

Surveying State Police Agencies about Domestic Terrorism and Far-Right Extremists

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Project Title: *Creation of a database of U.S. extremist crime, 1990- 2005*

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Overview

The purpose of the study was to obtain state-police agencies estimates about possible cooperation between far-right extremists and Islamic Jihadists to commit crimes, and the threat posed by specified extremist groups. Towards this goal, a survey was mailed to the 50 state police agencies in the United States. The survey also asked about the types of crimes far-right extremists commit. Forty-two states (84%) responded, with 37 states (74%) submitting completed surveys.

Interim Findings¹

Group Presence

- Far-right groups are present in most states and both far-right and extreme animal and environmental rights groups are present in more states than Islamic Jihadists. The groups reported by state police agencies to exist in their states were (in order of frequency):

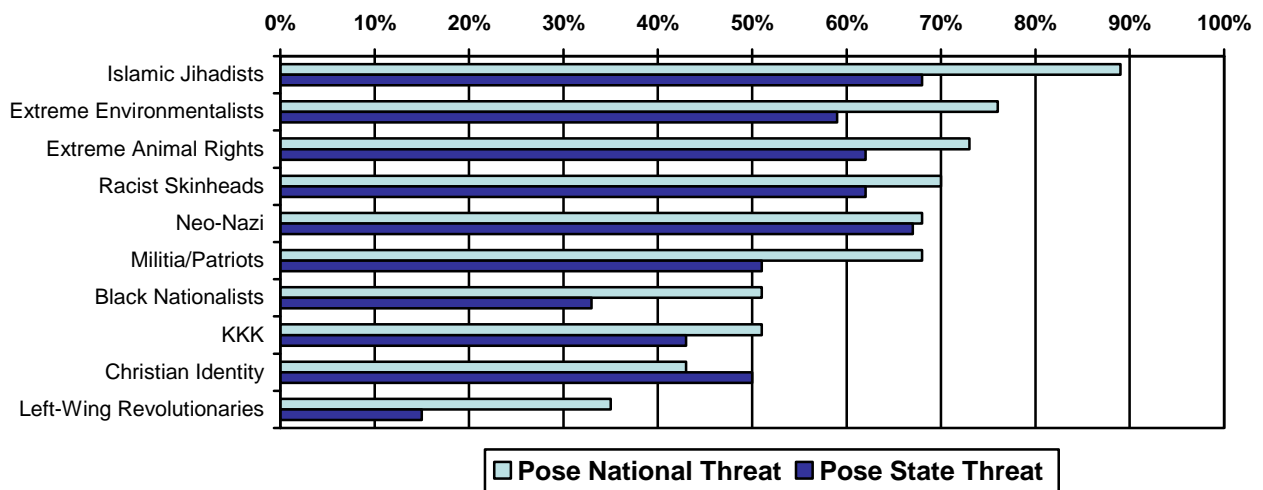
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| ▪ Neo-Nazi (92% of responding states) | ▪ Extreme anti-immigration groups (65%) |
| ▪ Militia/Patriot (89%) | ▪ Islamic Jihadi groups (62%) |
| ▪ Racist Skinheads (89%) | ▪ Extreme anti-abortion groups (62%) |
| ▪ Freeman/ Sovereign Citizen (87%) | ▪ Extreme Black nationalist groups (54%) |
| ▪ Extreme animal rights groups (76%) | ▪ Odinists (35%) |
| ▪ Extreme environmental groups (73%) | ▪ Left-wing revolutionary groups (32%) |
| ▪ KKK (73%) | ▪ Idiosyncratic sectarians (32%) |
| ▪ Christian Identity (70%) | ▪ Other extremist groups (11%) |
| ▪ Extreme anti-tax groups (67%) | ▪ Doomsday cults (8%) |

- Two state police agencies reported that Islamic Jihadists and far-right extremists had cooperated to commit financial/fundraising crimes in their state, with one state noting that cooperation had also occurred in prison. Twelve states reported no cooperation, 20 states reported that they did not know, and 3 states did not answer the question. Two states that responded “don’t know” commented that these questions should be referred to their Joint Terrorism Task Forces.

¹ The findings below are derived from the completed surveys of state police agencies. Agencies completed the survey on the condition that the researchers would not reveal data from specific states. As such, no state names are identified in these findings.

Perception of Threat Posed by Groups

- Results indicate widespread concern about extant terrorist threats. 89% of state police agencies agree or strongly agree that Islamic Jihadists pose a serious threat to national security. Over two thirds of agencies agreed or strongly agreed that extreme environmental (76%), extreme animal rights groups (73%), racist skinheads (70%), neo-Nazi (68%), and militia/patriots (68%) pose serious threats to national security.



- Two thirds of agencies agreed or strongly agreed that elements of the far-right and Islamic Jihadists pose serious threats to their state's security. Close to 60% of agencies agreed or strongly agreed that extreme animal or environmental groups pose serious threats to their state's security. The top five threat concerns were: (1-tie) Islamic Jihadists and neo-Nazi (67% of states), (3-tie) extreme animal rights groups and racist Skinheads (62%), and (5) extreme environmental groups (59%).
- Far-rightists commit a variety of crimes, violent and nonviolent. These crimes claim innocent lives, cause physical injuries and incur great financial damage. 30% or more of state police agencies reported that supporters of far-right groups commit more than a half-dozen false liens/financial crimes, non-ideological routine crimes, tax refusal crimes, or hate crimes in their state in a typical year. Importantly, 24% of agencies reported that supporters of the far-right commit more than 31 routine non-ideological crimes in their state in a typical year, while 14% of agencies reported that far-rightists commit more than 31 false liens and financial crimes in their state in a typical year.

Policy Implications

- Our finding that far-rightists and Islamic Jihadists had cooperated to commit financial crimes in two states while not providing firm support for the collaboration hypothesis, suggests that this issue merits careful consideration by law enforcement. There has been speculation about possible cooperation between Islamic Jihadists and racist segments of the domestic far-right to commit terrorist acts inside the United States due to their shared hatred of the federal government's (e.g., perceived pro-Israel/Jewish) policies, anti-Semitism, and social views (e.g., anti-feminism, gay-rights, and pornography, etc). This issue, however, has received little research attention.
- While Islamic Jihadists are seen by most state police agencies as posing a national and state threat, *domestic* groups are also viewed as posing significant threats. First, both far-rightists and extreme animal and environmental groups are present in more states than Islamic Jihadists. Second, just as many state-police agencies (62%) view neo-Nazis as posing a

serious threat to their own state's security as consider Islamic Jihadists to pose a serious threat.

- Our survey found that far-right extremists commit a wide variety of crimes, both violent and non-violent (e.g., tax refusal, and false liens/financial schemes). A significant amount of far-right criminal activity therefore does not meet the FBI's terrorism definition (that requires the act to be violent). Knowledge of these non-terrorist ideological crimes might aid law-enforcement, especially if these crimes act as stepping stones to more violent terrorist crimes. As such, law enforcement might consider expanding domestic terrorism task forces to encompass representatives of agencies not normally included, such as state tax agencies, the IRS, Treasury Department, and state-land use and zoning agencies.

Project Background

Joseph Simone, lead author on this brief and a graduating undergraduate senior at John Jay College, is a research assistant working on Freilich and Chermak's START project. Simone was awarded two START undergraduate research fellowships to work with Freilich and Chermak to conduct the research discussed here. Freilich and Chermak's project is creating the first of its kind national database on the perpetrators, victims, event, and group characteristics of all known crimes committed by supporters of the domestic far-right from 1990-2005. Incidents are identified and data are collected from open sources. The database includes ideological crimes—terrorist and non-terrorist acts (including violent ideological attacks perpetrated by lone-wolves, crimes not claimed by groups, and non-violent ideologically motivated crimes (e.g., tax-refusal) on the state and federal levels—and routine/non-ideological crimes (e.g., rape).

Method

State police contacts were collected from the National Public Safety Information Bureau's "2006 National Directory of Law Enforcement Administrators," 42nd edition. Each state police agency received a survey instrument and cover letter, stating the mission, and significance of their participation in the study. Three mailings with subsequent follow-up phone calls were conducted between November 13, 2006 and September 2007. 42 states (84%) responded, 37 states (74%) submitted surveys, 5 states (10%) stated that they were unable to participate because of legal or policy limitations, and 8 states (16%) have not responded.

Future Directions

Data from this survey will be presented in several full-length journal articles. Two articles will present descriptive findings from our survey. The third article will compare our results to findings produced by advocacy watch-groups such as the Anti-Defamation League and Southern Poverty Law Center. The fourth article will use census and other data to explain state-level variation in the number of extremist groups, their supporters, activities, and crimes documented by our survey.

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