

Law enforcement agencies have made great strides in understanding domestic terrorism over the past decade. This is partially due to the nature of politically motivated crime and violence. As Donald Black (2004) states, the three main ingredients of modern terrorism are (1) an angry group of people or sometimes even a single enraged individual (2) with the ability to travel and (3) with access to technology that can cause massive casualties. All three ingredients are available to people who wish to take criminal action based on various political positions. Stated simply, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies have had quite a bit of experience with such criminal activity, and they are getting better at handling it.

In the past three decades, law enforcement agencies have participated in anti-terrorist training, especially after the massive Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. Many law enforcement executives came to see that terrorism was no longer an exotic problem that happened only overseas; rather, it was a real criminal problem in the United States. Large urban agencies established units to deal with terrorism, and they frequently operated in conjunction with the federal government. The reaction to Oklahoma City expanded such units, though Chicago; New York; Washington, D.C.; Miami; and Los Angeles had experienced various forms of terrorism for years. Oklahoma City was different—if it could happen there, it could happen anywhere. American law enforcement began to respond. Of course, the process was accelerated in the wake of 9/11.

Understanding is important because terrorism investigation and prevention differs from many other types of patrol and investigative work. Terrorism requires extensive criminal intelligence and deep networks of information. If community policing has a positive impact on neighborhoods, it is essential in antiterrorist operations. Law enforcement cannot operate in many subcultures unless members of those subcultures experience police officers solving problems and meeting community needs. Finally, many investigative methods resemble organized crime and conspiracy investigations. They take time to develop, require patience, and rely on criminal intelligence.

Extremism Versus Terrorism

Another issue surrounds domestic terrorism. The Constitution allows people to hold extremist beliefs, no matter how radical they may be. It also allows people to voice those beliefs most of the time, as long as they are not taking engaging in crime or supporting a terrorist group. Terrorism involves criminal activity, which is why American law enforcement is concerned with the subject. People are free to be extremists, but they are not allowed to engage in criminal activity.

Still, the line between constitutional rights and behavior is sometimes very thin. Freedom of speech serves as an example. The Supreme Court has said that people connected with a terrorist organization are not exercising their right to free speech if they write or speak in support of the group. This is a crime. Subsequent court opinion stated that a person not connected with the terrorist group has a right to speak in favor of its activities even when such activity assists the group (Pochon, 2012).

Categorizing Domestic Terrorism

There is a great deal of tension between theoretical criminologists and practical analysts who look for immediate solutions to a specific problem. Classical, or theoretical, criminologists look for explanations of social phenomena, and they search for theories to explain crime or behavior in general. This crucial work produces theories that guide policies. From a tactical (or practical) perspective, however, immediate