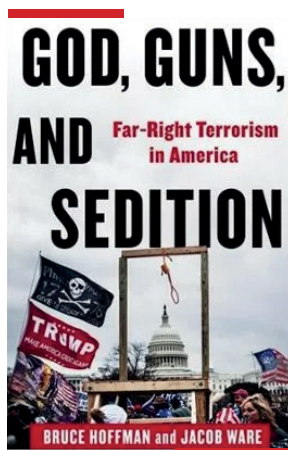


## Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware, God, Guns, and Sedition. Far-Right Terrorism in America<sup>1</sup>

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The authors of the reviewed monograph are researchers of terrorism in the context combating this phenomenon. Bruce Hoffman, who has been researching extremism and the development of terrorism for over 40 years, a long-time expert at the RAND Corporation<sup>2</sup>, is a professor at Georgetown University. Hoffman is the author of the book *Inside Terrorism* published by Columbia University Press (third edition in 2017). Jacob Ware is an assistant professor at the Walsh School of Foreign Service

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<sup>1</sup> B. Hoffman, J. Ware, *God, Guns, and Sedition. Far-Right Terrorism in America*, Columbia University Press 2024, 448 p. At time of review writing the book was not available in Polish.

<sup>2</sup> Founded in 1948, this American think tank and independent non-profit research organisation conducts research and analysis in the areas of security, health, education, and sustainable development. Source: <https://www.rand.org/about.html> [accessed: 13 VIII 2024] – editor’s note.

at Georgetown University. Both authors are also associated as researchers with the Council on Foreign Relations<sup>3</sup>.

The reviewed book was published as part of the Council on Foreign Relations Book series by Columbia University Press. The reviewed publication is 448 pages long, including an extensive bibliography (pages 255-411) and an index of names and terms. The publication consists of a preface and 9 chapters:

1. *Accelerationism Reborn*
2. *Battle Plan*
3. *Race War*
4. *Armed and Dangerous*
5. *Leaderless Resistance*
6. *Racism Rekindled*
7. *The Movement Goes Global*
8. *American Carnage*
9. *Countering Far-Right Terrorism.*

From the first chapter, the authors take the reader through the history of right-wing extremism and terrorism in the United States. The starting point is the storming of the Capitol on 6 January 2021, introducing a comparison of the symbolism of the images with *The Day of the Rope* from the novel *The Turner Diaries* by white supremacist William L. Pierce (published under penname Andrew Macdonald). The authors show how the actions of right-wing extremists, ironically, fit into the strategy of accelerationism and revolution straight from Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*.

The researchers cite interesting statistics showing how acceptance of the use of violence for political purposes has been growing in the US, on both sides of the political spectrum. One of the cited examples is a 2021 study conducted by the University of Maryland and "The Washington Post", the results of which indicate that a third of Democrats and slightly more Republicans agreed that violence for political purposes is "somewhat justified". The data showing political radicalisation is compared with statistics on firearms - the US is home to approx. 4% of the world's population, and at the same time US citizens own (private property, not state resources) 40% of firearms globally - 400 million weapons, about 121 per 100 citizens.

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<sup>3</sup> Founded in 1921, an American, independent non-profit organisation, think tank and publisher. It deals with international politics and the role of the United States in the world. Source: <https://www.cfr.org/about> [accessed: 13 VIII 2024] – editor's note.

In the following chapters, the authors show how right-wing extremism and terrorism are not a new phenomenon, and in their current form, their roots can be traced back to the 1970s: *Far from being an unfortunate symptom of today's society, the development of this threat has been systematically planned by lineage of violent, far-right extremists who have sought to project their hateful and antidemocratic views of the world into American society*<sup>4</sup>.

The second chapter presents the neo-Nazi and white supremacist movement, and the authors show that the stereotypical image of a neo-Nazi as an uneducated person, often from the lower classes, does not always correspond to reality. The aforementioned William Luther Pierce, anti-Semite, considered one of the main ideologists of the movement, the founder of the extremist organisation National Alliance, had a doctorate in physics, graduated from prestigious studies, and even lectured for a while.

The third chapter details the history of the trial of white supremacists from Fort Smith, accused of plotting to overthrow the government. All the conspirators were acquitted, which, as Kathleen Belew, an American historian, quoted in the work, wrote was like a green light for violence by right-wing extremists<sup>5</sup>.

Chapter four examines right-wing armed groups, from the Ku Klux Klan to David Koresh's cult and the story of the Waco siege in Texas, in which cult members tragically set fire to the Mount Carmel complex in which they had barricaded themselves. This is one example of the link between right-wing extremism, fanaticism, and conspiracy theories.

Chapter five examines the radicalisation of Timothy McVeigh and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, which killed 168 people and injured nearly 700. The chapter concludes with an introduction to the presidency of Barack Obama. The election of a non-white person to the presidency in 2008 for the first time, combined with difficult economic conditions resulting from the recession, provided fertile ground for a new chapter in the history of right-wing violence in the United States.

This thread is developed in chapter six, in which the problem of right-wing extremism is presented in a broader global context, discussing, among others, the attacks in Norway in 2011 and in the USA in Oak Creek in 2012. The authors analyse the factors contributing to radicalisation,

<sup>4</sup> B. Hoffman, J. Ware, *God, Guns, and Sedition...*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

including the development of social media, pointing to the media aspect of terrorism and the axes of the narrative of right-wing extremists (among them the migration crisis - especially in Europe - and racism and hatred towards African-American - in the USA).

Analysing examples of increasingly radical narratives, the researchers present the history and background of subsequent attacks - in the USA: Charlottesville (2017), Pittsburgh (2018), El Paso (2019) and in New Zealand: Christchurch (2019). The authors show how terrorists “inspire” each other and, thanks to social media, they seem to have a sense of belonging to a broad group (even though they act alone). Hoffman and Ware point out that social media gives extremists the opportunity to speak directly to people susceptible to radicalisation.

Chapter eight takes up the topic of conspiracy theories and uses the COVID-19 pandemic as an example to show how conspiracy theories are spreading, reinforcing radicalisation on the right side of the political spectrum. It also points out to the role of political leaders in this process, as exemplified by Donald Trump’s statements quoted in the book. This part also shows how the QAnon movement gained popularity by capitalising on hate speech narratives. This part of the book ends with a detailed description of the events of 6 January 2021, aligning with the first chapter.

The final, ninth chapter presents recommendations for decision-makers. Hoffman and Ware point out that fighting domestic terrorism may be even more difficult than terrorism from “abroad”. The recommendations are divided into three parts: a) short-term (including an appropriate regulatory framework), b) medium-term (including strengthening civil society) and c) long-term (aimed at rebuilding unity and counteracting social polarisation).

In the reviewed publication, the authors present in a comprehensive and well documented manner the history, development and modus operandi of right-wing extremists and terrorists, their mutual connections, inspirations, and conspiracy theories that serve as a kind of ideological glue for the fragmented movement. They also point to the role of social media as a factor that has accelerated the development of extremism at a “supersonic speed.” Although the authors address the subject of the far right in their work, certain observations regarding radicalisation processes seem to be universal for extremism in a broad sense, regardless of the ideology behind it.

*God, Guns, and Sedition. Far-Right Terrorism in America* is certainly a valuable read for terrorism researchers. It presents a cross-sectional history of extremist movements in the US, organising the knowledge available so far in various sources, while showing how radicalisation progresses and what factors strengthen it. Among the numerous titles devoted to right-wing extremism that have appeared in the US in recent years<sup>6</sup>, reviewed publication stands out for its comprehensive and practical approach.

The book can be recommended to state administration employees responsible for the strategic level of the Anti-Terrorist (AT) system in the Republic of Poland, especially in the context of analysing the systemic conclusions related to responding to the growth of polarisation and radicalisation presented in the monograph. The book would also be very useful for students. It is therefore hoped that its Polish edition will soon be available.

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<sup>6</sup> Examples: E. Reeve, *Black Pill. How I Witnessed the Darkest Corners of the Internet Come to Life, Poison Society, and Capture American Politics*, Atria Books 2024; B.F. Walter, *How Civil Wars Start. And How to Stop Them*, Crown 2022; M. Browning, T. Browning, *The Hate Next Door. Undercover within the New Face of White Supremacy*, Sourcebooks 2023; D. Neiwert, *The Age of Insurrection. The Radical Right's Assault on American Democracy*, Melville House 2023.