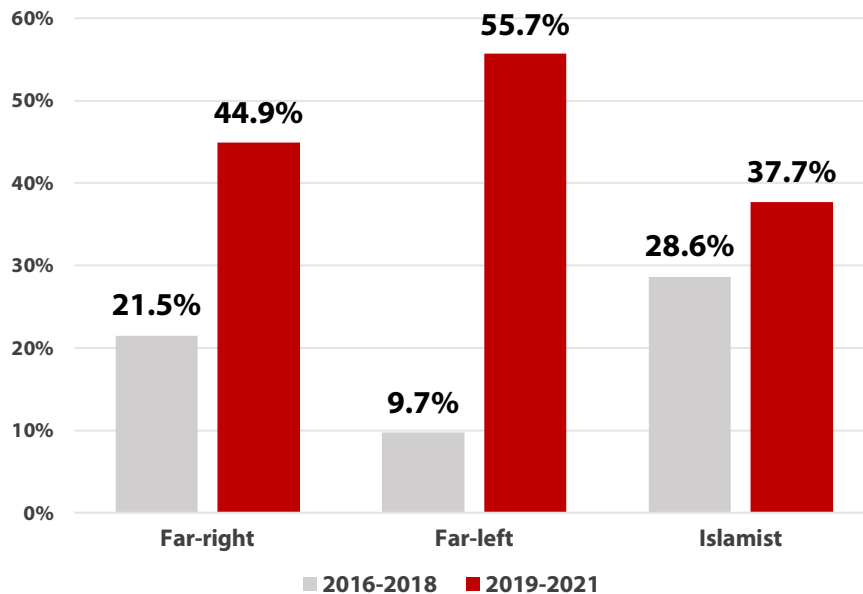
For instance, fewer than 20% of the subjects in PIRUS who committed extremist crimes in 2007 proceeded through the processes of radicalization and mobilization in less than a year. In 2021, nearly 50% of the offenders in PIRUS mobilized in less than 12 months after their initial exposure to extremist views.

The acceleration of radicalization means that violence prevention practitioners and law enforcement are facing shorter windows of opportunity for off-ramping individuals in the pre-criminal space or interdicting terrorist plots before any harm is done.

The acceleration of radicalization processes largely coincides with the explosive growth of online extremist communities and the rapid spread of mis/disinformation on social media.

The sharp acceleration in radicalization among subjects who committed crimes from 2018-2021 correlates with the global spread of the QAnon conspiracy theory, disinformation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and false claims of election fraud in the 2020 U.S. presidential election.

Radicalization to Mobilization* in Less than 1 Year, by Ideology



The PIRUS data show that the acceleration of radicalization among U.S. extremist offenders is not uniform across ideological groups.

From 2019-2021, 44.9% of far-right offenders in PIRUS mobilized in less than 1 year compared to 21.5% from 2016-2018. Similarly, from 2019-2021, 55.7% of far-left extremist offenders mobilized in less than 1 year compared to only 9.7% from 2016-2018. However, there has been a much smaller increase in the speed at which Islamist offenders have moved from radicalization to mobilization in recent years.

ABOUT THE DATASET

PIRUS is a de-identified cross-sectional, quantitative dataset of individuals in the United States who radicalized to the point of violent or non-violent ideologically motivated criminal activity, or ideologically motivated association with a foreign or domestic extremist organization from 1948 to 2021. The PIRUS dataset was coded using entirely open-source material, including newspaper articles, websites (e.g., government, terrorist group, watchdog groups, research institutes, personal information finder sites), secondary datasets, peer-reviewed academic articles, journalistic accounts including books and documentaries, court records, police reports, witness transcribed interviews, psychological evaluations/reports, and information credited to the individual being researched (verified personal websites, autobiographies, social media accounts). PIRUS contains dozens of variables containing information on a wide range of characteristics, including the individuals' criminal activity and/or violent plots, their relationship with their affiliated extremist group(s), adherence to ideological milieus, factors relevant to their radicalization process, demographics, background, and personal histories. The dataset is not limited to a single ideological category, and includes individuals representing far-right, far-left, Islamist, and single-issue ideologies.

PROJECT TEAM

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START

The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) is a university-based research, education and training center comprised of an international network of scholars committed to the scientific study of terrorism, responses to terrorism and related phenomena. Led by the University of Maryland, START is a Department of Homeland Security Emeritus Center of Excellence that is supported by multiple federal agencies and departments. START uses state-of-the-art theories, methods and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics and effects of terrorism; the effectiveness and impacts of counterterrorism and CVE; and other matters of global and national security. For more information, visit start.umd.edu or contact START at infostart@umd.edu.



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