

# Victims of Ideological Homicides, 1990-2014

## OVERVIEW

This research brief presents the preliminary results of 25 years of ideological victimization committed by al-Qa’ida and affiliated movements and the extremist far-right in the United States from 1990 to 2014. For a full copy of the report, visit [START’s website](#). Very little is known about victimization patterns, especially across ideologies, as researchers in terrorism and extremist violence tend to focus on perpetrator motives and typologies. Victim and target centered research provides a nuanced perspective of these violent events that can help mitigate victimization risk.

Excluding the homicide victims associated with the four attacks on September 11th and the Oklahoma City bombing, 62 individuals were killed in 38 ideologically motivated homicide events committed by extremists associated with al-Qa’ida and affiliated movements and 245 were killed by far-right extremists (FRE) in 177 ideologically motivated incidents. The data for this brief originates from the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB), an open-source dataset that examines ideologically motivated and routine criminal activity, both violent and financial, committed by ideological extremists.

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

### NUMBER OF ATTACKS

Over the last 25 years in the United States, attacks inspired by al-Qa’ida and its associated movement (AQAM) have killed nearly seven-and-a-half more people than far-right extremists have killed in one-fifth as many incidents. However, if you remove two outlier events – the September 11th terrorist attacks and the Oklahoma City Bombing – far-right extremists have killed nearly four times as many people as AQAM extremists.



Excluding the September 11th and Oklahoma City bombing victims (2,977 and 168, respectively):

- 62 individuals were killed by AQAM offenders in 38 incidents (1.6 victims per homicide incident) and
- 245 individuals were killed by FRE offenders in 177 incidents (1.4 victims per homicide incident).

### TARGETING

**FRE:** victims’ lifestyle and routine activities only dictate when and where, not if, they are victimized.

- FRE victims were more often purposefully targeted for an ideological homicide than AQAM victims (43.3% to 19.4%, respectively). This is to say that the offenders knew of the victims and purposefully decided to kill them for ideological reasons.
- 81.3 percent of FRE homicides were “purposeful” (offenders knew of the victims and purposefully decided to kill them for ideological reasons) or “representative” (offenders targeted their victims not because they knew of them, but because they represented something that was antithetical to their ideology). For AQAM, 56.5 percent of the homicide were “purposeful” or “representative.”

**AQAM:** a victim’s routine activities and lifestyle play a larger role in their risk of ideological victimization.

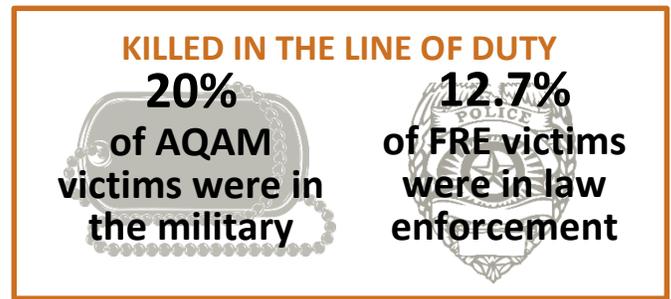
- AQAM victims are much more likely to be random victims (19.4%) than are FRE victims (9.4%).

		AQAM		FRE	
		N (62)	%	N (245)	%
<b>TARGETING</b>	Purposeful	12	19.4%	106	43.3%
	Representative	23	37.1%	93	38.0%
	Random	12	19.4%	23	9.4%
	Unknown	15	24.2%	23	9.4%

## VICTIM TYPE

The majority of AQAM victims were civilian targets (62.9%), while the second largest category was government victims (29%) – more than 20 percent of AQAM victims were in the military and killed in the line of duty.

FRE victims were most often targeted for racial or ethnic reasons (53.1%), specifically due to their status as minorities. This was followed by civilian targets (28.1%) and then government targets (13.1%), primarily law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty (12.7%).



## WEAPONS



Like typical homicide patterns, a firearm was the primary weapon used to kill AQAM victims and FRE victims.

- However, there was a lower use of firearms by FRE (62.9%) compared to AQAM (72.6%)
- When compared to AQAM, FRE favored more intimate forms of violence, such as stabbing or beating their victims to death.

## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Although the magnitude of violence from far-right extremism has fluctuated over the last 25 years, the threat against civilians and law enforcement has been ever present. It is important for policymakers, law enforcement officials, and the public to not underestimate the potential of fatal violence in their jurisdictions from far-right extremists by solely focusing on AQAM perpetrators. Both groups have posed, and continue to pose, the risk of ideological victimization to Americans.

More training should be developed and standardized across the country for law enforcement officers on how to engage with anti-government extremists. As shown by the number of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty by violent far-right extremists, these extremists pose a disproportionate threat to law enforcement officers. Though some jurisdictions offer training in this regard, the training is not universal.

## METHOD

This report includes all homicide victims identified in open-source materials who satisfied the ECDB's inclusion criteria, specifically:

- the victim was killed in a homicide event identified in open-sources;
- at least one of the offenders involved in the incident was an ideological extremist;
- the homicide event was ideologically motivated;
- the extremist ideology to which the offender adhered and the incident was motivated was connected to al-Qa'ida and affiliated movements or far-right extremism;
- the victim was killed within one of the 50 states or the District of Columbia;
- the victim was killed between January 1, 1990 and December 31, 2014.

For an in-depth discussion about the data collection process for the ECDB and the reliability and validity of the data, please see: "Freilich, J., Chermak, S., Belli, R., Gruenewald, J., & W. Parkin. (2014). Introducing the Extremist Crime Database (ECDB), *Terrorism & Political Violence*, 26, 372-384" and "Chermak, S., Freilich, J., Parkin, W., & J. Lynch. (2012). American Terrorism and Extremist Data Sources and Selectivity Bias: An Investigation Focusing on Homicide Events Committed by Far-Right Extremists, *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 28(1), 191-218."

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