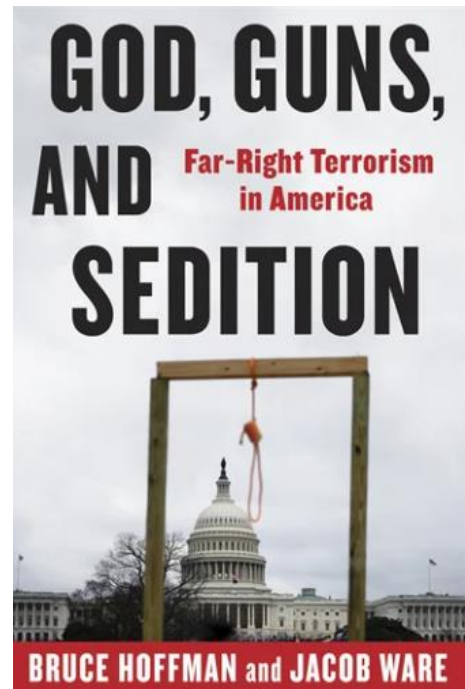


Book Review: *God, Guns, and Sedition* Far-Right Terrorism in America

By Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware
Columbia University Press
2024, 448 Pages
Hardcover ISBN: 9780231211222
E-book ISBN: 9780231558808

Reviewed by Samantha Jones

In *God, Guns, and Sedition*, authors Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware show that many Americans believe that violence against the government can be justified. Through their research spanning over 40 years, focusing on the rise of far-right extremism, they highlight how a “toxic mix of political extremism and polarization, social and cultural tribalism, conspiracy theories, proliferation of guns and well-armed militias” has brought the US “closer to a civil war than any of us would like to believe” (p. 6).



The first five chapters outline the history of far-right extremism in the US, focusing on the spread of “accelerationism”, i.e., the idea the best thing white supremacists can do is ‘accelerate’ the demise of the West by sowing chaos and creating political tension. The authors discuss the emergence of the Neo-Nazi cell ‘The Order’, the watershed trial in 1988 in which fourteen white supremacists were acquitted on charges of government overthrow, and militia movements in the 1990s (especially in relation to federal raids in Idaho and a religious cult in Texas). Chapter four reviews the radicalisation of a decorated war hero, Timothy McVeigh, who epitomises the ‘lone wolf’ idea within the far-right and killed 168 people during the Oklahoma City Bombing.

The following three chapters focus on the aftermath of Barack Obama’s election to the White House. Far-right extremism had been relatively dormant in the US; yet Obama’s election ‘accelerated’ the outcry from white supremacist groups to take action. The appearance of Donald Trump as the 2018 Republican candidate, with his promise to ‘clean the swamps’ and ‘ban all Muslims’, acted as a major catalyst for far-right extremists. Ten days after Trump’s electoral win, the Anti-Defamation League highlighted a “massive increase in the amount of harassment of American Jews” (p. 155), ultimately illustrating that words, actions, and social media do matter and can create not only regional changes but global impacts.

Then, the book shifts to the discussion of conspiracy theories within the context of the far-right, with particular reference to the COVID-19 pandemic. Right-wing extremists used

COVID to spread racist propaganda against Chinese, Jewish, and other religious and ethnic groups. Social media played a significant role in inciting fear and generating self-fuelling violence that spread as quickly as the pandemic, whereby citizens banded together to march in force, which quickly spread to riots. Numerous far-right extremists took advantage of the situation and unrest after the killing of George Floyd. The chaos culminated with the Capitol Hill assault on 6 January (2021). The most recent assault on Capitol Hill before that had been in 1814 (p. 209).

In the final chapter, the book brings the historical analysis together, showing that far-right extremism predates the elections of Trump and Obama. Such extremism was rather “revitalised and infused with new vigour” by those political events, giving rise to “a new generation of white supremacists now allied with militant, antigovernment extremists” (p. 226). This extremism has infiltrated the very fabric of American society, causing fractures, the misalignment of values, and self-fuelling violence. Hence, the authors argue that countering the domestic threat of far-right extremism in America will be far more challenging than countering international threats.

Hoffman and Ware have incorporated policy recommendations comprising short, medium, and long-term measures to rebuild social cohesion and assist with breaking the cycle of recruitment and regeneration within America. These changes must be implemented urgently if the goal is to counter America’s far-right extremism while restoring integrity and respect for America’s political system. Nevertheless, the authors note that the recommendations will likely take years, if not decades, to be implemented. One such change is to ensure that “social media titans” (p. 230), who have sat back while their platforms were utilised and exploited to spread hate and radicalisation, are finally held accountable for their failure to act.

God, Guns, and Sedition is extensively researched and has incorporated a comprehensive historical and contemporary analysis that aims to not only provide an accurate account of the emergence, evolution, events, movements, and analyses around far-right extremism in America but also seeks to address countermeasures. This book would be an excellent resource for personnel within industry and students to gain a deeper understanding of far-right extremism in America from two renowned scholars within the counterterrorism industry.

About the reviewer:

Samantha Jones is a lecturer in Terrorism and Intelligence and Discipline Lead for the Bachelor of Policing and Bachelor of Policing-Investigation with the Australian Graduate School of Policing and Security, Charles Sturt University. Her doctoral research expertise focused on terrorism and terrorist cell profiling domestically and internationally, and she is actively researching state-sanctioned terrorism and intelligence and biological weaponry with a focus on terrorism.