

## Anatomy of a Standoff

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Read the full comprehensive report, [Anatomy of a Standoff: The Occupiers of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters \(PDF\)](#).

On January 2, a loosely organized group of armed anti-government extremists led by Ammon Bundy seized control of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge headquarters buildings located near the town of Burns in remote southeastern Oregon. They did it because two local ranchers, Dwight and Steven Hammond, had been ordered to report to federal prison to serve a sentence for arson.

Since seizing the headquarters—empty at the time—the extremists have refused to leave and have instead used social media extensively in an effort to gather support from other right-wing extremist groups and individuals. Mainstream media outlets have also flocked to the scene, interviewing many of the participants in the takeover.

After several days, the extremists finally gave themselves a name: Citizens for Constitutional Freedom. But who are these “Citizens” and what are their beliefs and backgrounds? Experts with the Anti-Defamation League’s Center on Extremism have attempted to identify as many of the participants in the takeover as possible, watching and reading many interviews and scouring hundreds of profiles and videos on social media.

This report provides mini-profiles on 30 different occupiers and allies who have been at the wildlife refuge headquarters examining their backgrounds, ideologies, and activities. It also analyzes the composition of the occupiers, illustrating a number of important aspects to the participants in the takeover, including:

- **The importance of the 2014 Bundy Ranch standoff.** Of the 30 occupiers detailed in this report, more than half (17 of 30) appear to have actually participated in the earlier standoff between Cliven Bundy and the federal government in Nevada in 2014, including almost all of the key participants. The 2016 Oregon standoff is a direct sequel to its 2014 predecessor.
- **The ideological backgrounds of the extremists.** About two-thirds of the occupiers appear to have the anti-government "Patriot" movement - and more specifically, the militia wing of that movement - as their primary ideological affiliation. The remaining one-third of the occupiers have an anti-government ideology centered on opposition to federal regulation of public lands, a movement often referred to as the Sagebrush Rebellion or the Wise Use movement. Some of the occupiers also have associations with other right-wing extremist movements, such as anti-immigrant border vigilantes or the sovereign citizen movement. Almost a quarter of the takeover participants have expressed some sort of racism, anti-Semitism, or anti-Muslim bigotry.
- **The lack of local participation.** The overwhelming majority of the identified occupiers (25 out of 30) came from out of state, mostly from Arizona, Utah, and Nevada. Only five were from anywhere in Oregon. The takeover is an example of outsiders coming into a local area to pursue their own agenda.
- **The relative lack of leadership and experience.** Most of the extremists involved in the takeover are not prominent or well known, even to other extremists. Many of them are also relatively newly radicalized. Few have any leadership experiences with extremist groups or causes. This may have accounted for the general indecisiveness and uncertainty that has characterized much of their activity since the initial seizure.

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