Right-Wing Extremism and Mass Shootings in the United States

By Emily Kramer
Research Question

To what extent has the rise of online platforms, coupled with the shift in leadership from Obama to Trump contributed to the increase of mass shootings perpetrated by right-wing extremists in America since 2015?
Definition of Right-Wing Extremism

A reaction to perceptions of negative change [that] aims to revert fundamental features of the political system to some imagined past state.

Samuel Jackson, Oath Keepers.
Threat of Right-Wing Extremist Violence from 2008-2017

MURDER AND EXTREMISM IN THE U.S.

- Right-Wing Extremism (all movements) 71%
- Left-Wing Extremism (inc. anarchists & black nationalists) 26%
- Islamic Extremism 3%

387 Total Deaths

RIGHT-WING EXTREMISTS responsible for vast majority of extremist-related murders over last decade

Note: Total deaths Include both ideologically and non-ideologically motivated killings

Source: Anti-Defamation League
Definition of Mass Shooting

A minimum of four victims shot (either fatally or not) excluding any shooter killed or injured in the attack.

The Gun Violence Archive
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deaths - Willful, Malicious, Accidental</td>
<td>12,418</td>
<td>13,537</td>
<td>15,112</td>
<td>15,679</td>
<td>14,789</td>
<td>15,208</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suicides by Gun</td>
<td>21,386</td>
<td>22,018</td>
<td>22,938</td>
<td>23,854</td>
<td>24,432</td>
<td>PENDING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injuries - Willful, Malicious, Accidental</td>
<td>22,779</td>
<td>27,033</td>
<td>30,666</td>
<td>31,265</td>
<td>28,233</td>
<td>29,501</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children [age 0-11] Killed or Injured</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teens [aged 12-17] Killed or Injured</td>
<td>2,318</td>
<td>2,695</td>
<td>3,140</td>
<td>3,256</td>
<td>2,869</td>
<td>3,068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Shooting</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder-Suicides</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensive Use [DGU]</td>
<td>1,531</td>
<td>1,393</td>
<td>2,001</td>
<td>2,107</td>
<td>1,888</td>
<td>2,147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unintentional Shootings</td>
<td>1,605</td>
<td>1,969</td>
<td>2,202</td>
<td>2,039</td>
<td>1,662</td>
<td>1,837</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Deaths, Injuries, Children, Teens killed/injured [actual numbers]
Mass Shooting, Murder-suicides, Defensive Use, Unintentional Shooting [number of incidents]
Suicide numbers supplied by CDC End of Year Report [actual numbers]

@gundeaths
www.gunviolencearchive.org
www.facebook.com/gunviolencearchive

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Hypothesis

The change in presidency from Obama to Trump coupled with the resources that online platforms present for extremist groups caused the uptick in right-wing extremist mass shootings.
Methodology

- Process tracing using causal mechanisms, "a theory of a system of interlocking parts that transmits causal forces between a cause (or a set of causes) and an outcome"
- X = causal condition
- Y = outcome
El Paso Mass Shooting

• When: August 3rd, 2019
• Where: Walmart in El Paso, Texas
• Victims: 22 killed, 24 injured
• Targets: Hispanic individuals
• Perpetrator: Patrick Crusius
Case Study, Patrick Crusius

- X = Crusius’ belief that immigrants are a threat to America and therefore should be eradicated
- Y = The enactment of Crusius’ beliefs during the El Paso massacre.
- A: Crusius’ perceived threat under Obama
- B: The proliferation of online platforms
- C: Trump’s campaign and election
Crusius' Twitter Page

Patrick Crusius @outsider

#BuildTheWall is the best way that @POTUS has worked to secure our country so far!

John Doe @juhjghjk

I'm extremely proud to call Trump my President! He's doing a wonderful job and is truly going to #MAGA! #MondayMotivation
My ideology has not changed for several years. My opinions on automation, immigration, and the rest predate Trump and his campaign for president. I am putting this here because some people will blame the President or certain presidential candidates for the attack. This is not the case. I know that the media will probably call me a white supremacist anyway and blame Trump’s rhetoric. The media is infamous for fake news. Their reaction to this attack will likely just confirm that.
Online Platforms Catering to Right-Wing Extremists
Findings

• Niche online platforms create a "contagion" phenomena
  • Conducive environments for radicalization
  • Direct correlation between increase in right-wing extremist mass shootings and the proliferation of such online platforms

• Trump's influence has a clear impact, but there is not enough evidence to make him directly responsible
Conclusion

• Hypothesis partially correct
  • Online platforms are linked to the increase in right-wing extremist violence

• Will become easier to measure Trump's level of responsibility as a new administration emerges

• Right-wing extremist mass shootings are an increasing threat to the United States, regardless of Trump’s potential influence.