



A Study of Lone Offender Terrorism in the United States (1972 – 2015)



QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

LONE OFFENDER TERRORIST DEMOGRAPHICS

There is no one “profile” of a lone offender terrorist.

All **52** lone offender terrorists in this study were male.

The youngest was **15** yoa and the oldest was **88** yoa, with an average age of **37.7**.

90% were born in the U.S.

65% were white; **13%** were Middle Eastern; **8%** were black; **8%** were bi-racial; **4%** were Asian; **2%** were Hispanic.

48% were single; **23%** were divorced or separated; **21%** were married.

50% identified as religious, of which **50%** were Christian and **35%** were Muslim.

37% had military service, of which **5%** was other than honorably discharged.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE

The following were present *before* the event:

62% Paranoia

40% Suicidal ideation

10% Hallucinations

25% (n=13) had at least 1 formal psychiatric diagnosis, of which **9** had a mood disorder, **4** had a psychotic disorder, **3** had a substance use disorder, and **3** had an “other” disorder.

RADICALIZATION

69% had an identifiable primary personal grievance in addition to their violent ideology.

In the **69%** (n=36) of cases where radicalization time estimations could be made, **94%** (n=34) offenders were involved with their ideology for more than 1 year prior to the attack.

In the **40%** (n=21) of cases where an estimated timeframe on attack idea development could be determined, **81%** (n=17) developed their initial idea within the year.

96% produced writing or videos to be viewed by others, of which **48%** produced content only before the attack and **44%** produced content both before and after the attack.

79% had previously expressed the belief that violence was justifiable in service or a cause or objective.

77% consumed radical ideological materials or propaganda.

56% engaged in ideologically-driven speeches or tirades that reportedly intruded into regular conversations.

52% used a public platform to promote their grievances or violent extremist beliefs.

IDEOLOGIES

Primary Ideologies:

25% Anti-Government Violent Extremism

23% Racially-Motivated Violent Extremism

19% Radical Islamist Violent Extremism

10% Pro-Life Violent Extremism

4% Environmental Violent Extremism

19% Other Violent Extremism

TARGETS

Primary targets included:

17% Federal government facilities/personnel

15% Law enforcement personnel. An additional **19%** attacked law enforcement or security in response to first responders.

12% Religious centers/personnel

10% Medical facilities/personnel

8% Private individuals

8% Educational facilities/students/faculty

6% Other businesses

6% Specific organizations or groups

19% Other targets

14 (27%) offenders committed at least 1 act of terrorism in addition to the index attack (the first act of terrorism that met the project’s inclusion criteria).

TARGET SELECTION

79% attacked targets that had no or minimal security.

In the 36 cases where information about offenders’ decision-making processes were available, **50%** (n=18) selected their targets based at least partially on the target’s ease of access.

73% selected their target because it was instrumental to their goal or ideology.

42% selected their target or chose to carry out an attack at least partially on the basis that they wanted to attract media attention.

40% considered other targets before selecting their primary target.

31% (n=16) had multiple targets planned for their index attack, of which **63%** (n=10) attacked multiple targets.

25% targeted at least 1 specific individual. In **62%** of these cases, other individuals besides the target(s) were killed and/or injured.

For this study, the FBI used data almost exclusively from information contained in official law enforcement files. Subjects must have been the primary architect and actor in the ideologically-based lethal attack. The final sample included 52 lone offenders.

ATTACK METHOD

67% used firearms, of which 77% used a handgun, 40% used a rifle, and 20% used a shotgun.

In the 50% (n=26) of cases in which information on firearm acquisition was known, 69% (n=18) legally purchased their weapons, 19% (n=5) illegally purchased, 15% (n=4) borrowed, and 12% (n=3) stole their weapons.

27% used explosives, yet 60% tried to learn how to assemble explosives and/or tried to obtain explosive materials.

6% used an airplane or vehicle.

4% used a bladed instrument.

10% of offenders engaged in an attack that was reactive, spontaneous, or opportunistic in nature.

OFFENDER OUTCOME

62% were arrested after the attack.

Of those arrested, 38% were detained at the site.

Of the 20 offenders who left the attack site, 5 (25%) were arrested the same day, 5 (25%) were arrested days later, 5 (25%) weeks or months later, and 5 (25%) years later.

38% (n=20) died during or in the immediate aftermath of their attack, of which 12 were killed by law enforcement and 8 committed suicide.

CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

70% were arrested at least once as adults prior to the attack.

58% of offenders had previously carried out battery or physical violence (whether or not they were arrested for it).

29% were previously arrested for 1 or more violent offenses.

Over the course of the offenders' lifetime, bystanders expressed concern with:

85% Interpersonal interactions

83% Anger/aggression

75% Mood

71% Thinking/communication

42% Alcohol/drug use

40% Work/academic performance

33% Impulsivity/recklessness

In 73% of cases, concerning behavioral changes were observed in the year before their attack.

STRESSORS

In 90% of cases, bystanders were aware of at least 1 stressor experienced by the offender prior to the attack. The most common stressors were:

48% Financial

44% Family

44% Mental health

35% Employment

29% Criminal/legal

27% Partner/marital

19% Physical injury/illness

BYSTANDERS

Despite committing the attacks on their own, offenders were not completely socially isolated, giving bystanders opportunities to observe possible concerning behavior.

50% had at least 1 family member or associate who appeared to be sympathetic to a non-violent extremist ideology.

44% had previously claimed group membership or affiliation with an ideological movement or associated with members.

35% had at least 1 family member or associate who adhered to a violent ideology.

39% lived alone at the time of the attack.

During the planning/preparation process, 9 (17%) offenders were stopped, detained, and/or examined by law enforcement. 3 offenders had contact with law enforcement the morning of their offense.

BYSTANDER AWARENESS OF IDEOLOGIES AND PLANS

92% of cases, at least 1 person knew of the offender's non-violent ideology or grievance.

62% of cases, at least 1 person knew the offender was supportive of violence to further an ideology.

25% of cases, at least 1 person knew of the offenders' research, planning, or preparation for the attack.

18% of cases, at least 1 person knew of the offenders' specific attack plans.

ACTIONS TAKEN BY OTHERS

69% of cases, 1 or more individuals took some action to address 1 or more concerning behaviors.

How bystanders addressed concerns:
(Percentages sum to more than 100% as bystanders may have addressed concerns to multiple people or multiple bystanders may have expressed concerns about 1 offender.)

54% of cases, to offender directly.

40% of cases, to family.

33% of cases, to an authority figure.

19% of cases, to friends.

2% of cases, anonymous tip.

23% of cases, at least 1 bystander took no action or no one was concerned.

RESOURCES

Persons suspected of planning an attack should be immediately reported to local law enforcement or the FBI at 1-800-CALL-FBI.

The BAU's Behavioral Threat Assessment Center (BTAC) is the only multi-agency behavioral threat assessment and threat management team in the U.S. Government. Requests for BTAC assistance can be made via the BAU Coordinator in your local FBI Field Office.

Lone Offender: A Study of Lone Offender Terrorism in the United States (1972-2015) is available for download at <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/fbi-releases-lone-offender-terrorism-report-111319>