

## Far-Right Fatal Ideological Violence against Religious Institutions and Individuals in the United States: 1990-2018

Following the Oct. 27, 2018 shooting at a Jewish Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, START researchers compiled background information from the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) on ideologically motivated, fatal far-right violence in the United States, generally, and far-right extremist homicides and plots related to religion and religious institutions, specifically.

START's ECDB includes a systematic collection of open-source data on financial and violent criminal behavior in the United States associated with far-right, far-left, and al-Qaida-influenced groups and movements. The ECDB does not exclusively profile 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 attacks on law enforcement, abortion providers, and racial, ethnic and social minorities. Extremists are also connected to financial crimes and cases involving foiled plots. Inclusion in the dataset is based primarily on an individual's criminal behaviors. The researchers then classified the criminals into ideological categories (e.g. far-right extremist, al-Qaida-influenced). The use of broad ideological categories does not suggest that any individual or group sharing one or more of these beliefs is an extremist criminal.

### IDEOLOGICALLY MOTIVATED FAR-RIGHT HOMICIDES

ECDB data have been shown to be [a reliable source of fatal far-right extremist violence](#) in the United States. According to the ECDB, between 1990 and 2018 there were over 217 ideologically motivated homicide incidents committed by far-right extremists in the United States. Most of these (n= 166) far-right fatal attacks were committed by white supremacists against social minorities, as they targeted persons due to their racial or religious background, sexual orientation or identity. A small percentage were targeted for being ideological enemies of the far right or viewed as worthless to society (e.g., homeless). More than half of the victims in this group were targeted because they were racial/ethnic minorities. Others, as we discuss below, were targeted due to their actual or perceived faith (e.g., Jews, Muslims, Sikhs). 51 incidents of far-right ideologically motivated attacks were committed by other far-right extremists, targeting government officials, other ideological enemies (n=10), and in a relatively small number of cases (n=8), abortion providers. [In fact, law enforcement officers, corrections officers, private security guards, and a judge have all been killed during ideologically motivated incidents.](#)

*Table. Ideologically Motivated Homicides Committed by Far-Right Extremists (Jan 1990-Oct 2018)\**

Years	White Supremacists		Other Far-Right Extremists		All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1990-1994	37	22.3%	8	15.7%	45	20.7%
1995-1999	42	25.3%	14	27.5%	56	25.8%
2000-2004	23	13.9%	7	13.7%	30	13.8%
2005-2009	29	17.4%	8	15.7%	37	17.1%
2010-2014	14	8.4%	10	19.6%	24	11.1%
2015-2018	21	12.7%	4	7.8%	25	11.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

\*Source: The Extremist Crime Database (ECDB)

\*\*2017 and 2018 numbers are preliminary as cases are still being vetted, so these numbers could change as the cases are finalized.

So far in 2018, seven homicide events have been identified as being committed by a far-right extremist and, at least in part, motivated by the suspect's ideology. [Analysis of pre-2018 events have shown interesting variation between homicides committed by white supremacists and those committed by anti-government or anti-abortion extremists.](#) In addition, the far-right homicides that occurred pre-2018 have not been evenly distributed across the 50 states. The vast majority of states had less than 5 homicides committed in their jurisdiction in the last 28 years. Only five states had more than 10 far-right ideologically motivated homicides, including Oregon (n=11), Florida (n=14), Pennsylvania (n=15), Texas (n=21), and California (n=33). These numbers are not purely a function of a state's population since New York only had six homicides, despite its large population.

### JEWISH INSTITUTIONS & INDIVIDUALS TARGETED BY FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISTS

Between 1990 and 2018 (including the 27 October 2018 attack), far-right extremists committed 11 ideologically motivated homicide incidents (that claimed 23 lives) in the United States that purposefully targeted persons or locations due to their actual,

or perceived, Jewish identity. In addition to the Synagogue attack, targets included a Jewish Community Center, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and a Jewish retirement home. These incidents include:

- 1997 Homicide in Washington state where a white supremacist murdered a fellow white supremacist because the perpetrator found out the victim was Jewish.
- 2000 Homicide in Pennsylvania where a white supremacist killed his Jewish neighbor as part of a shooting spree. Subsequently the offender shot at a synagogue before killing five Asian Americans in a series of shooting attacks.
- 2002 Homicide in Missouri where a skinhead shouted anti-Semitic epithets while beating a victim to death he mistakenly thought was Jewish.
- 2009 Homicide in Washington D.C where a neo-Nazi attacked the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and killed a non-Jewish security guard.
- 2009 Homicide in Connecticut, which killed a female Jewish college student.
- 2011 Homicide in Oregon by a white supremacist that claimed the life of a 19-year-old because he thought his last name sounded Jewish.
- 2014 Homicide in Kansas where a long time Nazi leader killed two non-Jews during a shooting rampage at a Jewish Community Center.
- 2014 Homicide in Kansas where the same long time Nazi leader mentioned in the prior entry killed one non-Jew during a shooting rampage at a Jewish retirement center.
- 2015 Homicide in Louisiana where a far-right extremist opened fire on theatregoers during Amy Schumer's *Trainwreck* and killed 2 persons. Although this is a mixed-motive incident, there is evidence he partially chose the location and movie because Schumer is Jewish.
- 2018 Homicide in California where a white supremacist stabbed his Jewish gay friend to death and left him in a grave.
- 2018 Homicide in Pennsylvania where a white supremacist's shooting rampage in a synagogue claimed 11 lives.

Although our data on failed and foiled plots is still being finalized, between 1990 and 2014, there were also nearly 100 ideologically motivated violent plots against Jewish individuals and/or targets in the United States that were planned by more than 25 far-right individuals or groups. For almost 75 percent of those plots, the suspects had identified specific synagogues or Jewish persons to attack. Nearly 85 percent of those plots were foiled by a law enforcement investigation or interdiction before their plan was set into motion.

#### **OTHER RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS & INDIVIDUALS TARGETED BY FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISTS DURING IDEOLOGICALLY MOTIVATED HOMICIDES**

- 1999 A white supremacist attacked a Baptist church in Texas due to strong disagreements with their theology and actions, possibly including Baptist efforts to recruit Jews into their faith, killing seven persons and wounding seven more.
- 2001 In two incidents shortly after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, two men were killed in Texas because a white supremacist believed they were Muslim. One of the homicide victims was Muslim; the second victim was Hindu.
- 2008 Two individuals were shot and killed at a Unitarian Church in Tennessee. The church was targeted by a far-right extremist because of its liberal ideology.
- 2009 A far-right extremist targeted and killed an Arab-American Muslim in Texas.
- 2012 A white supremacist attacked a Sikh temple in Wisconsin and shot to death six worshippers and wounded four more.
- 2015 In South Carolina, a white supremacist attacked a Black church and shot to death nine worshippers and injured one more.
- 2017 A white supremacist stabbed two persons to death on a train in Oregon when they attempted to stop him from targeting Muslims.

Two other 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.

Also, from 1990 to 2014, there were approximately 15 ideologically motivated plots against Muslim individuals and/or Islamic targets by far-right extremists or groups of far-right extremists. In nearly 75 percent of those plots, the far-right extremists had identified a specific individual or location to attack. Law enforcement foiled more than 85 percent of these anti-Islamic plots.

## OTHER EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES TARGETING JEWS AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Other extremists beside the far-right have also targeted Jewish persons and other religious institutions. For example, **supporters of al-Qaida and other similar movements** have committed more than 50 fatal attacks in the United States since 1990. Four of these incidents were anti-Jewish including:

- 1990 A assassination shooting of a far-right Israeli leader and rabbi in New York City.
- 1994 A drive-by shooting in New York on a bridge that killed one and wounded three Orthodox Jews.
- 2006 A shooting in Washington State at a Jewish Community Center that killed one and wounded five.
- 2011 A triple murder in 2011 where two of the victims were targeted for being Jewish.

As with the far right, supporters of Al Qaeda and other similar movements have been involved in failed or foiled plots. Between 1990 and 2016, these extremists were connected to three foiled plots targeting Jewish institutions and/or individuals, all of which occurred in 2014 and 2016. Finally, a September 2017 shooting attack at a church in Tennessee by a **far-left** Black Nationalist, partially motivated to avenge the 2015 South Carolina massacre, claimed one life and wounded seven.

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## 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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