

# Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) Mass Casualty Extremist Offenders

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

Included with the current update to the Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) data are a suite of variables that allow users to investigate extremist offenders who plotted to commit, or committed, mass casualty attacks in the United States from 1990-2021. A mass casualty plot is defined as an event in which the perpetrator(s) intended to kill or injure four or more victims. Unlike other data resources on mass casualty events, PIRUS allows users to investigate successful mass casualty attacks as well as unsuccessful plots where the perpetrators clearly intended to kill or injure four or more people but failed. The inclusion of failed and foiled mass casualty plots in PIRUS gives users a more accurate estimate of how often extremists plan to cause significant harm. It also allows users to compare ideological groups and offenders on measures of plot success. This research brief provides an overview of the mass casualty crimes in PIRUS, including their frequency, links to ideological and sub-ideological groups, and a comparison of their perpetrators.

## MASS CASUALTY PLOTS & CRIMES, 1990-2021



Note: The yellow series in the chart above includes events that resulted in four or more combined deaths and injuries, but fewer than four fatalities.

**631**  
SUBJECTS

**439**  
EVENTS

PIRUS includes data on 631 subjects who collectively were involved in 439 events that are classified as mass casualty plots from 1990-2021.<sup>1</sup>

The PIRUS data show that there has been a sharp increase in the number of mass casualty plots in the United States in recent years. For instance, during the five-year period from 1990-1994, the United States averaged two mass casualty

extremist plots per year. By comparison, during the five-year period from 2017-2021, there were an average of 40 mass casualty plots per year in the United States—a 1900% increase.

<sup>1</sup> The figures in this brief on mass casualty plots and offenders do not include the January 6, 2021, Capitol riot or Capitol riot defendants.

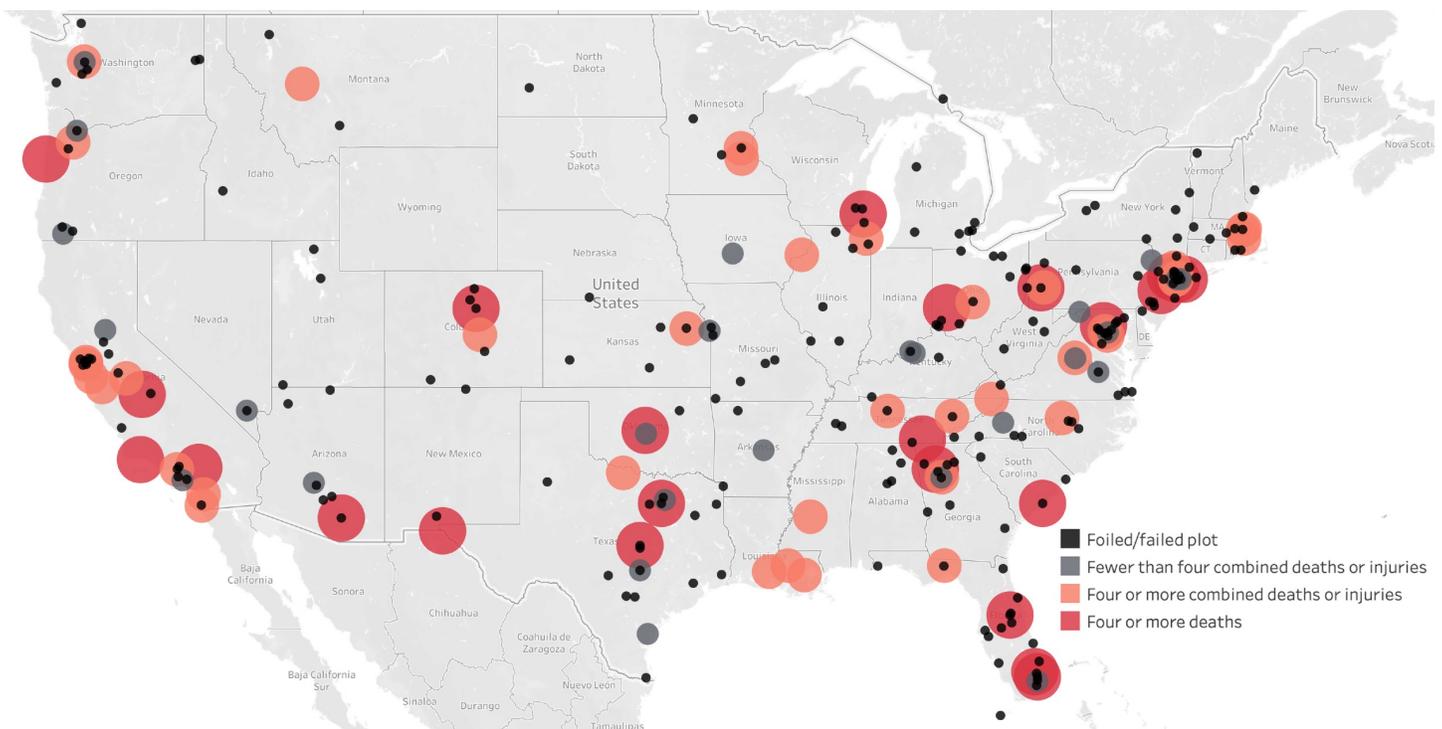
# 1900%

There has been a 1900% increase in the yearly average of mass casualty extremist plots in the United States since the early 1990s.

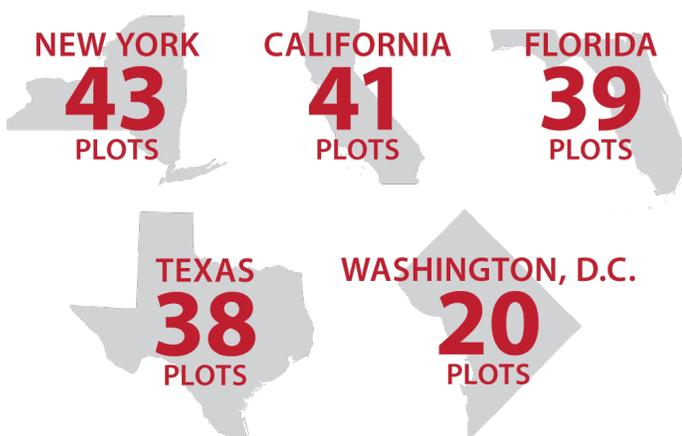
Fortunately, 295 (67.2%) of the mass casualty plots linked to subjects in PIRUS were foiled by law enforcement before any harm was done to people or property.

## The remaining 144 mass casualty crimes in PIRUS resulted in various outcomes:

- In 43 of the crimes, the perpetrators were successful in deploying weapons or damaging property but failed to hurt or kill anyone.
- Thirty-three of the plots resulted in fewer than four casualties (combined deaths and injuries).
- Forty-three of the crimes had four or more victims (deaths and injuries), but do not qualify as mass fatality events because fewer than four people were killed.
- Finally, 25 of the crimes resulted in four or more victim deaths and qualify as mass fatality events.



## Locations with the Most Mass Casualty Plots



From 1990-2021, plots to commit mass casualty attacks occurred in 44 states and the District of Columbia. Not surprisingly, most of these plots targeted locations with large populations and dense urban areas.

Of the 68 extremist crimes that killed or injured four or more victims between 1990-2021, 13 (19.1%) took place in California, while 7 (10.3%) occurred in New York.

There were 25 extremist crimes that killed four or more victims between 1990-2021. These attacks occurred in 16 states, including three each in Florida, New Jersey, New York, and Texas.

## Mass Casualty Plots and Crimes by Ideology, 1990-2021

	Far-Right	Far-Left	Islamist	Single-Issue
Number of failed/foiled mass casualty plots	170	29	114	25
Number of mass casualty plots resulting in fewer than four combined deaths and injuries	20	4	7	2
Number of mass casualty plots resulting in four or more combined casualties, but fewer than four deaths	21	4	9	9
Number of mass casualty plots resulting in four or more deaths	11	3	8	3

### Far-Right Groups and Movements

Most (50.6%) of the mass casualty plots and crimes in PIRUS, including those that resulted in four or more combined casualties or fatalities, were committed by perpetrators associated with far-right groups and movements.

### White Supremacist Groups

Subjects associated with white supremacist groups had the highest rate of participation in mass casualty plots of any sub-

ideological category. White supremacists were responsible for 33% of all mass casualty plots and crimes in the data.

### Comparing Ideologies

Far-right mass casualty plots far outpaced the plots associated with other domestic extremist ideologies. Far-left perpetrators and those classified as single-issue extremists were each responsible for approximately 9% of the mass casualty plots in PIRUS.

## Comparing Mass Casualty and Non-Mass Casualty Offenders, 1990-2021

	Violent Mass Casualty Offenders	Violent Non-Mass Casualty Offenders	Non-Violent Offenders
Age	33.8	35.8	34.6
Female	4.6%	8.2%	14.6%
Low education (no college)	42.7%	51.2%	38.1%
Unemployed	25%	23.3%	16.4%
Married	46.6%	28%	36.3%
Military experience	21.1%	15.6%	14%
Criminal history	45.6%	55.1%	32.4%
Trauma	32.7%	25.1%	25.9%
Mental illness	28.8%	26%	14.7%
Substance Use Disorder	22.8%	25.1%	15.3%

The extremist offenders in PIRUS who planned to commit, or committed, mass casualty crimes can be distinguished from non-violent extremists in terms of demographic characteristics, as well as certain risk and protective factors.

**The mass casualty offenders in PIRUS were more likely than non-violent offenders to be married at the time of their crimes and to have military service backgrounds.**

They were also significantly more likely to be unemployed, have pre-radicalization criminal histories, and documented trauma, mental health concerns, and substance use disorders.

**However, the distinctions between mass casualty offenders in PIRUS and those who plotted to commit, or committed, less lethal crimes are not as stark.**

In comparison to other types of violent extremists, the mass casualty offenders display higher rates of marriage, military service, and trauma, such as child abuse or the loss of a parent at a young age. However, both types of violent offenders are comparable when it comes to key risk factors for violence, such as substance use disorders, documented mental illness, and previous criminality.

## ABOUT THE DATASET

PIRUS is a de-identified cross-sectional, quantitative dataset of individuals in the United States who radicalized to the point of violent or non-violent ideologically motivated criminal activity, or ideologically motivated association with a foreign or domestic extremist organization from 1948 to 2021. The PIRUS dataset was coded using entirely open-source material, including newspaper articles, websites (e.g., government, terrorist group, watchdog groups, research institutes, personal information finder sites), secondary datasets, peer-reviewed academic articles, journalistic accounts including books and documentaries, court records, police reports, witness transcribed interviews, psychological evaluations/reports, and information credited to the individual being researched (verified personal websites, autobiographies, social media accounts). PIRUS contains dozens of variables containing information on a wide range of characteristics, including the individuals' criminal activity and/or violent plots, their relationship with their affiliated extremist group(s), adherence to ideological milieus, factors relevant to their radicalization process, demographics, background, and personal histories. The dataset is not limited to a single ideological category, and includes individuals representing far-right, far-left, Islamist, and single-issue ideologies.

### PROJECT TEAM

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### START

The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) is a university-based research, education and training center comprised of an international network of scholars committed to the scientific study of terrorism, responses to terrorism and related phenomena. Led by the University of Maryland, START is a Department of Homeland Security Emeritus Center of Excellence that is supported by multiple federal agencies and departments. START uses state-of-the-art theories, methods and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics and effects of terrorism; the effectiveness and impacts of counterterrorism and CVE; and other matters of global and national security. For more information, visit [start.umd.edu](http://start.umd.edu) or contact START at [infostart@umd.edu](mailto:infostart@umd.edu).



The Asymmetric Threat Analysis Center (ATAC) is a joint program between START and UMD's Applied Research Lab for Intelligence and Security (ARLIS). ATAC is funded by the Department of Defense under award no. HQ003421F0481.

This project was supported by Awards 2012-ZA-BX-0005, 2017-ZA-CX-0001, and 2019-ZA-CX-0004 through the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, and by the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate's Office of University Programs through Award Number 2012-ST-061-CS0001. The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the National Institute of Justice or the U.S. Department of Homeland Security