



UNDERSTANDING LONE-ACTOR TERRORISM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH VIOLENT HATE CRIMES AND GROUP-BASED TERRORISM

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PURPOSE

ANALYZE timing, locations, methods, targets, and geographic distributions of lone-actor terrorist attacks

COMPARE lone-actor terrorism to group-based terrorism and violent hate crimes

INFORM strategies for preventing lone-actor terrorism

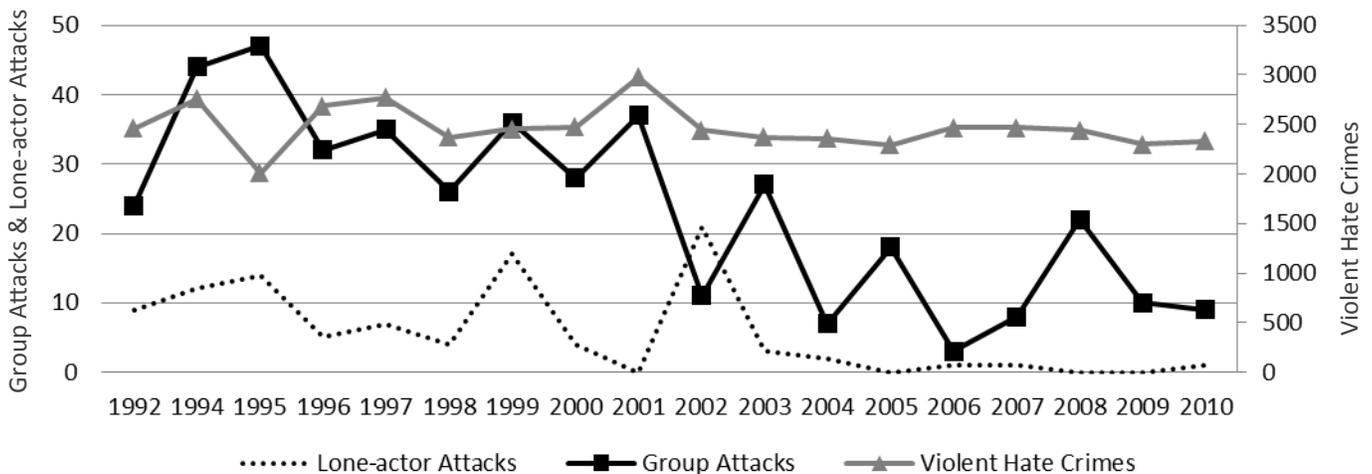
BACKGROUND

This research highlight examines the characteristics of the 101 lone-actor terrorist attacks that occurred in the United States between 1992 and 2010 and compares them with the violent hate crimes and group-based terrorist attacks that occurred during the same period.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- ◆ Year-to-year changes in lone-actor terrorism are moderately correlated with group-based terrorism, indicating that the two seem to ebb and flow together rather than one replacing the other. There is no discernible correlation between lone-actor terrorism and violent hate crimes from year to year. (See Figure below.)
- ◆ The proportion of lone-actor terrorism that occurs in less populous states (e.g., New Mexico, Nebraska, Iowa) is higher than the proportion of violent hate crimes and group-based terrorism in those states.
- ◆ Similar to group-based terrorism and violent hate crimes, lone-actor terrorism is more likely to occur in counties with larger populations, lower levels of home ownership, and higher percentages of non-Hispanic whites.
- ◆ Unlike group-based terrorism and violent hate crimes, lone-actor terrorism is not more likely to occur in counties with higher percentages of residents living in urban environments, higher percentages of male residents between 15 and 24 years of age, or higher unemployment rates.
- ◆ Overall, locations where lone-actor terrorism occurs tend to share more demographic similarities with the locations of violent hate crime offending than with the locations of group-based terrorism.

TERRORISM AND VIOLENT HATE CRIMES, 1992-2010



Source: Global Terrorism Database and FBI Uniform Crime Reports

ATTACK METHOD	Percent of Group-based Attacks	Percent of Lone-actor Attacks
Facility/ Infrastructure Attack*	53%	49%
Bombing/Explosion	26%	36%
Armed Assault	10%	9%
Assassination	6%	2%
Unarmed Assault	3%	2%
Hijacking	1%	0%
Hostage Taking (Barricade Incident)	0%	1%
Hostage Taking (Kidnapping)	0%	0%
Total	100% (n= 404)	100% (n= 99)

*Facility and infrastructure attacks are directed towards non-human targets such as buildings, monuments, and transportation infrastructure.

Attack Methods

- ◆ Evidence suggests that very few violent hate crimes involve weapons other than fists and blunt objects.
- ◆ The use of more advanced weapons and explosives is far more common in terrorist attacks, and in this respect group-based attacks and lone-actor attacks are generally similar.

Target Types

- ◆ Nearly 50% of lone-actor terrorist attacks are abortion-related compared with 17% of group-based terrorist attacks.
- ◆ 6% of lone-actor terrorist attacks target businesses versus 27% of group-based terrorist attacks.

TARGET TYPE	Percent of Group-based Attacks	Percent of Lone-actor Attacks
Abortion-related	17%	48%
Private Citizens & Property	19%	22%
Government (General)	13%	8%
Businesses	27%	6%
Religious Figures & Institutions	4%	6%
Educational Institutions	7%	3%
Military	2%	2%
Airports & Airlines	1%	1%
Government (Diplomatic)	<1%	1%
Other	9%	3%
Total	100% (n=418)	100% (n=101)

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- ◆ It may be possible to learn more about where and when lone-actor terrorism occurs by examining patterns in violent hate crime, a type of violence that both academics and practitioners understand more fully.
- ◆ Knowing the types of targets and means of attack common among lone-actor terrorists can assist with 'target hardening' or other law enforcement strategies.

TERRORISM & EXTREMIST VIOLENCE IN THE U.S. DATABASE

This research is part of a larger effort to develop a comprehensive database on Terrorism and Extremist Violence in the U.S. (TEVUS) that integrates data from the Global Terrorism Database, the American Terrorism Study, Profiles of Perpetrators of Terrorism in the U.S., and the U.S. Extremist Crime Database. Led by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), the research team is creating a resource that will allow operational and academic end-users to conduct unprecedented analyses that incorporate incident, perpetrator, and geospatial information.



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