

What does  
US terrorism  
look like and  
how do we  
find it?

Eric Vought

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# What does US terrorism look like and how do we find it?

Eric Vought

Lawrence County Sheriff's Auxiliary

Mount Vernon, MO Public Briefing, 09 August 2016



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Warrant Officer Jimmy Garrett, the Auxiliary's Intelligence and Security Chief (S2), prepared LE-targeted ISIS briefings for the Sheriff's Office and provided comments on this paper. Lt. Cathleen (Cathi) Vought (also my lovely wife) assisted with editing and putting up with me through writing and research.

# Recent Events Focused Attention

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- Paris Attacks<sup>1</sup>, San Bernardino<sup>2</sup>, Orlando<sup>3</sup> caught public attention;
- ~40% of Americans think we are losing 'War on Terror'<sup>4</sup>;
- Question why counterterrorism tactics *do not seem to be* working;
- What is the terror threat? Are we countering it effectively?

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<sup>1</sup>November 2015

<sup>2</sup>December 2015

<sup>3</sup>June 2016

<sup>4</sup>ORC International [2015] and Rasmussen [2016]

# This Presentation

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US domestic terrorism 1995 – 2016;

- How common is it?
- How do we detect it?
- What are current trends?
- How is ISIS<sup>5</sup> different?
- How is social media impacting terrorism recruitment?

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<sup>5</sup>Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, sometimes ISIL or Daesh 

# What US Domestic Terrorism Looks Like

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- US Terrorism is not common;
- Large, casualty causing events are rare;
- US jihadists are ethnically and racially diverse;
- There **are** concerning trends we need to watch carefully;
- Community awareness and traditional policing techniques **are** effective;

# Many definitions

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- UN, US agency, academic definitions often conflict;
- Looking at statistics, need to know how they mean it;

## Definition (Terrorism)

Not just violence, but *campaign of violence for ideological purpose*;



# ACDT 2011

## Academic Consensus Definition of Terrorism

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*Terrorism refers on the one hand to a doctrine about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and, on the other hand, to a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties. – [Schmid, 2011, 86-87].*

# Global Terrorism Database (GTD) Criteria

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- 1** The violent act was aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal;
- 2** The violent act included evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (or audiences) other than the immediate victims; and
- 3** The violent act was outside the precepts of International Humanitarian Law. [START 2015]

# Annual Terrorism Casualties

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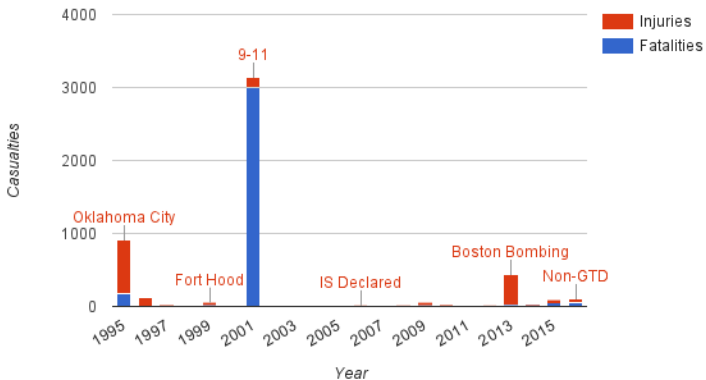
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## US Terrorism Casualties 1995-2015 (GTD)



# Annual Terrorism Casualties (log)

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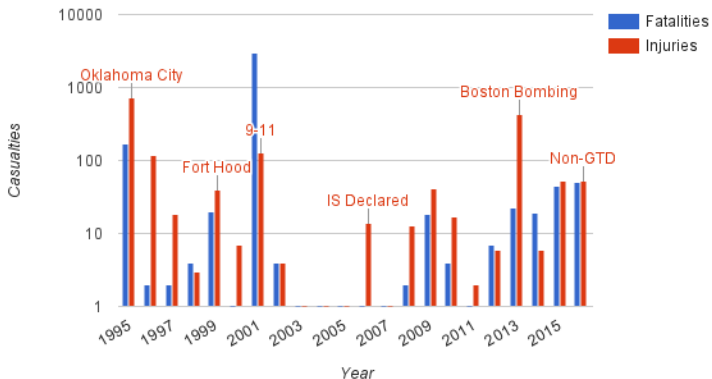
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## US Terrorism log Casualties 1995-2015 (GTD)



# Distribution of Attacks

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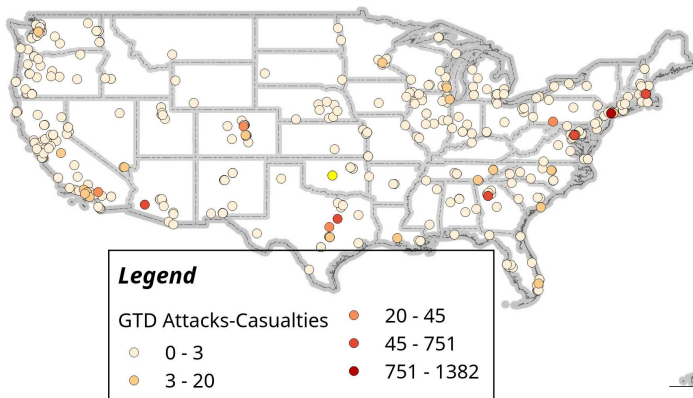
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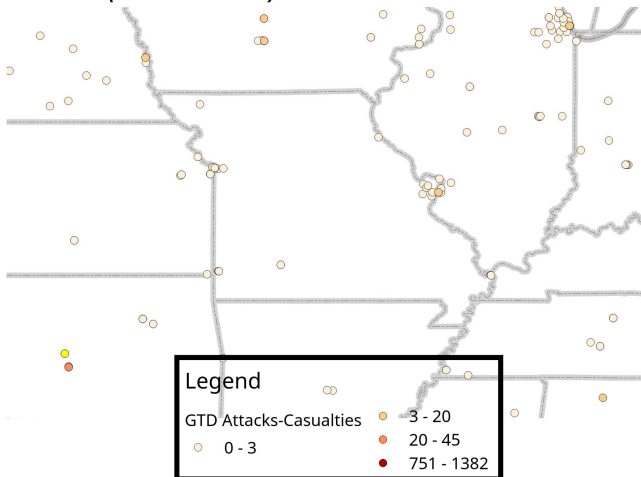
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***GTD US Terror Attack Casualties (killed + wounded) 1995 - 2015***



# Missouri Attacks

**GTD Attacks Missouri and Surrounds, Casualties  
(killed + wounded) 1970-2015**



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# World Terrorism

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- Only 2.6% of terrorism deaths from terrorism since 2000 in Western countries;
- 78% of deaths happened in Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria;
- Global deaths in 2014 totaled 32,685, an 80% increase from 2013;
- Number of countries experiencing attacks on the rise;
- Most deaths in 2014 from Boko Haram (Nigeria), ISIS 2nd;<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Global Terrorism Index [IEP2015]

# Not All Incidents Have Casualties

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- Hostage events;
- Hijackings;
- Law Enforcement intervenes:
- Failed bombings;
- etc.



# Yearly Incidents

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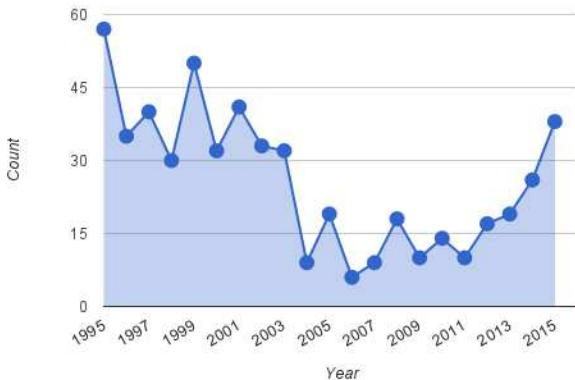
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# Why the Dip in 2003?

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## Fact

*Annual attacks from jihadi terrorism were single digits both before and after the Invasion of Iraq in 2003.*

# Selected Terror Incidents

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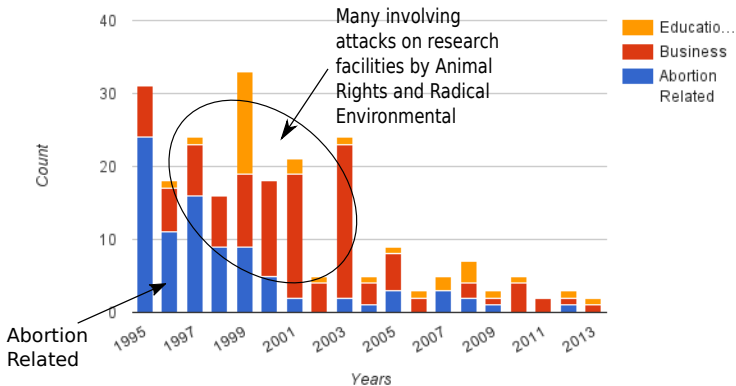
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### Selected US Terror Incidents (by Target Type) 1995-2014 (GTD)



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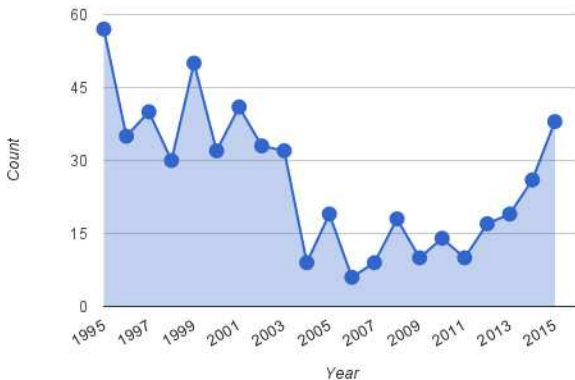
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# Plots v Incidents

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## Definition (plot)

Plots are incidents which either occurred or were planned/prepared. A plot interrupted before it is attempted will not be included in the GTD.

- New America Foundation Homegrown Extremism Database compiles data on plots;
- 505 plots covering 2001-2016;

# Annual Plots

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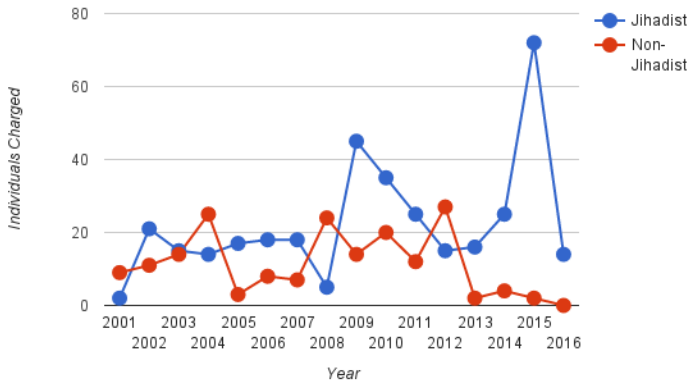
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## Extremists Charged Per Year 2001-2016 (New America Extremism Database)



# Jihadist v. Non-Jihadist

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- Non-Jihadist plots low 2013-2015, but that could change;
- Non-jihadists caused 23 of 87 casualties in our 2015 data<sup>7</sup>;
- From 2002-2016, jihadists killed 95 v. 48 for right-wing extremists<sup>8</sup>;
- We cannot focus exclusively on jihadist threats;

---

<sup>7</sup>See appendix.

<sup>8</sup>New America Foundation [2016]

# Jihadist Plotters

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## Not all a domestic threat

Most US Jihadis (~3/4) are not plotting domestic attacks but are attempting to defect or provide support to ISIS overseas;

- US jihadis ethnically diverse;
- Most not ethnically Arab;
- 40% are converts to Islam<sup>9</sup>;
- Many young, most male;

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<sup>9</sup>CNS 2014; Vidino and Hughes 2015, pp.ix 



# Plot Information Sources

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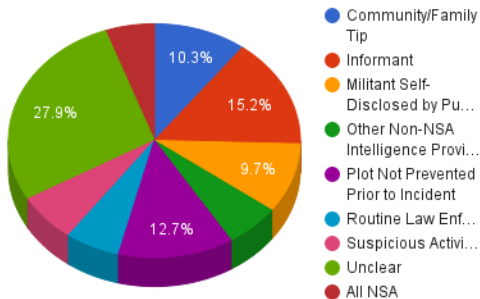
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**Plot Information Sources 2002-2016 (New America Foundation)**



# Community Policing

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- Local community and local law enforcement discover threats;
- Community/Family tips critical and *require trust*;
- This threat different than regional jihadi threats<sup>10</sup>; parents/family/community do not condone and *often seek help*:

---

<sup>10</sup>e.g. Palestine, Chechnya

# Parents Do Not Understand

*What's more — and this is the greatest difference from the circumstances of young Palestinians who take up diverse forms of intifada — the Muslim parents of radicalized second-generation youth do not understand the revolt of their progeny. More and more, as with the parents of converts, they try to prevent the radicalization of their children: They call the police; if the children have left the country, they follow to try to bring them back; they fear, with good reason, that the older children will draw in their younger siblings. Far from being the symbol of the radicalization of Muslim populations as a whole, the jihadis explode the generational gap, which is to say, quite simply, the family. – [Roy, 2016][emphasis mine]*

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- 9/11 centrally planned/coordinated; plotters sent to carry out plan;
- *Shoe bomber, underwear bomber* trained overseas; planned and carried out attack;
- Most US attacks 'homegrown';

---

<sup>11</sup>Congressional Homeland Security Committee testimony [Jenkins, 2015]

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- 9/11 centrally planned/coordinated; plotters sent to carry out plan;
- *Shoe bomber, underwear bomber* trained overseas; planned and carried out attack;
- Most US attacks 'homegrown';
- Paris attacks hybrid: Syria ringmaster, coordinated/carried out by French/Belgian nationals<sup>11</sup>;
- Social media makes hybrid attacks easier, plotters harder to find;

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<sup>11</sup>Congressional Homeland Security Committee testimony [Jenkins, 2015]

# ISIS and Social Media

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- Include Facebook™, Twitter™, cell phones and mobile apps;
- ISIS much more media-savvy than Al Qaeda or Al Nusra;
- ISIS Twitter Census: ~46,000 supporter accounts<sup>12</sup>;

---

<sup>12</sup>[Berger and Morgan, 2015, pp 7]

<sup>13</sup>[Callimachi, 2015]

# ISIS and Social Media

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- Include Facebook™, Twitter™, cell phones and mobile apps;
- ISIS much more media-savvy than Al Qaeda or Al Nusra;
- ISIS Twitter Census: ~46,000 supporter accounts<sup>12</sup>;
- ISIS recruiters target specific demographics, groom recruits;
- Target socially-isolated individuals and isolate them further<sup>13</sup>;

---

<sup>12</sup>[Berger and Morgan, 2015, pp 7]

<sup>13</sup>[Callimachi, 2015]

# Where does this lead?

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- We expect other extremists to learn from ISIS;
- Social media is two-edged sword:
  - We can track and discover active plots;
  - We can use volunteer labor;
  - Defectors sometimes help intercept potential recruits;
  - Organizations hijack ISIS social media to counter narrative;



# “Perplexed, but not in despair”

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Conclusion

- Media puts terror in 'terrorist';
- Trends are concerning, need to be watched;
- Community participation and routine law enforcement make a difference;
  - Suspicious Activity Reporting;
- Gathering intelligence requires trust;
- We must understand and adapt to social media trends;

# Changelog

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Changelog

References

- 1.0 First review draft 2016-01-11; Approved for distribution 2016-01-16;
- 1.1 2016-01-18, Incorporated editorial changes from ISC; Reformatted appendices, added this changelog;
- 1.2 2016-01-19, Reformatted as slides, handout;
- 1.3 2016-01-19, added back Plot Information Sources table lost in earlier draft;
- 1.4 2016-01-21, tweaked presentation, editorial;
- 1.5 2016-01-22, licensed CC-BY-4.0;
- 1.5.1 2016-02-04, updated log;
- 1.6.1 2016-06-12, updated 2015, 2016 prelim numbers;
- 1.7.1 2016-06-13 Incorporated most recent data on terror plots, added info on Orlando nightclub attack, ref to Sageman.
- 1.7.2 2016-06-14 Typo correction.