



Press Release: Background Information: Far-Right Attacks on U.S. Law Enforcement

The murder last week of 3 Pittsburgh police officers by far-right extremist Richard Poplawski is the most recent incident of violent activity in the United States by a far-right extremist against a police target.

Research led by [Dr. Joshua D. Freilich](mailto:jfreilich@jjay.cuny.edu) (John Jay College, CUNY) and [Dr. Steven Chermak](mailto:chermak@msu.edu) (Michigan State University) and funded by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) has revealed a violent history of fatal attacks against law enforcement officers in the United States by individuals who adhere to far-right ideology.

- In the United States, **42 law enforcement officers have been killed** in 32 incidents in which at least one of the suspects was a far-rightist since 1990.
- **94% of these incidents involved local or state law enforcement.** Only two events—high-profile attacks at Ruby Ridge and at the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City—involved federal agents. Much more common are events like the tragic Pittsburgh triple slayings.
- **Attacks on police by far-rightists tend to occur during routine law enforcement activities.** 34% of the officers killed by far-rightists were slain during a traffic stop, and a number of law enforcement officers have been killed while responding to calls for service similar to the domestic violence call that precipitated the Pittsburgh murders.
- Firearms were the most common type of weapon used during these fatal anti-police attacks. **88% of the incidents involved guns**, while only 6% involved explosives and 6% involved knives. 81% of the victims were killed by guns.
- **Only 12% of the suspects in these attacks were members of formal groups with far-right ideologies.** The vast majority—like Poplawski—acted alone. This greatly complicates law-enforcement efforts to anticipate which individuals might pose a threat to police officers.
- Beyond these law enforcement murders, far-right violence presents a broader threat to national security and American citizens. Since 1990, far-rightists have been linked to more than **275 homicide incidents in 36 states**. These crimes have resulted in the more than **530 fatalities**, including the 168 victims murdered by Timothy McVeigh when he bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. **The vast majority of these suspects are white and male, with almost 70% being 30 years old or younger.**

These information are generated through Freilich and Chermak's Extremist Crime Database (ECDB). ECDB contains systematically collected information on all crimes since 1990 in the United States involving a suspect known to adhere to far-right ideology -- principles such as fierce nationalism, anti-globalization, suspicions of centralized Federal authority, support for conspiracy theories, and reverence for individual liberties (including gun ownership). Additional information on ECDB is available from Dr. Freilich (jfreilich@jjay.cuny.edu; 212 237 8668) or Dr. Chermak (chermak@msu.edu; 517 355 2210) or from START (dhawkins@start.umd.edu; 301 405 6600; www.start.umd.edu). Additional information on far-right attacks on law enforcement in the United States is available from ECDB researchers Jeff Gruenewald (gruenew1@msu.edu; 517 353 9563) and William Parkin (wparkin@jjay.cuny.edu; 757 535 3620).



The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), is a U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence based at the University of Maryland. START uses state-of-the-art theories, methods, and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics, and social and psychological impacts of terrorism. Additional information on START is available at: www.start.umd.edu.