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## Extreme Far-Right Murder-Suicide Attacks in the U.S. and Germany: A Comparative Storyline Analysis

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Extreme Far-Right Murder-Suicide Attacks in the U.S. and Germany: A Comparative Storyline  
Analysis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Sociology

by

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University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in Criminology, 2019

May 2021  
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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## **Abstract**

Despite increasing empirical research on suicide terrorism since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, prior studies have focused primarily on radical Islamic terrorism in non-Western contexts. As a result, less is known about how murder-suicide attacks committed by other ideological movements unfold, particularly the extreme far-right in North America and Europe. Researchers have begun to theorize the social and psychological processes believed to play a role in the radicalization of suicide terrorists. However, the observable, situational processes shaping radicalized individuals when planning, preparing for, and executing suicide terrorism remain underexplored. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify intervention points by comparatively examining American and German extreme far-right murder-suicide attacks using a multi-method storyline analysis approach. Drawing from the criminal events perspective and bounded rationality framework, this study uses data (n=28) from the U.S. Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) and the Database on Terrorism in Germany: Right-Wing Extremism (DTGrwx) to identify the intervention points in planning and preparing for suicide terrorism. The findings from this study have implications for federal, state, and local law enforcement who are responsible for terrorism prevention.

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## Introduction

Suicide attacks remain a prominent concern for counterterrorism and other law enforcement officials as they kill victims with greater efficiency and often result in relatively higher death tolls than other types of politically motivated attacks (Mroszczyk, 2016). The 9/11 terrorist attacks clearly revealed the catastrophic devastation that is possible from suicide terrorism. Nearly twenty years since 9/11, public concern of future attacks in the United States (U.S.) remains heightened (Pew, 2019). Despite the undeniable impact and extreme lethality of 9/11, violent far-right extremists continue to commit more deadly attacks in the U.S. (Gruenewald et al., 2020). The Department of Homeland Security (2020, p. 18) stated that “[a]mong DVEs [Domestic Violent Extremists], racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists—specifically White supremacists (WSEs)—will remain the most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland.” Murderous suicide attacks (hereafter, murder-suicide) have been adopted by some adherents of the extreme far-right across the globe (Koehler, 2020), targeting both citizens and government officials, including law enforcement. Perhaps due in part to their lack of regard for self-preservation, law enforcement across the country have viewed extreme far-rightists as a greater threat to their communities than other forms of politically motivated offenders (Carter et al., 2014).

Prior research has found that, in comparison to Islamic extremists, violent far-rightists who commit murder-suicides in the U.S. are more likely to be younger (under the age of 25) and strongly committed to their extremist ideology (Freilich et al., 2017). American far-right extremists who commit murder-suicides are also more likely to have prior military or specialized training in weaponry, be unmarried, and are generally less educated in comparison to murder-suicide offenders affiliated with Islamic extremism. While the mental states of American

extreme far-right suicide offenders remain elusive and difficult to diagnose, international researchers have found that mental health issues may be a key factor in extreme far-right murder-suicides (Koehler, 2020), suggesting that offenders are attempting to achieve personal significance or lessen the negative effects of stigmatization by engaging in murder-suicides. Although it is widely known that not all terrorists are mentally ill, there are some incidents where mental illness may play a role in terrorism. The debate over whether or not mental health issues can cause an offender to commit a lethal suicide attack is still largely unsettled in the present literature (for more information see Lankford, 2014).

Despite the advances of prior research, there is still much to learn about the nature of extreme far-right murder-suicides in the U.S. and how it compares to other Western nations. In particular, previous studies have largely focused on the attributes, or structure, of extreme far-right murder-suicide events, while largely ignoring the developmental processes and pathways to these deadly encounters. In order to reduce the likelihood of this type of violence and mitigate its consequences, a more holistic understanding of how personal, social, and political grievances are triggered across various environmental contexts during a murder-suicide event is needed. To my knowledge, scholars have yet to examine how environmental cues might shape the decision-making processes of offenders over the course of murder-suicide attacks. Furthermore, how extreme far-right murder-suicide events compare across national contexts, each with their own socio-historical, political, and cultural contexts, has yet to be fully investigated. With advances in digital media communication over the last 30 years, far-right extremism has become an increasingly global movement (Bjørge & Ravndal, 2019). While there is anecdotal evidence that extreme far-rightists can be inspired by others committing violence in other nations, little is known about the similarities and differences in murderous suicide attacks across national

contexts. Therefore, more cross-national research is needed to fully comprehend the evolving nature of these multi-dimensional events and how offenders operate across these varying environments.

The purpose of the current study is to comparatively examine how extreme far-right murder-suicides unfold over situated environments and different national cultural contexts. There may be variances across national contexts in the U.S. and Germany because of differences in national identities, socio-cultural or political histories. Therefore, this study will be guided by the criminal events perspective (Meier, Kennedy, & Sacco, 2001; Miethe & Meier, 1994; Sacco & Kennedy, 2002) and storyline analysis approach (Agnew, 2006) to comparatively examine U.S. and German domestic extreme far-right murder-suicide cases. For this study, I will refer to far-right extremists as those who are fiercely nationalistic, generally hold anti-Semitic and racially charged beliefs, hold anti-government conspiratorial views, and perceive that there is a looming threat to a notion of a White American culture (Freilich et al., 2014). In addition, I will refer to murder-suicide as a form of extremism in which offenders exhibit a readiness to die after participating in an act of violence in an effort to avoid arrest or to increase the publicity of their political agenda.

First, I ask, *how do extreme far-right murder-suicides develop, transpire, and end within situated geospatial and temporal contexts?* Second, I seek to answer, *how do criminal event-level processes of murder-suicides compare across U.S. and German contexts?* By seeking to answer these questions, my study illuminates the structure and processes that constitute murder-suicide events. I will rely on both qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the backgrounds, decision-making, and behavioral processes of extreme far-rightists who engage in

episodes of murder-suicide, paying special attention to how personal or social grievances and mental health disparities can impact judgements.

### ***Socio-Political and Cultural Contexts of U.S. and Germany***

Despite their unique socio-cultural and political histories, particularly in regard to democratic values, the U.S. and Germany have both experienced violent attacks at the hands of ideologically motivated extremists over the last 30 years. The vast majority of these attacks have been committed by far-right extremists. Several far-right murder-suicide offenders in the U.S. have even adapted racist and anti-Semitic belief systems and attempted to replicate the more infamous attacks in German history (e.g., neo-Nazis). For example, some offenders in the U.S. will plan out their attacks on Adolf Hitler's birthday or read excerpts from Hitler's notorious book "Mein Kampf" to help draw inspiration for their own attack.

In one study comparatively examining extreme far-right murders in Germany and the U.S., Parkin et al. (2017) describe some of the major differences in macro-level contexts of the U.S. and Germany, and how such differences might shape the nature of these deadly attacks. In Germany, for instance, much of the violence committed by the extreme far-right stems from a desire by Germans to advance their national identities and eliminate perceived cultural threats, including foreigners and immigrants who are believed to be eroding their national identity. The Berlin Wall that separated East and West Germany came crumbling down in the early 1990s and sparked movement towards unity for German citizens. When the Berlin Wall first opened, approximately one million Germans moved from East Germany to West Germany (Kurthen & Minkenberg, 1995). Immigration and emigration restrictions were lessened or lifted altogether, which placed the national identities of the Germans in flux. In addition to feeling culturally vulnerable by increased immigration, those belonging to extreme far-right movements in

Germany continue to be economically deprived, thereby bolstering their beliefs that immigrants pose a threat to their economic circumstances and general frustration. Since then, far-right political parties have garnered support at the local and state levels largely through the espousing of anti-immigrant sentiment and expressive forms of violence.

Overall criminal activity—violent and nonviolent—towards foreigners also began to increase during the early 1990s (Willems, 1995). Although extreme far-right violence may have peaked in Germany during this time, the attacks never completely subsided. Searching for a national identity and worrying about elevated numbers of immigrants influenced some Germans to adopt extreme far-right beliefs, especially impressionable White males (Watts, 2001). Additionally, there was limited interaction with people from other countries, resulting in increased social acceptance or numbness to xenophobic attitudes. Germans' pride in their country waned as certain aspects of Germany's violent history were censored. Miller-Idriss (2009) revealed that young German working-class citizens turned to extreme far-right beliefs in search for something that would allow them to show pride in being German again.

Minkenber (1994) suggests that far-right movements gain popularity partially due to the shifts in political structures in West Germany (i.e., changing from a socialist authoritarianism to a capitalist democracy). Furthermore, McLaren (1999) found that increases in unemployment, in combination with increases in immigration, resulted in increased xenophobia, ideological grievances, and perceived economical and cultural threats, which result in more adherents to the far-right movement and violence. Similarly, Watts (2001) later found that youth in East Germany are more likely to encourage and support discriminatory practices against immigrants when levels of xenophobia are high and when youth perceive themselves to be threatened by immigrants, both financially and culturally.

The U.S. has also experienced a lasting presence of violent far-rightists over the last 30 years. Extreme far-right violence in America has largely emerged in waves correlating with catalyzing flashpoint events of perceived government overreach, economic instability (e.g., the 2008 Great Recession, an increase in anti-immigrant rhetoric after 9/11, electing a Black U.S. president) and other major political shifts. As a result of these social forces and others, the extreme far-right movement in the U.S. has persisted and serves as a continuous threat to the lives of social minority groups, law enforcement, and other government officials.

Racist neo-Nazi skinhead groups and paramilitary militias both grew in numbers in the early 1990s and 2000s (Potok, 2012). These militias are known for having a contempt for the federal government and other forms of governmental authority. Not all militias are racist, and many are only loosely organized, however, some more militant militia groups adhering to beliefs associated with the Christian Identity movement are especially dangerous (Barkun, 1997; Michael, 2014). The Christian Identity movement suggests that European Caucasians (or Anglo-Saxons) are the superior race, and that Aryans are “God’s Chosen People.” In this movement, non-Whites are considered “mud-people” who were created pre-Adamic. Followers of the Christian Identity movement also claim that Jews are the offspring of Eve and Satan. In addition, followers typically express conspiratorial feelings that the Second Coming of Christ is approaching and that there is a need to prepare for an impending apocalyptic battle against a perceived enemy of Jews, non-Whites, and other corrupted citizens and a tyrannical federal government. These beliefs have led many adherents to subscribe to preparatory survivalist tactics and paramilitary training.

During the 1990s, the U.S. saw an increase in racist skinhead groups when the Christian Identity movement became increasingly melded with neo-Nazi beliefs. Neo-Nazism is a culture

which endorses White supremacy, expresses hatred for ethnic or minority groups, and often shows an admiration for the work of Adolf Hitler. At first, neo-Nazis became involved punk rock music and started dressing in a military type fashion, such as steel-toe boots and shaved heads (Hamm, 1993). These groups eventually turned from primarily focusing on music and fashion to becoming more politically involved. Punk rock morphed into “hate rock” and the bands began to spread messages of White power and anti-Semitic beliefs. Soon after, racist, xenophobic and homophobic belief systems engulfed the music scene, and some groups became violent. The neo-Nazis most likely to engage in violence were working class, young, White males with scant criminal records. In the U.S., violent far-right extremists who commit murder are almost always White males in their 20s (Gruenewald, 2011).

Another key element in the evolution of extreme far-right violence is major political shifts (Parkin et al., 2017). In 1992, the election of a Democratic President, Bill Clinton, increased extreme far-right adherents’ fears that they would lose their Second Amendment right to bear arms. President Clinton imposed new restrictions that made purchasing guns more standardized (e.g., background checks and a 5-day waiting period) and, in 1994, certain types of semiautomatic firearms and ammunition through the Federal Assault Weapons Ban were banned by the passing of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, 1994). These acts increased fears among extreme far-rightists that the federal government planned to systematically strip the public of their guns.

In 2008, America’s first Black president, Barack Obama, was elected. President Obama was also in favor of gun restrictions and attempted to limit the accessibility of purchasing weapons (Frederick, 2016). Moreover, far-right extremists largely rejected President Obama’s election as the result of perceived corruption and a signal to some extreme far-rightists of an

impending race war. Then, in 2016, the election of Republican President, Donald Trump, served to only embolden extreme far-right groups more through the use of harsh anti-immigrant policy and his unwillingness to condemn ideologically motivated violence committed in his name (ADL, 2020; Piggott, 2016). Far-right violence in the U.S. continued to increase during the Trump administration and on January 6, 2021 President Trump’s rhetoric—encouraging his supporters to march to the U.S. Capitol Building to protest the official certification of President Joe Biden’s election win—culminated into Capitol Riots, and the deaths of both civilians and law enforcement officers (Goldwasser, 2021).

It is possible that historical flashpoint events and major political and economic transitions shape the nature of violent far-right extremism, specifically murder-suicides, in unique and discernable ways across Germany and the U.S. One might expect, for instance, that murder-suicide offenders in Germany commit attacks as an expression of commitment to their national identity. Alternatively, murder-suicides may be more often perpetrated in the U.S. in response to a perceived loss of social and political power by White males. A cross-national comparative analysis of far-right murder-suicide events is necessary to uncover potential similarities and differences. Thus, the research questions guiding this study are directly related to how murder-suicide events unfold and how murder-suicides compare in the unique cultural contexts of the U.S. and Germany.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

In the current study, I explore how extreme far-right murder-suicide offenders negotiate personal and social grievances along their violent trajectories and within the contexts of specific social and geospatial contexts. I also address how personal vendettas and mental illnesses can influence the decision-making patterns of offenders. In particular, I consider how the mental

health of murder-suicide offenders shape moral views and the perceived justifications of violence. While in the past researchers have usually either focused on the roles that mental illness *or* social identity play in the furtherance of terrorism, I simultaneously explore both mental illness and potentially relevant social psychological concepts in an attempt to bridge medical and social perspectives of politically motivated murder-suicides.

### ***Bounded Rationality***

I propose that the notion of bounded rationality, which suggests that humans make decisions based on available information, cognitive limits, and time (Cornish & Clarke, 1986; Simon, 1982) may help us to understand the decision-making processes of violent extremists. That is, rather than considering extremists to be insane or behaving in random acts of violence, I posit that it is possible to analyze patterns of violent extremist behavior by considering how their actions and thought processes are bounded by particular constraints. Far-right extremists who choose to carry out murder-suicides must make decisions based on “reasonable” justifications, albeit justifications that only seem reasonable within the context of their personal grievances, cognitive barriers, and perceived need to defend their social group ostensibly perceived to be under imminent threat.

### ***The Structure and Processes of Terrorism Events***

The criminal events perspective (Meier, Kennedy, & Sacco, 2001; Miethe & Meier, 1994; Sacco & Kennedy, 2002), in conjunction with the construction of storyline narratives (Agnew, 2006), can help us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the environmental and situational factors that might influence an offender over the course of an attack. From these combined perspectives, it becomes possible to theorize how environmental factors shape the bounded rationality of offender decision-making (Cornish & Clarke, 1986; Simon, 1982). That

is, the combination of both theoretical components—identity and mental processing—shape the decisions violent extremists made in uniquely situated environments. In other words, the structure and processes of terrorism events are a product of the mental ability of the offender in combination with how they view themselves and the persona that they project.

In some ways, terrorist attacks are akin to criminal activity (LaFree & Dugan, 2004; Smith 1994)—as are mass murders and other forms of targeted violence. Terrorist attacks come to fruition through a series of stages, beginning with the preparatory stage, followed by the transaction stage, and, finally, the aftermath stage which is a direct result of the incident (Meier, Kennedy, & Sacco, 2001; Miethe & Meier, 1994; Sacco & Kennedy, 2002). During each of these event stages, a series of situational factors are presented that may influence offender decision-making. Particular situational factors can play various roles to different degrees in influencing how offenders carry out their attacks.

### ***Social Identity and Terrorism***

Another factor shaping the decision-making of criminals, including violent extremists, as they move through stages of criminal events, is how they view themselves in relation to others present during the attack. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; for the earliest yet non-explicit reference of social identity theory see Sumner, 1906) provides an explanation to how membership in social groups serves to shape an individual's behavior, including one's interactions with groups outside of their own. The theory suggests that an individual's social identity is developed by perceived membership to a relevant social group. Individuals often form strong connections with social groups that maintain similar values, beliefs systems, and cultural heritages. Shared intimacy between one's group members reaffirms shared worldviews and perpetuates conventional ideals aligning with collective ideals and purposes. Tajfel and Turner

(1979, 1986) contribute to the social identity perspective by elucidating the social psychological processes of self-categorization, or how people perceive a collection of people as a group. Several years after social identity theory was first presented in published form, Tajfel and colleagues created a theory that aligns with social identity theory known as self-categorization theory, which more squarely centers on the role of the ‘self’ and group processes (Turner & Oakes, 1986; Haslam 2001). That is, social categories consist of the in-groups people belong to that help determine how they respond to interactions with others outside of the in-group. The process of self-categorization is heavily based on an individual’s evaluation of the in-group and this is formed by drawing comparisons from the in-group to out-groups. In order for in-group members to gain a positive evaluation of their group and build their own self-esteem, in-groups may seek to degrade out-groups for the purpose of boosting the status of their own group.

When the importance of social identity is especially salient for a social group, perceived threats to the group are more likely to produce an aggressive or violent response (Fischer, Haslam, & Smith, 2010). Wright (2015) claims that understanding social identity is theoretically useful to the study of terrorism because it provides an opportunity for researchers to identify which threatening circumstances might heighten a terrorist organization’s desire to engage in retaliatory or reactive actions. Social identity is also thought to play an integral role in the socialization and recruitment processes of extremist organizations who become martyrs that choose to carry out suicide attacks (Hoffman & McCormick, 2004).

Research shows that extremist organizations groom recruits and make their organization more attractive by providing multiple opportunities for growth within the in-group (Post et al., 2009). The “collective identities” of members are intentionally shaped by their larger social context (milieus) and by the people who are providing opportunities for them (e.g., the leaders of

the organization or older/more seasoned members). Nascent members of the group (or extremist organization) define themselves by their connection to the other members in their group. Doing so allows new members to adopt traits and share similar responsibilities within the organization—further strengthening bonds to their group. Hafez (2006) claims that organizations often utilize heroism and symbolism to increase member's willingness to sacrifice themselves, establishing suicide attackers as heroes who maintain high prestige. Hafez also suggests how organizations will turn to religion, culture, and identity to make this grooming process more effective, even stating that “organizers of collective action strategically select narratives, traditions, symbols, rituals, or repertoires of action to imbue risky activism with morality” (p. 61). However, less is known about the socialization processes for violent extremists outside the context of formal terrorist and extremist organizations.

### ***Mental Health and Terrorism***

The violent acts perpetrated by terrorists and extremists seem unfathomable to most, leaving the public in search of explanations for how a person could commit such heinous crimes. Terrorists in the past have often been categorized as mentally ill, but we now know that is not necessarily, or even usually, the case (Borum, 2004; Corner & Gill, 2019; Weatherston & Moran, 2003). Mental health and violence, including terrorism, have been studied for decades (Cooper, 1978; Horgan, 2008; Victoroff, 2005), but many questions about this relationship remain. Gill and Corner (2017) point to four paradigms within the past 40 years of mental health and terrorism research demonstrating how our understanding of this complex relationship has evolved. At first, researchers labeled all terrorists as mentally ill or irrational because of their extreme actions. Later, researchers turned from labeling terrorists as insane and began to examine how personality characteristics (e.g., narcissism) influenced or shaped terrorists.

However, empirical evidence fell short during this time and could only partially explain research findings.

After years of accumulating additional empirical evidence, researchers continue to evaluate the relationship between mental health and terrorism under a sharper lens in what is considered the fourth and most recent paradigm whereby mental health and terrorism do not share a dichotomous relationship (Corner & Gill, 2015). Instead, there are several other factors that play a role, sometimes in combination with conditions of mental illness, during the process of radicalization toward violence which may or may not lead to an eventual attack. Corner and Gill (2015) suggest that collections of behaviors and experiences crystalize within some individuals, creating opportunities for elevated risks of violence for people who may be relatively less mentally efficient than the average person. Because we know that not everyone with a mental illness turns to violence (Elbogen & Johnson, 2009), the challenge lies in identifying risk factors influencing some people with mental illness to turn to terrorist violence.

In summary, the concepts and theories mentioned above help explain how murder-suicide offenders make decisions throughout their attack. The concept of bounded rationality is used to understand how mental processes work for offenders who suffer from mental illness during their attack. Bounded rationality provides a way to explain how offenders make decisions, given that offenders are usually pressed for time, and some have mental health issues which may restrict their capacity to make quick decisions. In order to examine the structure and processes of murder-suicides as events, it is imperative to use the criminal events perspective as a theoretical framework to examine how these attacks unfold over a series of stages. Social identity perspectives are also useful to this study because offenders may decide on who to target based on their identity or the offender may be incentivized to commit their attack based on anticipation of

increasing social mobility. The theories outlined here are incorporated in the findings and provide a way to answer my research questions. In the following section, I discuss where the literature currently is on the study of suicide terrorism and I point out some gaps that prior literature has overlooked.

### **Prior Literature**

The topic of suicide terrorism has been examined by scholars from several different disciplinary lenses. Shire and Hersi (2019), for example, explore the tactical differences between simple and complex suicide attacks. Complex suicide attacks require that the attack be premeditated and include more than one offender. In addition, the offenders must use a suicide device, and employ more than one weaponry tactic (e.g., guns and an explosive vest). On the other end of the spectrum are simple suicide attacks. Simple suicide attacks are more traditional and only require one or more offenders. In terms of domestic or international suicide attacks, Shire and Hersi (2019) found that domestic targets (i.e., targets within the offender's homeland) are more likely to experience complex suicide attacks rather than simple. This implies that terrorist organizations may be putting more thought and preparation into domestic suicide attacks and that their attacks are becoming more precise with multiple levels of disruption.

Other studies have shown how suicide attacks are more effectively deployed against hardened targets compared to other types of terrorist attacks (Piazza, 2018). A hardened target is one that is well-defended, and it will usually have some form of physical security to reduce the impact or risk of an attack (e.g., military bases). In contrast to hard targets, 'soft' targets are generally unprotected, easily accessible, and vulnerable to attack. Not only did Piazza (2018) empirically demonstrate how suicide attacks are particularly effective against hardened targets, but findings also show that suicide attacks are more frequently deployed against hardened

targets. Presumably, this is because there is not a need for the offender to escape from a suicide attack and the attack has the potential to cause relatively more damage.

In another study of suicide terrorism, Alakoc (2017) showed why some suicide attacks are deadlier than other forms of terrorist attacks by examining location-specific attributes, choice of targets, and the use of multiple co-offenders as factors explaining variation in the lethality of suicide attacks. This study also found that targets are generally chosen by their level of lethality (i.e., the more deaths caused by the attack, the better). In other words, more heavily populated areas that are enclosed or difficult to escape from are ideal for murder-suicide attacks. Finally, Alakoc suggests that multiple offenders are ideal because it usually results in a higher number of fatalities.

Mroszczyk (2016) created the lethality ratio to weigh the costs versus benefits of several different terrorist attacks. In doing this, this study verified that suicide attacks kill more people on average—across geographic regions, across different attack types, and across different target types. However, Mroszczyk concludes that suicide attacks are a “suboptimal” tactic from a terrorist group leader’s perspective because there are other methods which are less costly to the organization and produce similar results (e.g., using small arms and/or IEDs). Santifort-Jordan and Sandler (2014) composed a global analysis of suicide attacks examining country-specific and attack-specific variables from both domestic and international suicide attacks. This study found that target hardening has made suicide attacks more attractive to terrorists, yet their study revealed that suicide attacks compare relatively close to conventional attacks because they usually favor the most vulnerable targets.

Political scientist Robert Pape (2005) suggests that suicide terrorism is strategic to terrorist organizations because of the relatively large *noise* it creates in society. This noise is the

vast amount of publicity that arises from the devastation of suicide attacks. Because suicide attacks kill more people, can cause an intense amount of property damage, and arguably end without closure (i.e., the offender does not have to face legal repercussions for their actions) the impact on society is more lasting. In short, Pape argues that suicide attacks are an especially attractive form of attack to people with a political agenda because of the shock value and publicity garnered.

In his book, Lankford (2013) provides an interesting perspective to suicide terrorism that claims suicide terrorists are more closely aligned, both psychologically and behaviorally, with others who commit suicide for more common reasons than many would expect. In doing so, Lankford sows doubt that suicide terrorists are motivated entirely by altruistic self-sacrifice for a collective cause. Instead, Lankford posits that “mental health problems, personal crises, coercion, fear of an approaching enemy, or hidden self-destructive urges” (Lankford, 2014, p. 351) play a large role in the decision-making processes for suicide terrorists. This has been a controversial claim, with several researchers (the most notable, Scott Atran; for reference see Lankford, 2014) asserting that Lankford fails to provide enough credit to the social, situational and organizational effects that help explain human behavior and gives too much credit to the personality of the offender.

Other relevant research by Freilich et al. (2017) compared suicide attackers to non-suicide attackers in the U.S. and found that extreme far-right suicide attackers were “significantly more likely than Islamic extremist suicide attackers to be strongly committed to their extremist ideology” (p. 958). In addition, they discovered that suicide attackers were just as likely as non-suicide attackers to have previously attempted suicide and to have been diagnosed with mental illness prior to their attack. However, they also found that suicide attackers were

more likely to have a history of substance abuse and were more likely to act alone compared to offenders of non-suicide attacks. Related, in another study, Gruenewald et al. (2013) found that far-right “loners” were more likely to participate in suicide missions compared to other types of violent far-right extremists.

While prior literature has made several important discoveries regarding suicide terrorism, there is still much to learn about extremists who commit murderous suicide attacks. We know very little about how extreme far-right murder-suicide attacks unfold over the course of the attack or the various influences that cause murder-suicide offenders to commit these violent crimes. Little is known about the environmental circumstances of situated events in which those with especially strong group identities use violence to defend their perceived in-groups. We also know that murder-suicide attacks occur across different geographic locations, yet there is no study that provides a cross-national comparison of extreme far-right murder-suicide offenders. While there has been increased research on how static attributes of suicide terrorism compare to other forms of terrorism, there has been less attention to the situational processes involved in planning, preparing for, and executing acts of suicide terrorism. Finally, there is no study to date that considers how ideological grievances and the mental health of an extreme far-right murder-suicide offender combine to shape the outcome of an attack. Considering the debate about the suicidality and role of mental illness in suicide terrorism (see Lankford; Atran), this is a critical gap in research. Therefore, the present study addresses this and other gaps in the literature to extend research on suicide terrorism and provide opportunities for future research to build upon these concepts.

### **The Current Study**

The current study seeks to explore the similarities and differences in the comparative

nature and behavioral processes of extreme far-right murder-suicide attacks in the U.S. and Germany. I draw from the concept of bounded rationality (Cornish & Clarke, 1986; Simon, 1982) and the criminal event perspective (Meier, Kennedy, & Sacco, 2001) to explore the situated circumstances in which American and German far-right extremists plan, prepare for, and execute ideologically motivated murder-suicides.

Agnew (2006) emphasized the importance of conceptualizing criminal activity through storylines to better understand how certain situational events can occur in rapid succession, making conditions more (or less) conducive to committing crime. I suggest that narratives or storylines, consisting of detailed summaries of criminal activity occurring over time and space that are rich in context, may also be fruitful for understanding the situated circumstances of terrorist plots, yet only one study to my knowledge has exercised criminal storylines to study violence perpetrated by far-right extremists (Gruenewald et al., 2015). Though this study provided useful insights into the circumstances surrounding deadly violence against law enforcement, more empirical research is needed to provide a comprehensive explanation for how far-right murder-suicides unfold more generally. In particular, I suggest that there remains a need to explore the non-linear relationships between mental illness, social identity, and murder-suicides perpetrated by extreme far-rightists.

To examine the complexities of unfolding murder-suicide events, I also suggest it is necessary to consider both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to further expand on prior literature. Using a mixed-method approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), I create theoretically informed narratives of how extreme far-right murder-suicide offenders navigate their identities through a series of situational stages. By utilizing both quantitative and qualitative analyses, this study uncovers the complex structure and processes of murder-suicide events.

My study is guided by two research questions:

**RQ 1:** How do extreme far-right murder-suicide events develop, transpire, and end within situated geospatial and temporal contexts?

**RQ 1a:** What roles do mental health and social and personal grievances play in murder-suicide events?

**RQ 2:** Given their unique socio-historical contexts, how do criminal event-level processes of murder-suicide attacks compare across the U.S. and Germany?

### **Data and Method**

The data for my study came from the U.S. Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) (Freilich et al., 2014) and the Database on Terrorism in Germany: Right-Wing Extremism (DTGrwx) (Koehler, 2016). The ECDB and the DTGrwx are open-source databases containing information on extreme far-right attacks in the U.S. and Germany, respectively. As an open-source database, the ECDB includes information on offender-, victim-, and incident-level attributes. In addition, each murder-suicide is associated with a comprehensive open-source file inclusive of media accounts, court documents, news articles, and other publicly available materials (Freilich et al., 2014). The ECDB data are rich in context and have been found to be a valid source of data on extremist violence (Chermak et al., 2012). For the current study, I extract data on 16 extreme far-right murder-suicide cases from the ECDB that fit my inclusion criteria.

I rely on the ECDB's definition of the extreme far-right movement (Freilich et al., 2014, p. 380), which is composed of individuals or groups who: are fiercely nationalistic (as opposed to universal and international in orientation); are anti-global; suspicious of centralized federal authority; are reverent of individual liberty (especially their right to own guns, be free of taxes); believe in conspiracy theories that involve a grave threat to national sovereignty and/or personal

liberty; believe that one's personal and/or national "way of life" is under attack and is either already lost or that the threat is imminent (sometimes such beliefs are amorphous and vague, but for some the threat is from a specific ethnic, racial, or religious group); and believe in the need to be prepared for an attack either by participating in or supporting the need for paramilitary preparations and training or survivalism.

Murder-suicide is defined as incidents in which there is evidence that the offender(s) plans to perish in their attacks. It is only required for extreme far-rightists to demonstrate a readiness or expectation of being killed during the execution of an attack to be included. For murder-suicide offenders not killed during the attacks, inclusion in the ECDB hinges on evidence available from open-source materials clearly suggesting offenders anticipated not surviving their attacks (e.g., suicide note, ridding selves of personal possessions).

The DTGrwx contains the most complete index of extreme far-right attacks in Germany. Similar to the ECDB, the DTGrwx is an open-source database that provides detailed information on extreme far-right attacks primarily through media accounts.<sup>1</sup> The open-source material provided by the DTGrwx has been widely utilized by academic publications, government agencies, and policy programs that specialize in extremist crime prevention (Koehler, 2016). I extract data for 12 cases from the DTGrwx that fit the inclusion criteria to use for purposes of comparison. It is known that far-right extremist murder-suicide attacks have occurred in both Germany and in the U.S., yet little is known about how attacks compare across national contexts. The current study provides a holistic perspective of how murder-suicide attacks unfold in both nations, increasing the robustness and generalizability of my findings.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about DTGrwx data please visit, <http://girds.org/projects/database-on-terrorism-in-germany-right-wing-extremism>.

### ***Outcome of Interest***

The outcome of interest for this study is *country*, which is coded dichotomously (1 = United States, 2 = Germany) and is defined as the country where the extreme far-right murder-suicide event occurred. Thus, every extreme far-right murder-suicide offender included in the analysis is known to have committed their attack in either the U.S. or Germany. The final dataset includes data on 16 far-right murder-suicide offenders in the U.S. and 12 offenders in Germany from 1990-2020.

As research settings, it theoretically and substantively makes sense to use both the U.S. and Germany to draw comparisons. Each country is vastly different in their socio-political and historical contexts and each country's offenders' ideological motivations for attacking are going to vary. This difference in ideological motivation and backgrounds will reveal several key differences, and possibly some similarities, which will reveal how attacks of this caliber unfold. Uncovering and exploring these types of ideologically motivated attacks in unique settings will only provide more detail into the nature of these attacks and how they manifest into violence.

### ***Independent Variables***

The structure of extreme far-right murder-suicides is captured through a series of quantitative variables and comparisons of offenders and event-level characteristics across precursor, transaction, and aftermath stages (see Appendix for Codebook). In the precursor stage, all independent variables are binary-coded (1 = Yes, 2 = No). The variables in the precursor stage include: "communicated online about violence," "acquired weapons specifically for attack," "surveilled target(s)," "recruited or attempted to recruit co-offenders," "posted manifesto online," "made verbal threats," "made written threats," "offender known to state or local law

enforcement,” “offender known to FBI or German officials,” “offender prior arrest,” and “evidence of mental illness.”

For the transaction stage, the variable “weapon type” is coded (0 = Unknown, 1 = Handgun, 2 = Long Gun, 3 = Assault Rifle, 4 = Bomb, 5 = Knife, 6 = Plane, 7 = Vehicle, 8 = Molotov Cocktail). Next, independent variables “two or more weapons” and “committed attack with co-offender” are binary-coded (1 = Yes, 2 = No). Other variables, such as “number of victims killed” and “number of victims injured” are measured based on three or more categories (0 = No victims killed, 1 = One victim killed, 2 = Two victims killed, 3 = Three or more victims killed; and 0 = No victims injured, 1 = One victim injured, 2 = Two victims injured, 3 = Three or more victims injured). The final variable in the transaction stage is “property damage,” which is measured dichotomously (1 = Minor, 2 = Major).

Finally, three independent variables are included in the aftermath stage of murder-suicides. The variables “standoff occurred” and “offender killed by police” are both binary coded (1 = Yes, 2 = No). The final independent variable, “how offender died” is coded dichotomously (1 = Self-inflicted, 2 = Other). Univariate statistics will be calculated and presented for all independent variables for both the U.S. and Germany.

### ***Qualitative Analysis***

I conduct a storyline analysis (Agnew, 2006) as the next step in my explanatory sequential mixed-method study to create holistic, narrative accounts of unfolding precursor, transaction, and aftermath stages in U.S. and Germany between 1990 and 2020 (n=28). In doing so, I consider how interactions between extreme far-rightists and other actors shape their pathways to murder-suicide attacks within particular temporal and geospatial contexts. For each of the cases included in the analysis, I create narratives—with a beginning and an end—that are

rich in context, connecting structure and process. In an effort to enhance the robustness of my qualitative analysis, I ask violent extremism experts<sup>2</sup> to separately review my initial findings and provide feedback. The qualitative storyline analysis illuminates how individual and situational factors compare similarly and differently across nations. In this way, the initial results of the quantitative findings guide my case selection for the supplemental qualitative storyline analysis.

After finalizing my coding strategy, I comparatively analyze each storyline for patterned themes on how offenders make decisions. I allow themes to emerge inductively as to how the murder-suicide attacks unfold across time and space. Starting broad and moving to more narrow descriptions, I note the situated circumstances and possible turning points shaping opportunities for murder-suicide and offender decision-making. In these narrative accounts, I pay special attention to available details of personal and social grievances, self-reported mental illness symptoms, diagnosed mental disorders, and media descriptions of mental illness, along with the specific sources of such information. In doing so, I comparatively examine how possible mental health conditions shaped offenders' decision-making behaviors across the murder-suicide events.

## **Results**

For purposes of comparison, I begin by providing the results of the descriptive statistics for all variables included in this study for both the U.S. and Germany. The quantitative findings shed light on how opportunities for murder-suicide are structured. These initial results also guide case selection for supplemental qualitative storyline analysis employed to illuminate the varied ways that reasoning offenders navigate their environments when committing murder-suicides.

### ***Precursors to Murder-Suicide Events***

In Table 1, the results for the precursor variables of interest, separated by country, are

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Jeff Gruenewald, Director of the Terrorism Research Center at the University of Arkansas, and Daniel Koehler, Director of the German Institute on Radicalization and De-radicalization Studies.

provided. The precursor stage of criminal events, typically an overlooked dimension of crime (Meier, Kennedy, & Sacco, 2001), entails the initial contact between murder-suicide offenders and the immediate warning signs that manifest just prior to violent transactions. Precursor activities are critical for setting criminal event processes in motion. Based on my analysis, it is clear that the vast majority of extreme far-right offenders who commit murder-suicide acquire weapons specifically for their attack (81.3% in the United States, 91.7% in Germany). This suggests that, in both countries, the majority of murder-suicide offenders had considerable forethought in planning and preparing to carry out their attack. In this way, murder-suicides vary from other forms of violent extremism and crime more generally. Well over half (56.3%) of offenders in the U.S. communicated online about violence prior to engaging in their attack, while only a quarter of offenders in Germany posted online prior to their attack. Surprisingly, half of the offenders in the U.S. surveilled their target(s) prior to the murder-suicide event. In contrast, in Germany, only one offender surveilled their target in preparation for their attack. This difference suggests relatively more organized and premeditated behaviors from U.S. offenders. I also found that only one offender in the U.S. recruited or attempted to recruit co-offenders, whereas a third of offenders operated with co-offenders in Germany. In other words, U.S. murder-suicide offenders are relatively more likely to be lone actors who engage in observable preparatory behaviors, including communicating their intentions online and surveilling targets, while German offenders are more likely to recruit co-offenders while resisting communicating online about their violence.

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**Table 1. Precursor Stage Attributes**

<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>United States (n=16)</b>	<b>Germany (n=12)</b>
<b>Offender preparatory activities</b>		

**Table 1. (Cont.)**

<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>United States (n=16)</b>	<b>Germany (n=12)</b>
<b>Offender preparatory activities</b>		
Communicated online about violence	56.3%	25.0%
Acquired weapons specifically for attack	81.3%	91.7%
Surveilled target(s)	50.0%	8.3%
Recruited or attempted to recruit co-offenders	6.3%	33.3%
<b>Other possible warning signs</b>		
Posted manifesto online	25.0%	33.3%
Made verbal threats	31.3%	33.3%
Made written threats	31.3%	41.7%
Offender known to state or local law enforcement	18.8%	66.7%
Offender known to FBI or German officials	6.3%	25.0%
Offender prior arrest	68.8%	33.3%
<b>Evidence of mental illness</b>	50.0%	25.0%

Other preparatory behaviors were tracked in the precursor stage revealing several similarities and differences across American and German murder-suicides. In particular, a quarter of the offenders in the U.S. and a third of the offenders in Germany posted a manifesto on the internet before executing their attack. Offenders in both countries wanted their message to be received after their attack and spread via media coverage. Posting a manifesto online allows offenders to further their political or social objective post martyrdom, effectively eternalizing their sacrifice. Along with posting a manifesto online prior to their attack, some violent far-rightists in the U.S. made either verbal (31.3%) or written (31.3%) threats of violence either

online or offline prior to their attacks. In Germany, offenders show a similar pattern as the U.S. A third of offenders in Germany made verbal threats and approximately 42 percent of offenders made written threats prior to their murder-suicide either online or offline.

In contrast, a stark difference between offenders in the U.S. and Germany was found in whether or not the offender was known to either state or local law enforcement, or if the offender's identity was known to federal officials before engaging in their attack. Less than one-fifth (18.8%) of offenders in the U.S. were known to state or local law enforcement and only one offender was previously known or on the FBI's terrorist and extremist watchlist. This is very different in Germany where two-thirds (66.7%) of offenders had run-ins with local or state law enforcement, or at least the police knew of their existence and name. Additionally, a quarter of the offenders in Germany were on the radar of German officials. Furthermore, in the U.S., over two-thirds (68.8%) of the offenders had previously been arrested before their attack and only a third (33.3%) of offenders in Germany had been arrested previously. This is notable because although American offenders are more likely to have a criminal history, their presence is less likely to be known by federal, state and local law enforcement. In comparison to the U.S., Germany has relatively fewer offenders with a criminal record, yet there are more offenders who are known to law enforcement and top German officials. A possible explanation could be because German far-right extremists are more likely to make their views publicly known. Hate speech is also illegal in Germany, perhaps putting potential offenders on the radar of law enforcement. It also appears that American murder-suicide offenders are more crime generalists with prior criminal histories unassociated with extremism than German offenders, who may be more likely to specialize in extremist crime. The final variable in the precursor stage reveals that

half of the offenders in the U.S. and a quarter of the offenders in Germany exhibited some evidence of a mental illness prior to their attack.

***Murder-Suicide Transactions***

As previously mentioned, the transaction stage encompasses the initiation of violence, escalating factors, and ultimately, the deadly act of violence that results in the death of both civilians and police officers. As shown in Table 2, the weapon types used in murder-suicide cases varied slightly by country. However, it is clear that violent far-rightists generally rely on two or more weapons during their attack in both countries, with some offenders heavily arming themselves. This is not surprising as gun ownership, and protecting gun rights, is paramount to far-right extremists. Many are fearful that the government will take away their guns, and many are trained to use guns in the military. In addition to an affinity for stockpiling weapons, murder-suicide offenders do not anticipate survival from their attacks. Thus, weapons that will cause the greatest amount of property damage or produce the maximum number of fatalities are favored.

**Table 2. Transaction Stage Attributes**

<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>United States (n=16)</b>	<b>Germany (n=12)</b>
<b>Weapon type</b>		
Handgun	75.0%	33.3%
Long Gun	43.8%	8.3%
Assault Rifle	18.8%	25.0%
Bomb	12.5%	8.3%
Knife	6.3%	—
Plane	6.3%	—
Vehicle	6.3%	—
Molotov Cocktail	—	8.3%
Unknown	—	33.3%

**Table 2. (Cont.)**

<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>United States (n=16)</b>	<b>Germany (n=12)</b>
<b>Two or more weapons</b>	62.5%	58.3%
<b>Committed attack with co-offenders</b>	18.8%	25.0%
<b>Number of victims killed</b>		
Foiled plot (no victims killed)	—	25.0%
One	31.3%	16.7%
Two	18.8%	16.7%
Three or more	50.0%	41.7%
<b>Number of victims injured</b>		
No victims injured	12.5%	50.0%
One	12.5%	—
Two	—	8.3%
Three or more	75.0%	41.7%
<b>Property Damage</b>		
Minor	68.8%	75.0%
Major	31.3%	25.0%

Though most of the offenders in this study committed their attacks as lone actors, there were instances in both the U.S. (n=3) and Germany (n=3) where offenders committed their murder-suicide attack with co-offenders. Drawing from social identity theories, it is possible that people commit crimes with others because of a desire to gain a higher rank within their in-group. Another possible explanation for co-offending is that more offenders equates to more casualties before attacks are completed. In some instances, offenders preferred to co-offend with others because their ideological motivations and backgrounds were similar or have some crossover (i.e., furthering their movement, having their name go down in history textbooks, etc.). In one case, a male offender and his female partner carried out the attack together because they both felt the need to spark a revolution. The couple were arguably more successful in increasing casualties

because they were able to protect one another, a tactical advantage that increased the duration of their standoff with police.

Suicide attacks, and murder-suicides specifically, are effective in causing massive amounts of property damage, are effective against especially hardened targets, and are often a much more lethal form of attack compared to more conventional attacks (Alakoc, 2017; Piazza, 2018). In the U.S., 50 percent of these murder-suicide attacks resulted in the death of three or more civilians or law enforcement officers, while 75 percent of the cases had three or more people who were injured, many severely. In Germany, patterns are similar, with approximately 42 percent of murder-suicides ultimately ending with three or more fatalities and approximately 42 percent involving three or more victims who were injured in attacks. In both the U.S. and Germany, between 50 percent and 42 percent of attacks, respectively, exceeded three deaths.

Supporting prior research on suicide terrorism (Pape, 2005, p. 28), my findings revealed an elevated amount of destruction or property damage caused by murder-suicides. In the U.S., approximately 31 percent of attacks caused major property damage. In Germany, three murder-suicides (25%) caused major property damage or destruction. This is not surprising as researchers (Pape, 2005) have suggested that attacks in which offenders plan to commit suicide are likely to result in massive amounts of property damage due to the use of explosives and other unconventional means of attacking targets. For example, one case in the U.S. involved an offender who crashed a personal airplane full speed into the side of an IRS building causing an explosion and subsequent fire, ultimately killing one person aside from the offender and injuring thirteen others who were in the building.

### *Aftermaths of Murder-Suicides*

I also examined the aftermath stage of extreme far-right murder-suicides, which includes

the behaviors of offenders immediately following the violent spree, concluding the murder-suicide event. As shown in Table 3, there are some similarities in the aftermath stage variables for both the U.S. and Germany. In nearly all murder-suicides in the U.S., the offender carried out their attack and then killed themselves (87.5%). In only one instance was the offender killed by police or law enforcement responding to the attack. Similarly, in Germany 91.7 percent (n=11) of offenders killed themselves and, again, only one offender was killed by responding police. Therefore, suicide by cop does not appear to be a major concern in either country. On the contrary, the offender almost always ends their own life following a standoff with the police. For terrorism prevention, this means that instead of actively pursuing offenders and attempting to detain them immediately, it might be in the responding officers' best interest to redirect the offender away from the public and into a contained area. Once the offender is contained, simply waiting until they succumb to the pressure and come out of hiding would be safer for law enforcement. These decisions made by responding law enforcement are crucial to their survival and could save many more lives.

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**Table 3. Aftermath Stage Attributes**

<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>United States (n=16)</b>	<b>Germany (n=12)</b>
<b>Offender conclusion activities</b>		
Standoff occurred	50.0%	25.0%
Offender killed by Police	6.3%	8.3%
<b>How offender died</b>		
Self-inflicted	87.5%	91.7%
Other	12.5%	8.3%

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However, there is a difference across countries in whether a standoff occurred in the aftermath stage. In the U.S., a standoff occurred in half of the cases (n=8). In Germany, only a quarter of the cases (n=3) involved a standoff with the police. Though these standoffs do not occur in the majority of cases, there are enough instances to warrant further discussion. In one case, a known far-right extremists and his co-offender committed a bank robbery and then proceeded to flee to a mobile home where they had a brief standoff with police. After exchanging a few rounds, the offender killed his co-offender, then set the mobile home on fire before shooting himself. Again, based on this incident and others, it seems wise for police to remain at a safe distance and wait to engage with the offenders until absolutely necessary—as long as the offender is contained.

### **Murder-Suicide and Storylines**

The purpose of the storyline analysis presented in this section is to identify the structure and processes of murder-suicide events by putting these events on a fluid timeline with a beginning and an end. Similar to the quantitative analysis, each storyline is separated into the precursor, transaction, and aftermath event levels. Unlike the quantitative analysis, however, the storylines provide more detail in the situated environment in which the murder-suicide event unfolds both geospatially and temporally. In this section, I present an analysis of the storylines created for each country in four separate typological categories based on the social, personal and mental health grievances for the offender's murder-suicide. Each of these categories emerged inductively after carefully examining the qualitative storylines for each case and taking into consideration how the initial quantitative findings shaped case selection. The storylines provided below are exemplar cases that represent each category. I begin with extreme far-rightists who commit murder-suicide fueled primarily by social grievances. Then, I shift to extreme far-

rightists who appear to be motivated by both mental health issues and social grievances. Next, I turn to those who commit murder-suicides due primarily to personal grievances. Finally, I focus on far-right extremists who exhibit both evidence of mental illness and who are driven by personal grievances that ultimately lead them to commit murder-suicide.

### ***Social Grievances***

The first storyline shown in Table 4 depicts extreme far-right offenders who commit murder-suicide primarily due to specific social grievances fueling them to commit ideologically motivated violence. It appears in this case, as well as others that fit into this category, that the precursor stage involves violent offenders who have a deep hatred for people of other races and ethnicities. Given that nearly all extreme far-right murder-suicide offenders are White males, they often deliberately ignore or allow other White people to escape harm free during their attacks.

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#### **Table 4. Social Grievances Storyline**

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##### **Precursor Stage**

After being mandated by his employer to attend an ethics and diversity training due to showing up to work in a look-alike Ku Klux Klan white pointed hood and making verbal death threats to one his Black co-workers, this 48-year-old far-right extremist took a one-week unofficial leave of absence to which there was no repercussion. Upon his return to work, the offender was noticeably agitated. He attended the scheduled ethics and diversity training for a few minutes before storming out in frustration. As he was walking out of the training, he muttered racial slurs to himself and continued to talk about killing Black people. The offender confronted his supervisor and proceeded to threaten to take matters into his own hands. He believed that some of the people who were in the training with him were the people who got him in trouble. At this point, the offender is enraged with anger and leaves the building. He walks to his vehicle parked outside and grabs a 12-gauge shotgun and .223 caliber rifle. With a shotgun in his hands, a rifle on his back, and bullets draped down either side of him—the offender reenters the building.

**Table 4. (Cont.)**

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**Transaction Stage**

The offender is now armed with multiple weapons and is inside the building which held the ethics and diversity training. He goes back into the classroom which held the training and burst open the door. As he entered, one brave individual stood up and tried to calm him down. Unfortunately, this cost the individual their life. The offender then fatally shot three others in the classroom with his shotgun. One of his surviving co-workers recalled, "I was lying on the floor. He came over and shot me while I was on the floor." The offender left the classroom and went directly towards the production floor of the main building where he knew several Black employees worked. For a brief moment, a White co-worker was able to apprehend him. However, the offender was quickly able to get away from his co-worker and draw his weapon. Presumably because this co-worker was White, the offender simply told him to get out of the way or he would kill him. As the gunman walked away, the White co-worker screamed out for people to take cover in an attempt to warn others of the shooter. While on the production floor, the offender found and killed three more people while they were working. The offender's girlfriend, who was also his co-worker, was present at this location and pleaded for him to stop.

**Aftermath Stage**

Shortly after the killing spree and before police arrived, the offender solidified his own death by committing suicide with his weapon. The offender managed to shoot fourteen of his co-workers with the shotgun. Six of the fourteen victims were fatally injured. Five of the six who were murdered were Black. The entire murder-suicide lasted approximately ten minutes and after a search of the offender's vehicle, police located three more weapons: a .22 magnum Derringer, a .45 caliber Ruger P90 pistol, and a .22 caliber rifle with a scope.

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This storyline also shows that extreme far-right offenders will specifically target certain areas where social minorities are known to frequent. In this case, the offender went to two locations where he knew the largest number of people he was interested in murdering would gather. The offender in this case intentionally let a White co-worker live. Although this is not always the case, there is a pattern of extreme far-right offenders who will allow White people to live or escape while specifically targeting people of other races.

***Mental Health and Social Grievances***

The second storyline exemplifies extreme far-right offenders who commit murder-suicide seemingly due to both social grievances and mental illnesses that might influence the offender to

commit acts of violence (see Table 5). In this case, the offender suffered from a mental illness where he heard voices in his head that guided him to violence and amplified an intense fear that he was being watched by authorities. In addition to and perhaps relate to, his mental illness, the offender had an extreme disdain for political figures and law enforcement. Another underlying factor identified from his online manifesto posted before his murder-suicide was that because of his mental illness he struggled to find an intimate partner, a somewhat common theme amongst extreme far-right murder-suicide offenders. They feel that their mental illness disadvantages them in regard to finding partners, fueling their internal anger and angst.

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**Table 5. Mental Health and Social Grievances Storyline**

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**Precursor Stage**

For nearly two decades, a 43-year-old xenophobic far-right extremist intimately felt and expressed that he was being illegally surveilled by law enforcement. On two separate occasions, he attempted to file criminal charges against law enforcement for these reasons. Three months prior to his attack the offender sent a nineteen-page letter to a prosecutor's office suggesting that someone needed to take action against a secret service organization that was brainwashing people in order to control world events. In his nineteen-page delusional rant, there were sections where the offender talked about being guided by voices in his head since birth and that he knew he was being followed. He disclosed his extreme political beliefs and claimed that President Donald J. Trump stole some of his slogans and eugenics. The offender also included that he was frustrated that he had such a difficult time finding an intimate partner because of his psychological issues. In the letter the offender mentioned a viciously strong hatred for migrants and a hatred for citizens who allowed immigrants into his country. Nothing came about after receiving the letter. On the month of his attack, the offender uploaded a twenty-four-page manifesto online, which was extremely similar to the letter he wrote in the previous months. It is widely accepted that paranoid schizophrenia was a factor in the crystallization of his crime. Two weeks leading up to his murder-suicide, the offender legally borrowed a Glock 17 from an arms dealer. A few days before the attack, he uploaded a video to YouTube—addressed to Americans—where he continued to express his delusional racially charged extremist views.

**Transaction Stage**

The offender targeted two shisha bars presumably in hopes of finding migrants to attack. Both locations he selected were known to have an abundance of Turkish citizens who frequented the bars. He arrived at the first location approximately an hour before the attack began. The

**Table 5. (Cont.)**

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offender waited in a handicap parking space but was confronted and asked to park elsewhere. Just before 10:00 P.M. the offender got out of his vehicle and took a backpack filled with 350 rounds of ammunition and three weapons with him. He opened fire with two weapons in hand and killed an employee of the bar. Next, he shot a person outside of the bar near the street. He made his way to the front of the bar where he shot four consecutive rounds through the door, killing the owner. The offender fled to the second location, a nearby newsstand kiosk and police quickly arrived at the first location. As the offender was fleeing, he shot at a car driving in his direction. He continued to flee and eventually killed another person who was sitting in their parked car. At the second location, the offender fatally shot four more people and critically injured another victim who died in the hospital the following day. The offender then fled to his parent's apartment where he murdered his mother. Fortunately, his father was able to escape.

**Aftermath Stage**

Around 10:10 P.M. the offender's vehicle was located at his parent's residence. At 11:10 P.M. police officers rang the doorbell, with no response. After using a drone to scout the inside of the apartment—and nearly four hours later—at 3:03 A.M., a special task force unit deemed it safe and entered the apartment where they found the offender and his mother dead from gunshot wounds. The initial three murders at the first location occurred in four minutes or less. The entire attack only lasted twelve minutes and police were on scene within five minutes. The offender killed ten people and injured five others before killing himself.

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Several storylines demonstrated that offenders post delusional rants or online manifestos about their extreme beliefs just before their attacks. The amount of time between the offender posting online about violence and actually committing their attack varies. However, this could be a possible intervention point for law enforcement. Rather than seeing an online manifesto and taking time to process what the message could mean, perhaps it would be beneficial to consider each online outreach or threat as if it were going to occur. In some cases, law enforcement, prosecutors, or civilians received letters where the offender would explicitly write about violence and killing people, yet these threats are often overlooked or not taken seriously. Nonetheless, there are opportunities for quick action or law enforcement intervention in many of these cases.

One more point of interest that revealed itself in this case, as well as others similar in nature, is that offenders often attack two different locations, sometimes attacking others while

fleeing from the first attack site. It is not uncommon for far-right murder-suicide offenders to flee to a nearby getaway vehicle and kill innocent people along the way or leave one scene to avoid detection.

### ***Personal Grievances***

The third storyline category consists of extreme far-right offenders who commit murder-suicide primarily because of personal grievances or vendettas that lead the offender to commit violence. Offenders experienced circumstances unique to them, in part fueling their murder-suicide. It appears in this particular case (see Table 6) that the offender felt he had been wronged by government officials, causing him to seek out revenge. This desire for revenge consumed the offender until he was ultimately prepared to end his life in order to achieve his goals. In addition to the offender seeking revenge, there appears to be a lack of regard or consideration for others who might be impacted by this attack. Not only was everyone in the IRS building that day likely traumatized by an attack of this caliber, but his family also lost their home, father and husband to his selfish acts.

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**Table 6. Personal Grievances Storyline**

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#### **Precursor Stage**

In this case, the offender is a 53-year-old extreme far-rightist who is an avid tax protester and anti-government conspirator. The night before the attack, the offender's wife took their children and went to stay in a hotel because she felt that her husband has gone "crazy". On the morning of the attack, the offender posted a suicide note, or manifesto, online where he expressed a deep anger for the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) because supposedly the IRS and his Certified Public Accountant (CPA) were stealing money from him. The offender had been in a tax dispute for several years and eventually—after the attack—it was released that the offender was being audited by the IRS for failure to report income. After posting his manifesto online, the offender set fire to his two-story house and then drove approximately twenty miles north to an airport where he kept his personal single-engine plane.

## **Table 6. (Cont.)**

### **Transaction Stage**

At approximately 9:45 A.M. he boarded his plane and made a radio announcement to the control tower that his flight would be “going southbound, sir.” The last words he spoke over the radio system to the control tower were, “thanks for your help, have a great day.” Just ten minutes later, the offender did a nosedive with his plane and flew it full speed into a four-story building which housed an IRS field office. The crash resulted in a large fireball of explosion and caused massive amounts of property damage and destruction to the building—instantly killing the offender. Glass and debris exploded out from the crash and hit cars below, shattering the windows and sunroofs of vehicles, while flames and smoke soared throughout the rest of the building. A witness, who called 911 to report the incident, said “it sounded like an 18-wheeler slammed into the building.”

### **Aftermath Stage**

Aside from his own death, the murder-suicide attack killed one other person and injured thirteen others. Two of the thirteen victims were critically injured. The property damage accumulated to approximately \$6.4 million dollars in repairs and, in response, the IRS allocated another \$32 million to increase the security and infrastructure of other IRS buildings.

This case also illustrates how extreme far-rightists commit arson or use explosive devices to intentionally cause significant property damage to further their message. This case is a good example of how much the amount of property damage can add up to from just one person and the lasting impact it can have on those connected to the offender.

### ***Mental Health and Personal Grievances***

The fourth and final storyline category demonstrates extreme far-right offenders who commit murder-suicide because of both personal grievances and underlying mental illnesses, which inevitably lead them to their violent attack (see Table 7). In this case, the offender is relatively younger and was a victim of bullying from his fellow classmates, which in part led him to his strong desire for revenge. The offender was diagnosed with several mental illnesses (i.e., depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder) which could have clouded his judgement. The combination of his mental illnesses and being bullied as a child led this individual to be

extremely irritable and allowed him to develop a personal hatred for people who resembled the bullies in his childhood.

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## **Table 7. Mental Health and Personal Grievances Storyline**

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### **Precursor Stage**

The offender in this case is an 18-year-old far-right extremist with no previous criminal convictions. However, during his childhood, the offender suffered from bullying and was a victim of physical abuse from his classmates between fifth and eighth grades. Additionally, he had a history of psychological disorders and anxiousness in social situations. The offender was diagnosed and received treatment for depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. During one of his treatments—the longest of which was a two-month inpatient—the offender attracted attention to himself by drawing swastikas and professing his love for Adolf Hitler and their shared birthday. The offender began to take on extremist ideologies and a deep hatred ensued inside of him for the people who resembled the bullies that gave him trouble as a youth. He took a full year to plan out his eventual attack. The offender collected and read both books and newspaper materials related to previous extremist attacks. At the same time, he surveilled several places where he would hold his attack, and even took photos of the sites. Aside from planning out his attack, the offender spent most of his free time playing first-person shooter games with people online. He met a person who shared similar extremist beliefs online and decided to create an online forum. This online forum reinforced his extremist beliefs and gave a platform to approximately 255 other far-right extremist—mostly young men—to discuss their hatred for immigrants. The offender posted a manifesto online where he talked in depth about creating a superior Aryan race, eliminating contaminated humans and referred to immigrants as “cockroaches” or “sub-humans”. He planned his attack on the five-year anniversary of another infamous extreme far-right attack that he looked to for inspiration.

### **Transaction Stage**

On the day of the attack, the offender reportedly did poor on a school exam, which he blamed his academic failures on being bullied by his classmates. At approximately 5:00 P.M. he went to a fast-food chain near a shopping mall. He sat there and proceeded to message four people on Facebook asking them to come to the restaurant—none of them came. After about fifty minutes, the offender went to the restroom inside of the restaurant with his backpack. He retrieved a handgun from his backpack, left the restroom and proceeded to open fire at a table of six unsuspecting teenagers. He murdered five of the six and the sixth one sustained injury. The offender quickly fled the restaurant, turned to his right and began shooting at people who were running away. Here he fired sixteen bullets, which killed three people, wounded three others and hit two parked vehicles. The offender slowly made his way to the shopping mall area where he shot and killed another teenager. Approximately ten minutes after the first bullet was fired, the offender was walking away from the shopping mall and towards a nearby

**Table 7. (Cont.)**

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connecting multilevel parking garage. While walking, he fired shots towards the parking garage and another bystander but missed. The offender fired thirteen shots towards unoccupied cars in the garage while making his way to the top parking deck. As he gained entrance to the top deck, a man and his friend were on their balcony across the street shouting at him. The offender fired a couple of shots in their direction, hitting one of them with shrapnel. Next, the offender fires a few more rounds towards the mall and at an employee, but thankfully no one was hurt. Officers arrived on scene and spotted the offender. An officer fired one shot towards him but missed. The offender fled and attempted to force entry into a nearby residence without success. At this point, he lingered in a stairwell and was able to find a bicycle storage room where he hid out.

**Aftermath Stage**

At approximately 8:26 P.M. the offender stepped outside of the storage room and was immediately confronted by police. The offender then shot himself in the head. It should be noted that the victims of the crime resembled people (i.e., in terms of age, appearance, origin and lifestyle) who he felt bullied him in his earlier school years. This murder-suicide ended in nine deaths and with thirty-six others injured.

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A common theme for attacks in this category is that the offender plans for and prepares for their attack long in advance. In this case, the offender collected various sources of extremist literature and communicated extensively with members of an online community of like-minded individuals. The offender also took time to study previous extreme far-right attacks and attempted to recreate his own murder-suicide on the anniversary of another attack. Premeditation and surveilling areas prior to the attack is common practice for extreme far-right murder-suicide offenders. Another interesting finding is that the offender used multiple weapons and carried a backpack filled with additional ammunition and weapons. Though simply carrying a backpack is not an indication that a person is going to commit a murder-suicide attack, if the offender is already in the transaction stage of the attack then carrying a backpack could signify to responding law enforcement that the offender has additional, unknown weapons, ammunition, or potentially explosive devices. This is something responding law enforcement should keep in mind in order to better protect themselves and others from potential injury or death.

## Discussion

Several notable patterns emerged from this study of extreme far-right murder-suicide attacks in the U.S. and in Germany. In particular, I found that violent murder-suicide attacks often involve perpetrators who suffer from some form of mental illness. Although mental illness does not directly cause an individual to become violent, mental illness in combination with personal and social grievances shapes the nature of murder-suicides in unique and patterned ways.

After examining general descriptive statistics, and the qualitative storylines that emerged from the data, it is clear that not all extreme far-right murder-suicides develop in the same way. In other words, the storyline analysis revealed how murder-suicides are structured differentially and how differing elements can shape the dynamic precursor, transaction, and aftermath processes of murder-suicide events. My study benefited greatly from using multiple methods to analyze the available data. While the quantitative descriptive statistics provided initial insights into the structure and processes of attacks, there was still more to be understood about the dynamic nature of these attacks as fluid events. Subsequent qualitative analysis revealed more clearly how murder-suicides unfold situationally and over time and space. Four unique storyline categories of murder-suicides emerged from the data. Two broad categories, personal grievances and social grievances, were initially observed as distinct motivating factors or themes. Further, in-depth analyses revealed that mental illness was also a factor impacting some offenders as they make decisions along their violent trajectories.

One key finding that emerged from the statistical analyses was that offenders often communicated about violence online before ever engaging in violent activity. Though this may prove to be difficult, the time period after the offender posts online and before they commit their

attack remains a potential intervention point for law enforcement to interdict. Responding police are usually very quick to respond once the violent transaction has been initiated, but to save lives it is important that the law enforcement and intelligence community act proactively to threats made online. Findings also show that offenders will in some cases make either verbal or written threats in the precursor stage of a murder-suicide event. These types of threats can occur at workplaces, at schools, or even other social settings that may seem otherwise safe. Direct and swift action is necessary when threats are made verbally or whether they are written. Employers and others who may witness or hear about threats towards individuals based on their ethnicity, race, gender, government affiliation or any other social category should immediately report threats to law enforcement. Another related finding is that some offenders who commit murder-suicide have a history of prior arrests or interactions with law enforcement where they explicitly express their extremist beliefs. Therefore, in cases where offenders explicitly disclose they are associated with a violent extremist organization, law enforcement should take steps towards documenting such threats and, if appropriate, seeking additional mental health resources.

A number of offenders exhibited at least some evidence of a mental illness observable in open-source materials. This may seem like trying to solve a puzzle without all of the pieces, but it would be beneficial if medical providers who heard something that drew suspicion—such as carving swastikas on the wall or expressing a profound love for Adolf Hitler—immediately reported that suspicious activity to law enforcement so that police have time to conduct further investigation. However, this responsibility does not fall solely on the medical staff providing a service. There needs to be a mandatory training put in place to prepare medical professionals to respond and take quick action towards these types of unusual cases.

Looking beyond the precursor stage, there are certain points in time outside of the attack

itself which could potentially be used to reduce the number of violent attacks or prevent a large number of them altogether. In particular, it might be effective to promote education on sensitive topics such as white supremacy and the history of white supremacy, in educational settings for the public and within police trainings.

Moving away from the precursor events and looking towards the transaction stage, there are several interesting findings that could be useful to law enforcement. First and foremost, it should be assumed that the offender has multiple weapons or outlets for causing destruction or violence. Offenders often carry backpacks with weapons and ammunition, have hidden weapons strapped to their bodies, or have other means of attacking people, such as using a vehicle to run over bystanders. Murder-suicide offenders frequently kill more than three people and injure more than three people during the commission of their attack. Therefore, it is vital to understand how to reduce the number of deaths that result from these types of attacks. Qualitative storyline analysis showed that it is almost always fatal for intervening civilians to attempt to interdict before law enforcement arrives on the scene. In one case, a legally armed civilian tried to stop an active shooter in a shopping supercenter and he ultimately lost his life. Although it is difficult to make such life or death decisions under such unimaginable pressure, findings suggest it would be in the best interest of innocent bystanders to take shelter, grab a defensible weapon in case of close interaction, and barricade outlets that the offender would take to get to their location. This is especially true for minorities groups who are often the target of these attacks. While offenders have shown to sometimes allow members of their own race to walk away from the attack unscathed, this should not be the expectation.

It is imperative that law enforcement also take extra precaution in protecting themselves against violent extremists who are often targets themselves. In several cases, responding law

enforcement took initiative in engaging the offender in less than ideal situations. For example, turning around corners of buildings where the offender is known to be or going into enclosed stairwells where the offender is waiting to ambush them. Standoffs with law enforcement occurred in some cases before offenders ultimately killed themselves to avoid arrest and punishment. Only in two cases, one in the U.S. and one in Germany, were responding officers forced to deescalate the attack by neutralizing the offender. Therefore, it would be advisable for responding officers to be patient and let the offender come out from cover, while law enforcement wait for additional reinforcements. Absent a hostage situation, it would be safer for law enforcement to allow offenders the opportunity to surrender, or more tragically, end their own life.

The conclusion of the murder-suicide event also revealed important findings. These attacks will sometimes cause massive amounts of property damage and general destruction that take time and resources to repair. In some cases, offenders shot out windows of buildings, shot through vehicles both moving and parked, rolled pipe bombs down church isles, set houses and restaurants on fire, crashed airplanes into buildings, and shot many bullets in the direction of people that either cause injury or end up destroying material items near the crime scene. These are just a few instances in which extreme far-right murder-suicide offenders caused excessive amounts of property damage and destruction.

The circumstances which form the setting for the event are unique in the U.S. and Germany. There are differences and similarities across U.S. and German offenders in each stage of the attack. However, it may be most informative to focus on comparisons in the precursor stage of murder-suicides. Pinpointing and highlighting such differences could reveal prevention points in both countries. For U.S. offenders, the majority of the murder-suicide cases involve the

offender communicating online about violence prior to their attack. U.S. extreme far-right murder-suicide offenders also surveil targets more often, and attempted to recruit co-offenders less often. Whereas, in Germany, offenders do not communicate about violence online as often as U.S. offenders prior to their attack. German offenders are less likely to surveil targets or locations, but are more likely to recruit co-offenders. In addition to these differences in the precursor stage and within the unique contexts of the U.S. and Germany, there are similarities that also occur. For example, there is a relative similarity in the proportions of offenders in both countries who post manifestos online, made verbal threats, and made written threats before entering the transaction stage.

The qualitative portion of this study revealed several important theoretical findings related to the mental health of the offender and how mental illness can sometimes combine with personal or social grievances to shape decisions of offenders based on limited time, cognitive constraints, and availability of information. Social grievances alone may manifest as excessive hatred for women, white supremacy, or an overwhelming fear and hatred of the government. Offenders fueled primarily by social grievances specifically targeted places where minorities or people of interest frequent in order to kill intended targets. In some cases, the offenders surveilled certain locations and planned out attacks at multiple proximal locations.

While hatred for minority groups provides a partial explanation for murder-suicide in some cases, mental illness was also shown to play a role in some murder-suicides. For example, in a few cases, there was evidence that offenders had diagnosed mental illnesses stunting healthy social relationships. Social isolation and alienation from the opposite sex drove the offender to commit gross acts of sexual violence and ultimately began their trajectory in committing murder-suicide. This internal anger and angst developed because the offender felt that something was

wrong with them and they were not able to find successful coping mechanisms. Another common mental illness symptom was the feeling of being watched or hearing voices in their head telling them to commit crimes, including murder-suicide. In another case, the offender suffered from a mental illness and was bullied throughout their childhood. Being bullied, having a mental illness, and feeling that one is somewhat of an outcast can lead to intense hatred that can sometimes lead to violence. Reflecting back on social identity theory, this theoretically makes sense and is consistent with the idea that forming strong bonds with in-groups shapes how the individual perceives themselves. Without successfully integrating into an in-group because of a preventative force—in this case mental illness—the consequences could be deleterious to the individual and could fuel internal anger that eventually results in an attack. Something that is common among those murder-suicide offenders with mental illness, is that they often posted delusional rants or manifestos where they would write in excess about their extreme beliefs. Manifestos posted before the attack, as mentioned previously, allow a brief moment in time for law enforcement to intervene or for civilians to see and report.

I also found that other offenders commit murder-suicide based solely on personal grievances. Personal grievances result from individualistic extremist beliefs that are situational and have circumstances that are unique to the individual. Feelings of distrust, rage, and the desire for revenge are some of the reasons that murder-suicide offenders will commit an attack. Though these are unique to the individual, in some cases the offender would adopt extremist beliefs from online sources or through communication with other far-right extremists. The offenders in this category have several things in common. They are generally very angry and feel they were wronged by someone or some other entity, and they have a serious lack of regard for the people around them who might be impacted by their decisions. The decision-making process for

individuals in this storyline category is quick, usually impacts several other people, including family members and civilians, and the main purpose is to get some form of retribution. This information is useful because it reveals the behavioral overlaps between ideological and non-ideological violence.

Personal grievances intertwined with mental illness is a dangerous combination. Severe mental illness can possibly cloud the judgement or impair the offenders' ability to make decisions. Based on my findings, however, even if extreme far-right offenders suffer from a mental illness, they still maintain a bounded rationality for planning and preparing for an attack. Some of the offenders who had a personal grievance and a mental illness consumed extremist literature, engaged in online communities of like-minded individuals, and studied previous attacks to use as examples for their own murder-suicides. Though alone mental illness will not cause someone to become violent, this lapse of judgement in some offenders could be caused by the inability to understand the consequences that might result from the attack. Furthermore, communicating with other extreme far-rightists, who share similar violent ideations, only made offenders spiral deeper and further lose sight of reality. To reiterate, these cases are different than the cases driven by personal grievances alone because the offender's decision-making is not only influenced by a personal grievance but by cognitive and emotional impairments.

### **Future Research Directions**

As a foundational piece of literature on extreme far-right murder-suicide, this study acts as a tool for similar research to build upon. Future studies should continue to explore other dynamic attributes of this type of ideologically motivated attack, and compare them to other forms of violent attacks (i.e., more conventional attacks) to learn about their uniquenesses. Additionally, this study demonstrates the utility of cross-national comparisons and mixed-

methodologies as a form of analysis for studying particular types of terrorism and violent extremism.

Although social identity perspectives may help us understand group behaviors, including forms of terrorism and violent extremism, why only some violent extremists commit murder-suicide attacks remains an open theoretical question. Swann and Buhrmester's (2015) concept of "identity fusion" may help us to further understand how the relationships between personal identities, social identities, and group processes can influence extreme pro-group behaviors like violent extremism. Identity fusion theory (Swann et al., 2009) emphasizes the role of intragroup relationships and the personal self, suggesting that an individual becomes "fused" when their social identity (social self) and their personal identity (personal self) overlap so heavily that they merge into a single identity (Swann et al., 2009). Developing an especially deep connection, or "visceral oneness," with their social group, a fused person may be willing to go to great lengths to defend their group in the face of perceived threats (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015). More colloquially, once a person is highly fused with their in-group, they will perceive an attack on the group as an attack on the self—the group and the self are experienced as one entity. In this way, identity fusion theory may provide further insights into why only some extreme far-rightists engage in serious forms of violence, including murder-suicide.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of my explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to use data from both the ECDB and the DTGrwx to develop a more holistic understanding of the dynamic nature of extreme far-right violence by comparatively examining murder-suicide cases in the U.S. and Germany. Although there are a limited number of extreme far-right murder-suicide cases to examine, I believe that the design of my study along with my approach to data collection and

analysis resulted in key insights into the nature of this social phenomenon. Specifically, my findings confirmed that not all extreme far-right murder-suicides across the globe unfold in the same manner and that differences among these events have vastly important implications for preserving both law enforcement and civilian lives. It is my hope that having a more comprehensive understanding of how murder-suicide processes transition from precursor, transaction, and aftermath stages, under unique sets of circumstances (or storylines), will greatly benefit the safety of law enforcement by helping them identify initiation, escalation, and other dynamic factors that contribute to deadly outcomes. My study used a relatively unique cross-national design and theoretical framework to identify several key findings about the structure and processes of extreme far-right murder-suicide. Specifically, I found that there are four types of motivational circumstances resulting in murder-suicides. Utilizing data from two unique cultural contexts and employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design made it possible to discern between these types of attacks. The concepts and theories of bounded rationality, the criminal events perspective, and social identity theory, were invaluable for understanding how offenders made decisions as murder-suicide attacks unfolded across particular temporal and geospatial contexts.

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## Appendix

Possible Variables	Variable Description
<b><u>Precursor Stage</u></b>	
Offender Preparatory Activities	
Communicated Online About Violence	Yes or No
Acquired Weapons Specifically for Attack	Yes or No
Surveilled Target(s)	Yes or No
Recruited or Attempted to Recruit Co-Offenders	Yes or No
Other Possible Warning Signs	
Posted Manifesto Online	Yes or No
Made Verbal Threats	Yes or No
Made Written Threats	Yes or No
Offender Known to State or Local Law Enforcement	Yes or No
Offender Known to FBI or German Officials	Yes or No
Offender Prior Arrest	Yes or No
Evidence of Mental Illness	Yes or No
<b><u>Transaction Stage</u></b>	
Weapon Type	Handgun, Long Gun, Assault Rifle, Bomb, Knife, Plane, Vehicle, Molotov Cocktail, Unknown
Use of Multiple Weapons	Yes or No
Committed Attack with Co-Offenders	Yes or No
Number of Victims Killed	Yes or No
Number of Victims Injured	Yes or No
Property Damage	Minor or Major
<b><u>Aftermath Stage</u></b>	
Standoff Occurred	Yes or No
Offender Killed	Yes or No
How Offender Killed	Self-Inflicted or Killed by Police