



# Left-Wing Terrorism and Political Violence in the United States

*What the Data Tells Us*

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## THE ISSUE

*In recent years, the United States has seen an increase in the number of left-wing terrorism attacks and plots, although such violence has risen from very low levels and remains much lower than historical levels of violence carried out by right-wing and jihadist attackers. So far, 2025 marks the first time in more than 30 years that left-wing terrorist attacks outnumber those from the violent far right. Despite its decline this year, right-wing terrorism could easily return to previous high levels. It is important to resource counterterrorism efforts against both right- and left-wing terrorism and work with communities to gain their support against extremists. Leaders across the political spectrum must condemn violent extremism of all kinds, denying it legitimacy and reducing its appeal.*

## INTRODUCTION

The tragic killing of political commentator and conservative activist Charlie Kirk has once again put the spotlight on political violence in the United States, with figures on both sides of the political aisle decrying extremism on the other. To understand the danger of political violence today and to find the best solutions for reducing it, it is important to understand the overall threat landscape and how both left- and right-wing violence have evolved and could change in the future.

Our analysis of terrorism trends in the United States shows that, indeed, left-wing violence has risen in the last 10 years, particularly since President Donald Trump's rise to political prominence in 2016, although it has risen from very low levels and remains much lower than historical levels of violence carried out by right-wing and jihadist attackers. More contentious politics in the United States and the expansion of the Make America Great Again

(MAGA) movement appear to have reenergized violent left-wing extremists. The left-wing movement as a whole has not returned to its violent heights of the 1960s and 1970s, but the number of terrorist incidents involving left-wing extremists so far this year puts 2025 on pace to be the left's most violent year in more than three decades. Moreover, 2025 marks the first time in more than 30 years that left-wing attacks outnumber those from the far right.

Indeed, the increase in left-wing attacks is particularly noticeable because attacks from right-wing perpetrators have sharply declined in 2025. This decline is striking, and explanations are speculative. One possibility is that many traditional grievances that violent right-wing extremists have espoused in the past—opposition to abortion, hostility to immigration, and suspicions of government agencies, among others—are now embraced by President Trump and his administration.

Similarly, jihadist attacks have declined in frequency since their peak in the 2010s, owing largely to the destruc-

tion of major groups like al Qaeda and the Islamic State and the subsequent decline in the power of the jihadist ideology to inspire attackers.

Left-wing attacks are remarkably less lethal overall than jihadist or right-wing attacks, however, even incidents that do not result in mass casualties can still have significant impact. Fortunately, many left-wing attackers (though not all) have demonstrated limited skill in carrying out violence, and the movement is disorganized, with little formal coordination.

The rise in left-wing attacks merits increased attention, but the fall in right-wing attacks is probably temporary, and it too requires a government response. In any case, many of the prescriptions for fighting terrorism effectively apply to violence from both the left and right. These include ensuring proper counterterrorism resourcing, avoiding overreactions, and having leadership unequivocally condemn such attacks.

The remainder of this brief is divided into six sections. First, terms such as “left-wing” and “terrorism” are defined. Second, trends in left-wing terrorism in the United States are analyzed, with an emphasis on the increase in the number of incidents since 2016. Third, the causes of the rise of left-wing incidents are assessed. Fourth, weaknesses that limit the impact of left-wing terrorism are examined. Fifth, possible reasons for the decline in right-wing and jihadist terrorism are discussed. The sixth and final section discusses several policy implications that can help combat violence from perpetrators across the political spectrum.

## DEFINITIONS

This analysis defines terrorism as the deliberate use or threat of premeditated violence by nonstate actors with the intent to achieve political goals by creating a broad psychological impact. Using this definition, CSIS researchers compiled and analyzed a dataset of 750 terrorist attacks and plots in the United States between January 1, 1994, and July 4, 2025. The dataset includes information such as incident date, location, target and location type, weapon used, and victim fatalities, as well as perpetrator age, sex, ideology, group affiliation, and current or former affiliation with the military or law enforcement. A full methodology and codebook for the dataset is available at [CSIS.org](https://www.csis.org).

This brief defines left-wing terrorism as that which is motivated by an opposition to capitalism, imperialism, or colonialism; black nationalism; support for LGBTQ+

rights; support for environmental causes or animal rights; adherence to pro-communist, pro-socialist beliefs or “anti-fascist” rhetoric; opposition to government authority under the belief it is a tool of oppression responsible for social injustices; support for decentralized political and social systems, such as anarchism; or partisan extremism, where violence is justified against political opponents and parties perceived as advancing right-wing agendas.

Right-wing terrorism as used in this analysis includes incidents motivated by ideas of racial or ethnic supremacy; opposition to government authority, believing it is tyrannical and illegitimate; misogyny, including incels; hatred based on sexuality or gender identity; belief in the QAnon conspiracy theory; opposition to abortion; or partisan extremism, where violence is justified against political opponents and parties perceived as advancing left-wing agendas.

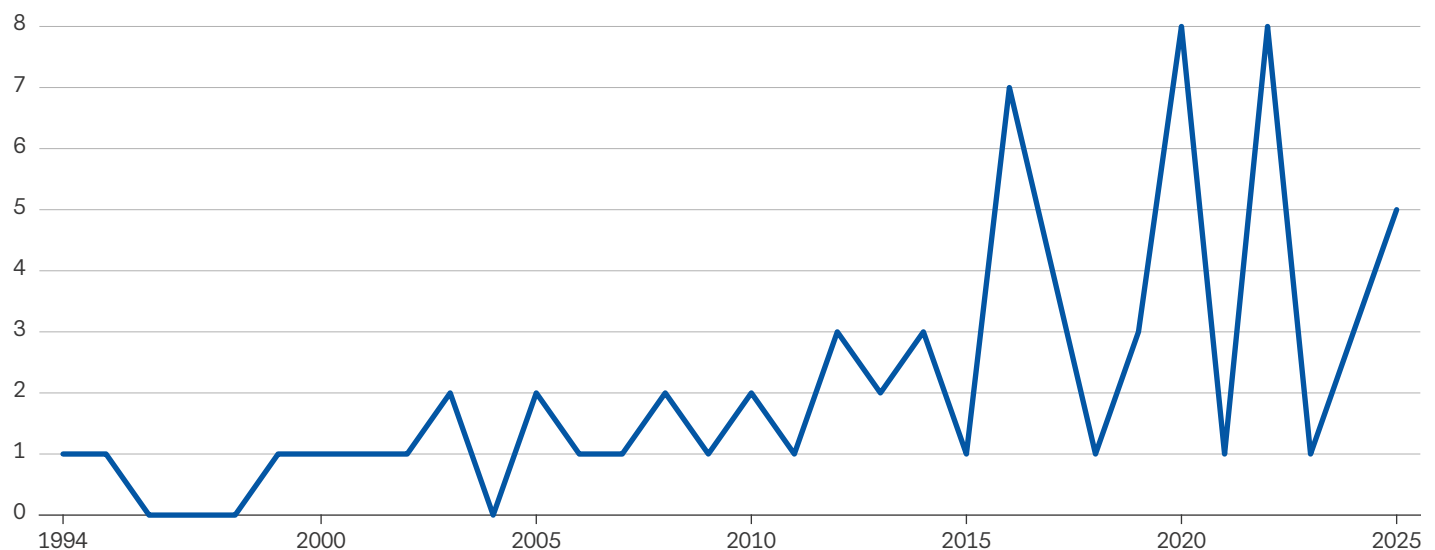
Note that terms such as “left-wing terrorism” and “right-wing terrorism” as used in this brief do not correspond to mainstream political parties in the United States, such as the Democratic and Republican parties, nor do they correspond to the overwhelming majority of political liberals and conservatives in the United States.

In many cases, clear ideological categorization of perpetrators is difficult. Former FBI Director Christopher Wray once referred to a “salad bar of ideologies,” where perpetrators of violence choose among an array of causes, many of which do not align with a traditional right-left dichotomy or other easy ideological classification.<sup>1</sup> In other cases, perpetrators may not have political motives despite their targets. For example, Thomas Crooks, who tried to assassinate then-candidate Donald Trump in Butler, Pennsylvania, in July 2024, reportedly searched online before his attack for locations where both Trump and then-President Joe Biden would be publicly speaking. While it is possible Crooks had political motives, FBI reports and journalist investigations suggest the explanation was more likely a mix of personal issues.<sup>2</sup>

## LEFT-WING TERRORISM INCIDENTS ARE ON THE RISE

The first half of 2025 was marked by an increase in left-wing terrorist attacks and plots in the United States, which continues a trend noticeable over the last decade. In absolute terms, left-wing incidents are on track in 2025 to reach historically high levels in the last 30 years, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Left-Wing Terrorist Attacks and Plots in the United States, 1994-2025\*



\*Data for 2025 runs through July 4, 2025.

Source: Data compiled by CSIS Warfare, Irregular Threats, and Terrorism Program.

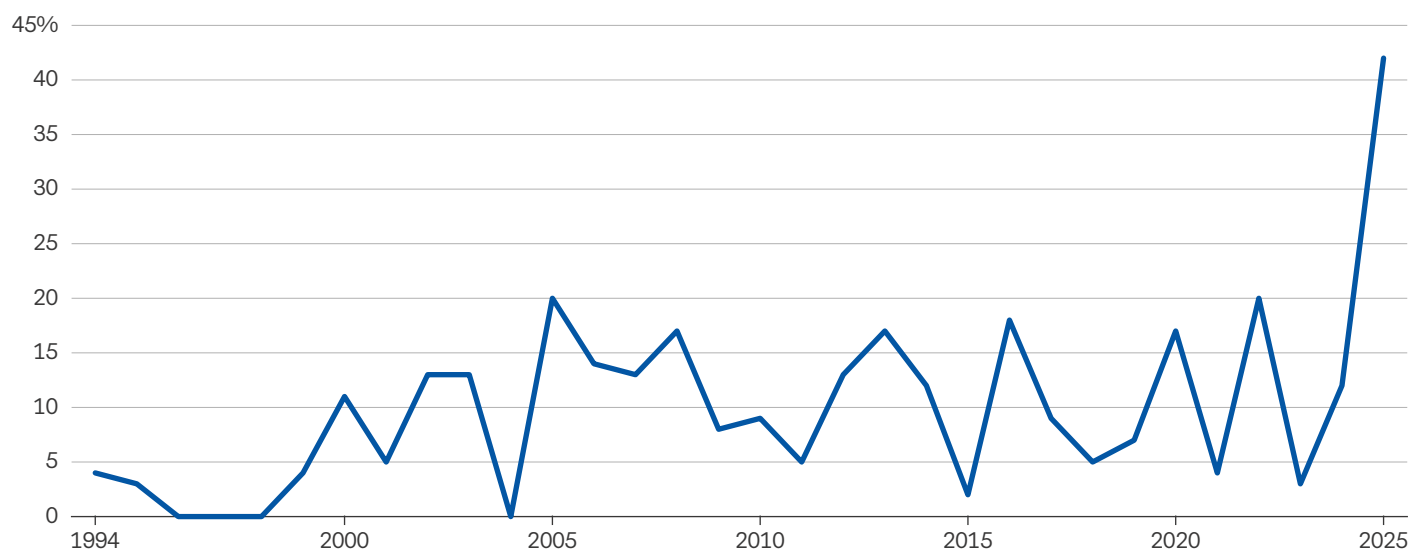
From 1994 through 2000, there was an average of 0.6 left-wing incidents annually; in the following decade, that figure doubled to 1.3 a year. Numbers began to grow substantially, however, in 2016, and from 2016 to 2024, they averaged 4.0 a year. Through July 4, 2025 (thus excluding the Kirk attack), there were five left-wing attacks or plots, which sets a trajectory for a record-breaking year in the last 30 years.

This elevated number of left-wing incidents is even

more striking when compared with the number of incidents classified under other ideological orientations. Left-wing terrorist attacks and plots as a percentage of all terrorist attacks and plots were at a record high in the first half 2025, although the decline of other forms of terrorism plays a significant role in this relative increase.

Indeed, a dramatic decline in right-wing incidents in 2025 has contributed significantly to the relative increase in left-wing incidents. So far, 2025 is the first year in the CSIS

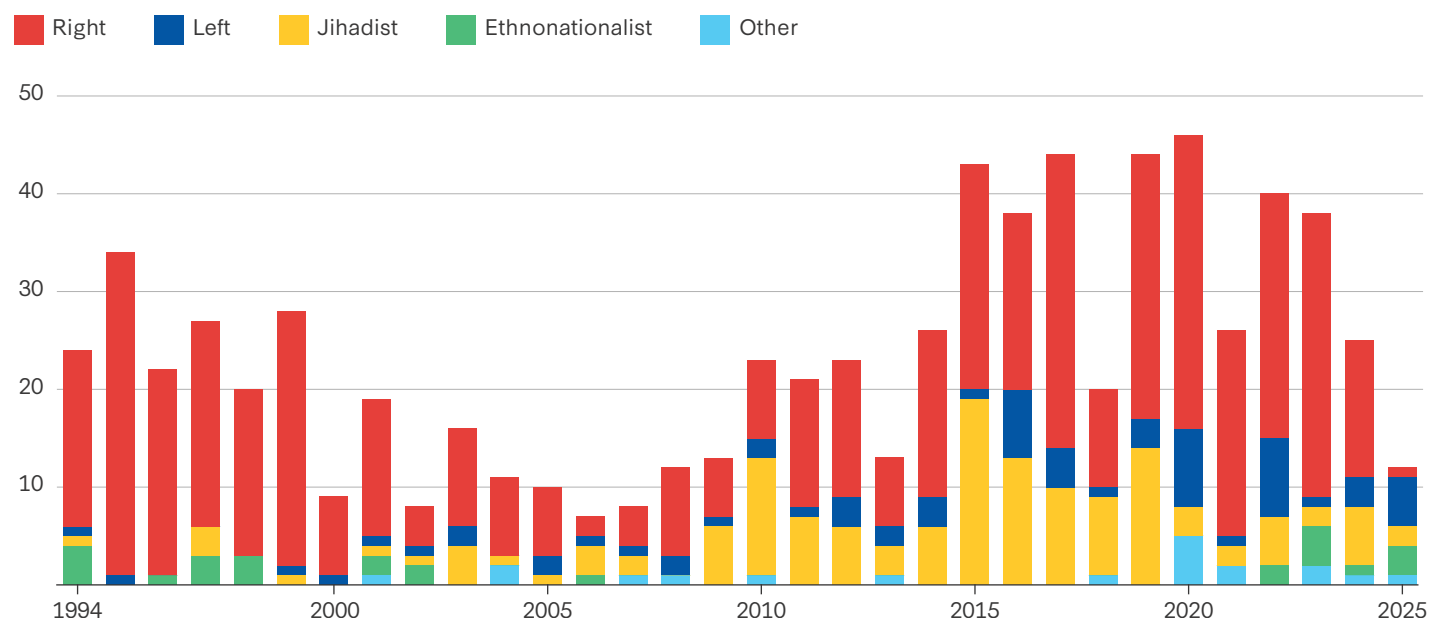
Figure 2: Left-Wing Terrorist Attacks and Plots as a Percentage of All Attacks and Plots, 1994-2025\*



\*Data for 2025 runs through July 4, 2025.

Source: Data compiled by CSIS Warfare, Irregular Threats, and Terrorism Program.

**Figure 3: Terrorist Attacks and Plots in the United States by Perpetrator Orientation, 1994-2025\***



\*Data for 2025 runs through July 4, 2025.

Source: Data compiled by CSIS Warfare, Irregular Threats, and Terrorism Program.

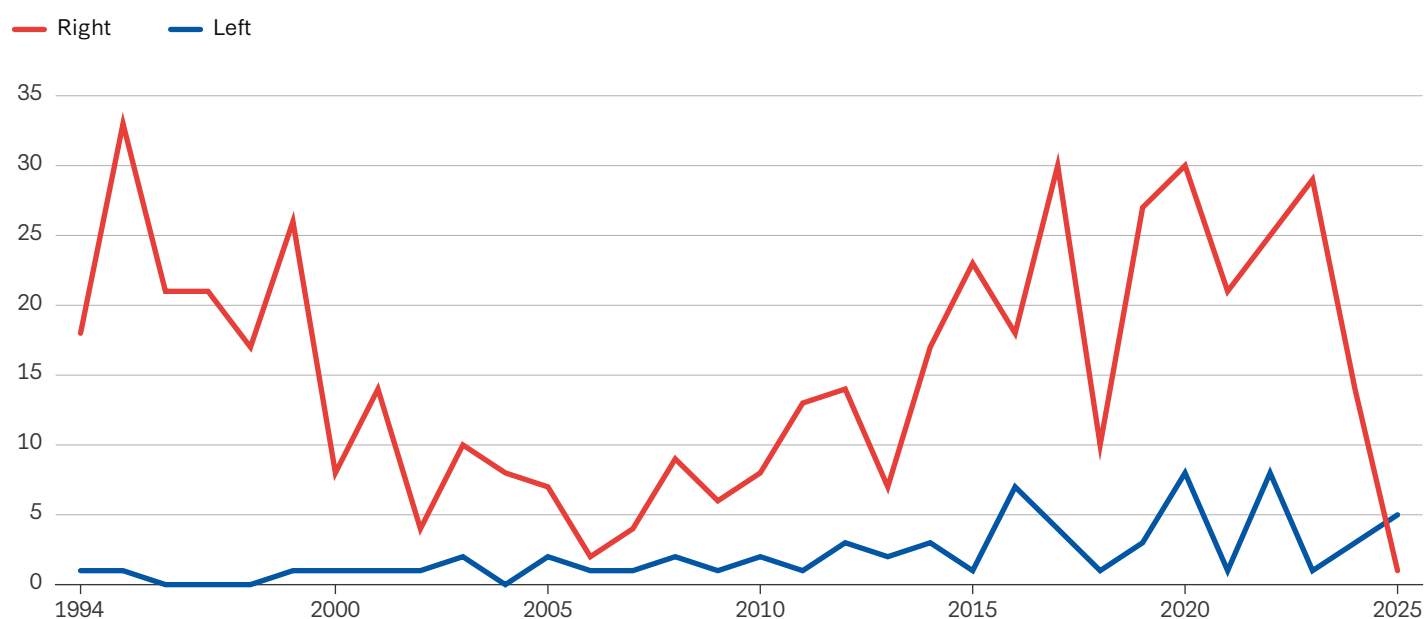
data where the number of left-wing incidents is greater than the number of right-wing ones.

Though the number of left-wing terrorist attacks and plots is experiencing a rise, the effectiveness of perpetrators typically remains limited. Although left-wing perpetrators often carry out their plans, they rarely do so with

deadly effect. Two metrics illustrate this dynamic.

First, a large share of left-wing plots succeed in becoming actual attacks. In 2025, of five left-wing incidents that occurred before July 4, four were attacks carried out and only one was a disrupted plot. This continues a long-standing pattern. As shown in Figure 5, the number of

**Figure 4: Left-Wing vs. Right-Wing Terrorist Attacks and Plots in the United States, 1994-2025\***

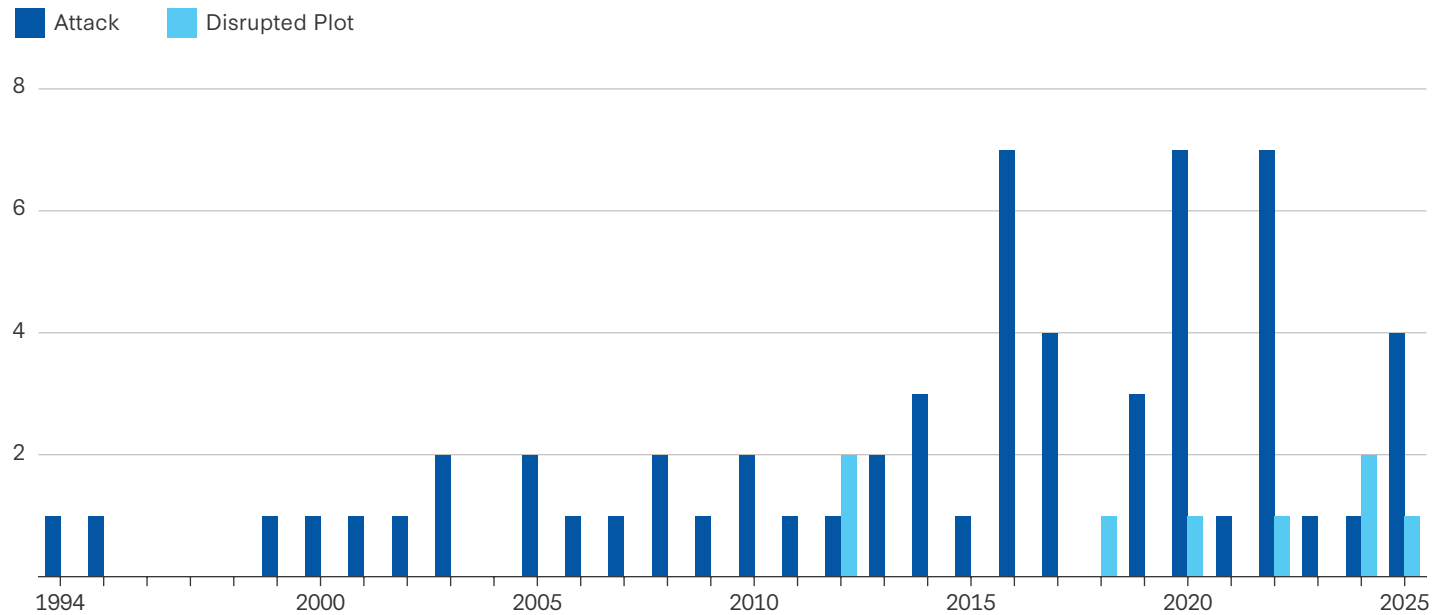


\*Data for 2025 runs through July 4, 2025.

Source: Data compiled by CSIS Warfare, Irregular Threats, and Terrorism Program.



**Figure 5: Disrupted Plots vs. Attacks Among Left-Wing Terrorist Incidents in the United States, 1994-2025\***



\*Data for 2025 runs through July 4, 2025.

Source: Data compiled by CSIS Warfare, Irregular Threats, and Terrorism Program.

left-wing attacks carried out is typically much greater than the number of plots disrupted. This trend is mirrored in right-wing and ethnonationalist incidents and is likely influenced by bias in data collection. That is, incomplete public information means disrupted plots are likely undercounted.

By contrast, jihadist incidents exhibit the opposite pattern. Disrupted plots are far more common than successful attacks, probably a reflection of decades of intense intelligence and law enforcement focus on jihadist activity after 9/11, as well as the far greater media publicity given to disrupted jihadist attacks, which enables greater data collection.

The fact that left-wing plots so often result in completed attacks elevates the significance of the recent rise in incidents because it indicates that the recent increase is likely to translate into realized violence.

Second, despite the rise in the number of left-wing incidents and the likelihood that such incidents involve realized violence, the lethality of left-wing attacks remains very low. Left-wing attacks are overwhelmingly non-lethal and far less lethal compared with other ideological orientations. Since 2020, only two fatalities have resulted from left-wing terrorist attacks in the United States: Luigi Mangione's assassination of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson in New York City in December 2024 and Michael

Reinoehl's fatal shooting of right-wing protester Aaron Danielson in Portland, Oregon, in August 2020 (if the Kirk killing is included, as seems likely, it would be a third fatality). Right-wing and jihadist attacks, by contrast, have caused far higher fatalities.

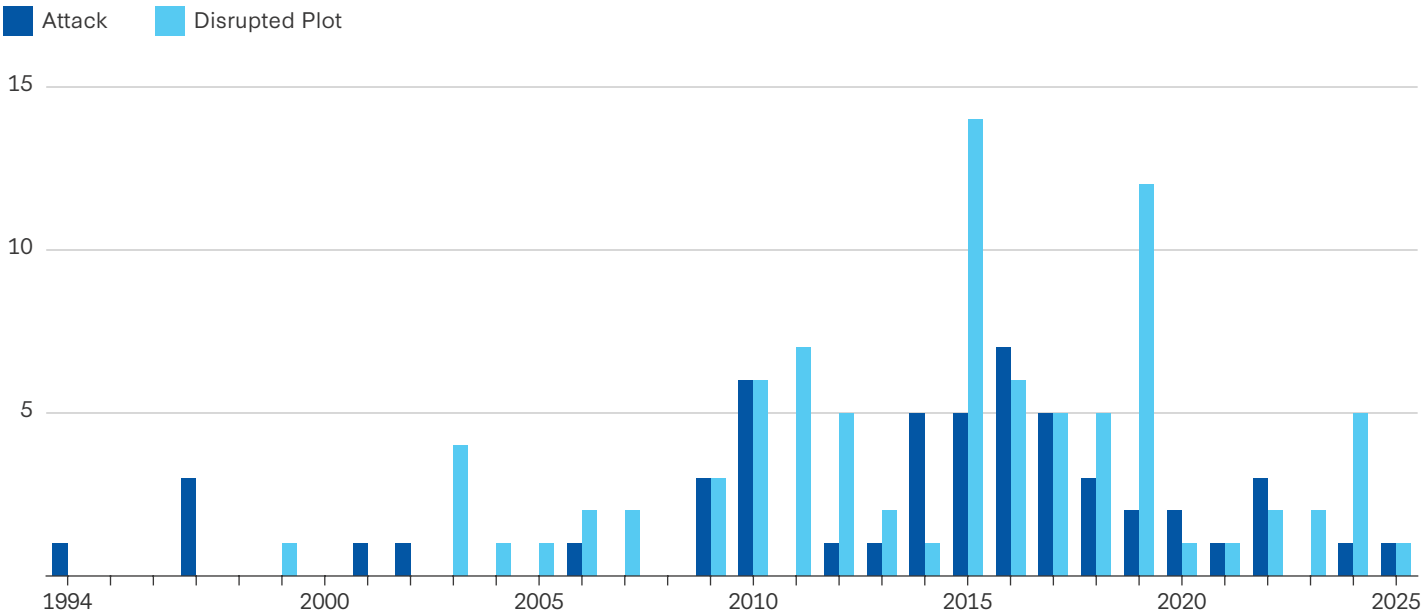
In the past decade, despite the increase in the number of left-wing incidents, left-wing attacks have killed 13 victims, compared with 112 and 82 victims for right-wing and jihadist attacks, respectively. Some of the key factors driving these dramatic discrepancies are explored in a later section of this brief.

## WHAT'S CAUSING THE RISE IN LEFT-WING INCIDENTS?

The increase in left-wing incidents in the past decade is driven by plots and attacks directed at government and law enforcement targets. Of the 41 left-wing incidents since 2016, anti-government extremism motivated 17 of them, and partisan extremism motivated another 11. All left-wing attacks through July 4, 2025, appeared to be motivated by one of these ideologies, and the Kirk killing fits this pattern, although details about Kirk's alleged killer are still emerging.<sup>3</sup>

The only significant break from this trend was a surge of six left-wing firebombings against pro-life targets (preg-

Figure 6: Disrupted Plots vs. Attacks Among Jihadist Terrorist Incidents in the United States, 1994-2025\*



\*Data for 2025 runs through July 4, 2025.  
Source: Data compiled by CSIS Warfare, Irregular Threats, and Terrorism Program.

nancy crisis centers and the office of an anti-abortion group) in the summer of 2022 around the time of the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. These attacks were intentionally perpetrated at night against unoccupied buildings to reduce (though not eliminate) the risk to people.

To understand rising left-wing violence, it is useful to distinguish between partisan extremism and anti-government extremism.

Partisan extremism includes attacks and plots against elected officials, political candidates, political party officials, and political staff and workers from terrorists with opposing political views. For example, on January 28, 2025,

U.S. Capitol Police arrested Riley Jane English, a 24-year-old from Massachusetts, on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., after she approached officers and revealed she was carrying a folding knife, two Molotov cocktails, and a lighter. According to prosecutors, English said she intended to kill senior U.S. officials, initially identifying Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, whom she described as a “Nazi,” before shifting her focus to House Speaker Mike Johnson and then to Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent. She also expressed a desire to attack the conservative Heritage Foundation.<sup>4</sup>

In a separate incident on March 30, 2025, an assailant set fire to the headquarters of the Republican Party of New

Table 1: Victims Killed in Terrorist Attacks by Perpetrator Orientation, 2016-2025\*

| Perpetrator Orientations | Victims Killed | Number of Attacks | Victims Killed per Attack |
|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Right                    | 112            | 152               | 0.7                       |
| Jihadist                 | 82             | 25                | 3.3                       |
| Left                     | 13             | 35                | 0.4                       |
| Ethnonationalist         | 4              | 10                | 0.4                       |
| Other                    | 2              | 8                 | 0.3                       |

\*Data for 2025 runs through July 4, 2025.  
Source: Data compiled by CSIS Warfare, Irregular Threats, and Terrorism Program.

Mexico in Albuquerque, igniting the entrance late at night. Graffiti reading “ICE = KKK” was spray-painted on a wall near the site.<sup>5</sup>

Attacks such as English’s plot to assassinate senior officials and the arson of the Republican Party’s New Mexico headquarters reflects the most severe effects of polarization in the United States. A variety of survey data underscores that this issue is widespread and worsening. In 2016, fewer than half of Republicans or Democrats described the opposing side as immoral, dishonest, or unintelligent. By 2022, however, most Republicans described Democrats as immoral (72 percent), dishonest (63 percent), and unintelligent (70 percent), while most Democrats said the same of Republicans (64 percent, 61 percent, and 52 percent, respectively).<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, while less than 4 percent of Americans express support for partisan violence such as assault, arson, or murder, both sides greatly overestimate their opponent’s willingness to endorse such actions, with Democrats believing 45.5 percent of Republicans support partisan murder, and Republicans believing that 42 percent of Democrats do.<sup>7</sup>

Although the vast majority of Americans would never commit partisan violence and oppose it, widespread polarization and misperceptions that the other side is far more violent than it actually is creates a dangerous environment where extremists can more easily rationalize using violence. Growth in even a tiny minority who are willing to commit partisan violence has the potential for tremendous consequences considering the combustible political climate in the United States and the fact that symbolic and strategically important political leaders are among the potential targets.

In addition to partisan extremism, anti-government extremism has also become more pronounced as a motive for left-wing attacks in 2025, particularly around the issue of immigration.

In one incident on July 4, 2025, a group attacked the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Prairieland Detention Facility in Alvarado, Texas. According to federal prosecutors and law enforcement statements, approximately a dozen individuals dressed in black clothing and equipped with tactical gear initiated the attack by detonating fireworks and spray-painting anti-ICE graffiti on vehicles and structures outside the facility.<sup>8</sup> When an Alvarado police officer responded to the scene, an assailant

positioned in a nearby wooded area opened fire, wounding the officer in the neck.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, another individual reportedly fired 20 to 30 live rounds at unarmed ICE correctional officers outside the facility.<sup>10</sup> Law enforcement subsequently apprehended 14 suspects, who now face federal charges including attempted murder of federal officers and firearm-related offenses.<sup>11</sup> Searches uncovered AR-style rifles, a pistol, body armor, two-way radios, spray paint, and flyers with anti-ICE slogans.<sup>12</sup> One of the alleged attackers stored cellphones inside Faraday bags, which are used to block signals and indicate premeditated efforts to evade law enforcement tracking.<sup>13</sup>

Traditionally, anti-government extremism refers to violence aimed at state institutions viewed as illegitimate or oppressive, whereas partisan extremism targets specific political figures or individuals based on party affiliation. As events such as the Prairieland ICE attack suggest, left-wing opposition to the Trump administration in 2025 often manifests as both: rejecting its political leadership and resisting its efforts to expand the authority of military and law enforcement institutions. Together, partisan and anti-government extremism help explain why 2025 has seen an escalation of left-wing violence, as opposition to the Trump administration fuels attacks against both its political leadership and the state institutions that carry out its agenda.

## LEFT-WING WEAKNESSES

Despite the rise in the number of left-wing terrorist incidents, there exist several characteristics and conditions that limit the scale and sophistication of attacks. The overall low lethality rates in left-wing attacks are probably attributable to several factors, including target selection, target scope, tactical methods employed, low levels of perpetrator skill, and counterterrorism measures.

First, left-wing perpetrators typically select targets that limit opportunities for mass killing. In the past decade, left-wing attacks most commonly occurred at government or law enforcement facilities. These locations are often protected by physical fortifications and security personnel, making it more difficult for perpetrators to kill targets during an attack. For example, in the July 2025 attack on ICE’s Prairieland Detention Facility, one police officer was wounded before additional law enforcement forced the attackers to flee.<sup>14</sup> The attackers’ choice of a hardened federal compound with security personnel on site contributed

to the attack's failure to kill any victims. This contrasts with jihadist attacks, which most commonly target crowded public areas with limited or no security measures, such as the car ramming attack on Bourbon Street in New Orleans on January 1, 2025, that killed 14 victims.

Second, left-wing violence is often narrowly directed at specific individuals rather than indiscriminate killings of civilians. Most notably, 10 of the 13 victim fatalities from left-wing attacks in the past decade have been police officers ambushed in public areas by attackers using firearms. This pattern underscores that even the deadliest left-wing attacks have tended to focus on targeted confrontations with law enforcement rather than mass-casualty events.

Third, left-wing perpetrators frequently employ tactical methods poorly suited to producing mass casualties. In the past decade, 20 of 35 left-wing attacks have involved the use of incendiaries or arson as the primary weapon. Incendiaries and acts of arson typically lack precision, resulting in damage that can be severe but not necessarily lethal. In some cases, the arson was done at night, which further reduced the likelihood of fatalities because the targets were often sites that were largely unoccupied.

Taken together, the typical target selection, scope, and weapon selection of left-wing attackers reflect an intent to signal opposition or cause disruption rather than inflict mass casualties.

Fourth, left-wing perpetrators frequently lack the weapons and tactical training to maximize their impact. For example, on February 14, 2022, Quintez Brown, a 21-year-old black nationalist, entered the Louisville campaign office of Democratic mayoral candidate Craig Greenberg with a 9 mm pistol. Prosecutors argued that Brown saw himself as an “equalizer” striking at a symbol of gentrification and oppression.<sup>15</sup> Despite firing multiple rounds at point-blank range, Brown missed his target, with one bullet only grazing Greenberg's sweater.

Fifth, unlike many foreign terrorist organizations with centralized leadership, funding, and training infrastructures, left-wing terrorists, like most terrorist actors in the United States, operate as loosely affiliated networks or as lone individuals, limiting their ability to train and to plan and execute complex operations. Social and technological factors, including online radicalization, often result in isolated actors lacking the resources, expertise, or coordination needed for sophisticated attacks.

The lack of organization also creates a multiplicity of

competing goals that hinders strategic effectiveness. Like their right-wing counterparts, left-wing terrorists are against many things, and there is no clear prioritization of targets within the movement. Similarly, they are unable to calibrate violence, making it more likely to backfire.

Sixth and finally, U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies have developed robust counterterrorism measures, particularly since 9/11, that disrupt plots and largely deter large-scale attack planning across all ideologies. Legal restrictions, such as controls on explosives and surveillance of known extremist networks, further constrain terrorist operational capacity. Social media, in addition to enabling radicalization, also hinders operational security, revealing intentions and possible actions of individuals who, in the past, might have remained undetected. Combined, these dynamics help ensure that, while the threat of terrorism remains, the capacity of all U.S.-based terrorist movements to execute attacks is significantly diminished.

## **WHY HAVE JIHADISTS AND RIGHT-WING INCIDENTS FALLEN?**

Explaining non-events, such as why attacks from rival ideological groups and individuals have fallen, is always difficult, but there are several possible reasons for the decline in jihadist and right-wing terrorism.

For jihadists, the main foreign terrorist groups in recent years—al Qaeda and the Islamic State—are far weaker than they were at their peaks. The United States and its allies have killed group leaders, often leaving them in disarray. Al Qaeda, for example, still has not named a successor since the death of Ayman al-Zawahiri in 2022. The Islamic State likewise has lost numerous leaders, and it no longer has an above-ground caliphate where it can train people. In both cases, the losses have made the group less inspiring, although some bottom-up radicalization remains a concern. Finally, factors like aggressive law enforcement and a U.S. Muslim community that collaborates with law enforcement lead many would-be attackers to be caught in early stages of plotting.<sup>16</sup>

The sudden decline in right-wing terrorism is both more striking and harder to explain. From 1994 through 2000, there was an average of 21 right-wing attacks or plots each year. In the following decade, right-wing incidents fell to an average of 7 annually. From 2011 through 2024, right-wing incidents climbed back up to an average of 20 a year. In the



first half of 2025, however, there was only one right-wing terrorist incident in the United States—the killing of Minnesota state legislator Melissa Hortman and her husband in June—a remarkable drop off.

Aggressive law enforcement efforts under former President Biden hurt the right-wing extremist movement, with the January 6 investigation in particular causing disarray.<sup>17</sup> The U.S. government brought charges against over 1,000 individuals, including many leaders of groups like the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys. In addition, like left-wing terrorism, right-wing terrorism is highly decentralized, and the vast majority of the most lethal attacks in the last 10 years have been perpetrated by lone actors linked to various networks but not tied to any group.

Trump's election, however, appears to have changed the threat. Although it is impossible to definitively prove the link between the policies of and positions championed in Trump's second term and the decline in right-wing terrorism incidents in the United States, it is probable that at least some extremists do not feel the need to act violently if their concerns are being addressed.

Most notably, the administration has aggressively targeted immigrants, with high-profile efforts to identify, detain, and deport them. Anti-immigrant sentiment is one of the most important violent extremist motivations in recent years. The Trump administration has also warned of “deep state” abuses, criticized and abolished programs involving diversity, promoted some conspiracy theories, and hired individuals who openly embraced white supremacy.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Trump's victory temporarily ended many concerns about a Democrat-orchestrated “stolen election,” a leading conspiracy that motivated many extremists in the past.<sup>19</sup> Enrique Tarrio, the former Proud Boys leader and a convicted seditionist whom Trump pardoned, recently summed up the president's potential psychological effect on the violent far right: “Honestly, what do we have to complain about these days?”<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, it is important to stress that correlation does not mean direct causation. The administration's rhetoric and policies may overlap with themes found in extremist discourse, but that does not necessarily imply intent to encourage violence. Rather, extremist actors may perceive mainstream political validation of their grievances as reducing the need for independent mobilization or, more concerningly, as tacit endorsement of their worldview in situations where the administration faces resistance or does go far enough in the eyes of an extremist.

## WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The best responses to the Kirk killing and political violence from any source involve few theatrics but can be highly effective.

First, the government should avoid overreacting with crackdowns on peaceful organizations, which will serve to strengthen extremist views. Radicals will argue that peaceful politics will inevitably fail and that only violence will make a difference. In response to the Kirk killing, President Trump warned that a “radical left group of lunatics” are engaged in a campaign of violence.<sup>21</sup> Other conservative voices, from members of Congress to online influencers, have similarly claimed that the left is engaged in “war.”<sup>22</sup> Kirk's shooter appears to have acted alone, but Trump has claimed that a network of political organizations fund and support violence, and must be neutralized—a threat that, if acted on, could lead to government action against an array of non-violent organizations whose political positions were anti-Kirk and are anti-Trump.<sup>23</sup> These actions will be counterproductive for combatting terrorist threats.

Second, it is important to resource all dimensions of the terrorism threat. Left-wing terrorism is a Trump administration priority, but jihadist terrorism also remains a concern even though it has declined. Right-wing terrorism could come roaring back, especially if in 2028 there are complaints of a “stolen election” or similar incendiary claims. Developing the programs and expertise to suppress different forms of terrorism takes years, and ignoring a long-term threat to go after a more immediate one could be deadly over time.

Finally, although leaders are not responsible for extremists in their midst, they are responsible for how they behave toward extremists. U.S. political leaders and activists need to lead by condemning violence on their side and calling for calm when it involves violence on the other side. The American Muslim response to jihadist terrorism offers a useful model. Muslim leaders came together to repeatedly condemn jihadist violence, and this reduces the appeal of terrorism.<sup>24</sup> When the mainstream condemns an attack, the individual is less likely to be seen, and see themselves, as a hero or successful agitator, and the community as a whole is more likely to work with law enforcement.

Many leading Democrats have vehemently condemned the Kirk shooting.<sup>25</sup> For their part, many prominent Republicans also immediately condemned right-wing attacks in recent years, including the assassination of Hortman earlier

this year and the attack on Paul Pelosi in 2022.<sup>26</sup> But the track record is far from perfect. The celebrations among some on the left of Luigi Mangione is a failure to undermine support for left-wing violence.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the failure of some conservative leaders to condemn white supremacists and other violent extremists is a major problem, allowing these extremists to believe they are carrying out the will of a broader political movement.<sup>28</sup>

Utah Governor Spencer Cox has served as a model in unequivocally denouncing extremists. Cox described Kirk's killing as "an attack on all of us."<sup>29</sup> And he offered a simple exhortation that would benefit both sides, particularly in moments like these, when violence can spiral: "Disagree better."<sup>30</sup> ■

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## APPENDIX

### *WHAT IS EXCLUDED?*

This analysis excludes a number of incidents that further contribute to the perception of an increase in left-wing violent activity in 2025. Different definitions and coding might legitimately include these, but the explanation below details why they are excluded from this dataset.

The definition of terrorism used here excludes the series of attacks against Tesla vehicles and facilities. There were more than 20 such incidents in the United States from January to April 2025. Attacks on Tesla in the United States were linked to individuals expressing opposition to CEO Elon Musk's political affiliations, particularly his role and actions in the Trump administration. Although the CSIS study team determined these attacks were incidents of economic vandalism rather than terrorism, many involved substantial property destruction and drew sharp condemnation from the Trump administration and the Department of Justice. In some cases, prosecutors have even sought terrorism enhancements in charging decisions. Although excluded from this dataset, these highly publicized incidents attracted significant attention and reinforced the perception of escalating left-wing violence in 2025.

There were three high-profile terrorist attacks in the United States in the first half of 2025 motivated by the conflict between Israel and Palestine. These include the April arson attack on Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro's residence, a May shooting that killed two Israeli Embassy staff in Washington, D.C., and a June firebombing of a pro-Israel solidarity walk in Boulder that injured 15 demonstrators. In this dataset, these attacks are classified as ethnonationalist incidents, rather than left-wing ones. However, it is noteworthy that all three incidents involved attackers motivated by opposition to Israel's actions in Gaza or U.S. support for Israel—a political position traditionally (though not always) associated with left-wing politics in the United States.

Finally, political demonstrations against immigration and customs enforcement activity across the United States in 2025 also resulted in many violent encounters, namely between law enforcement and demonstrators. However, most of these incidents did not reach a level of violence that satisfied this study's definition of terrorism, and they were not intended to cause a broad psychological effect. Nonetheless, they too contributed to the perception of growing left-wing violence.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Threats to the Homeland: Hearings Before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs*, 116th Cong., 2nd Sess., 2024.
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