Far-right Violence in the United States: 1990-2010

Following the 5 August 2012 shooting at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, START researchers compiled background information from the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) on ideologically motivated far-right violence in the United States, generally, and far-right extremist crimes related to religion and religious institutions, specifically. Although the ECDB includes crimes committed by individuals with varying ideologies, this report focuses exclusively on far-right violence and crime due to initial reporting that the alleged perpetrator in Oak Creek was motivated by either a racist skin-head or white supremacist ideology. Should additional information about the ideological motivation for the attack confirm the initial reporting, this factsheet may help contextualize the event.

START's Extremist Crime Database includes a systematic collection of open-source data on financial and violent criminal behavior in the United States associated with far-right extremists, far-left extremists, and al-Qaida-inspired and associated extremists.[1] The ECDB does not exclusively focus on terrorist attacks, rather it records criminal incidents committed by extremist groups or their supporters. These crimes range in important ways, such as the level of violence imposed on victims, number of suspects involved and the motivations underlying each incident. For example, extremist crimes include ideologically and non-ideologically motivated homicides, financial crimes and cases involving foiled plots. The conduct of a criminal act is an inclusion criterion in this dataset; individuals are not included in this dataset absent criminal activity. The use of broad ideological categories in this research does not suggest that an individual or group sharing one or more of these beliefs is likely to be an extremist criminal.

IDEOLOGICALLY MOTIVATED FAR-RIGHT HOMICIDES

Between 1990 and 2010 there were 145 ideologically motivated homicide incidents committed by far-right extremists in the United States. Of those incidents:

- Including the Oklahoma City Bombing, which killed 168 individuals, far-right extremists killed 348 individuals during ideologically motivated homicide events between 1990 and 2010. Excluding that attack, far-right extremists killed 180 individuals between 1990 and 2010.
- 58 percent of the victims of ideologically motivated far-right violence were killed by perpetrators using firearms.
- More than half of the victims of far-right violence were targeted because they were racial/ethnic minorities.
- 37 percent of these homicide incidents were perpetrated by a lone individual.
- 32 law enforcement officers were killed in the line of duty by far-right extremists during ideologically motivated attacks. In addition, corrections officers, private security guards, and a judge have been killed during ideologically motivated attacks.
- For 10 percent of perpetrators, there was evidence that they expected to be killed or captured while committing their crimes.
- Almost 5 percent of perpetrators were killed by law enforcement during the commission of their crimes.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS & INDIVIDUALS TARGETED BY FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISTS

- In September and October of 2001 two men were killed in Texas because a white supremacist believed they were Muslim. One of the homicide victims was Muslim, and the second was Hindu.

- In July 2008, two individuals were shot and killed at a Unitarian Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. The church was a target of far-right violence because of its liberal ideology.

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[1] ECDB researchers are in the process of coding data for al Qaeda-inspired and al Qaeda affiliated extremist crime, as well as secular Arab Nationalist crime. For purposes of comparison, an initial look at the data suggests that between 1990 and 2010, al Qaeda affiliates, al Qaeda-inspired extremists, and secular Arab Nationalists committed 27 homicide incidents in the United States involving 16 perpetrators or groups of perpetrators. Nineteen of these incidents occurred following the 9/11 attacks. These incidents range from mass casualty –bombings to single-victim prison killings. ECDB researchers continue to code and refine this data.

- Two homicide incidents were committed by far-right extremists at religious institutions, even though the victims were not targeted for their religious beliefs. One was a July 1999 murder outside of a Korean Methodist church, while the other was inside a Reformation Lutheran church that occurred in May 2009.

- Three victims of far-right violence were killed because they were Jewish or perceived to be Jewish. In April 2000, a perpetrator murdered his neighbor in western Pennsylvania before driving to her synagogue and shooting at the building. A college student in the Northeast was targeted and killed in May 2009 because she was Jewish. In September 2002 a racist Skinhead killed a 46-year old man he mistakenly believed was Jewish.

- In June 2009 a security guard was murdered outside of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., which was targeted by an anti-Semitic, white supremacist.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The data presented here are drawn from the Extremist Crime Database (ECDB). The ECDB is the first-of- its-kind database and is a valuable resource for policymakers and researchers.

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