

Anti-Abortion Violence in America

The Stealth Terrorism

“Black Friday” took on an altogether different meaning in Colorado Springs this past Thanksgiving weekend when, on November 27, a gunman embarked upon a deadly shooting spree at a local Planned Parenthood clinic. The shooter, Robert Lewis Dear, opened fire outside the clinic, then entered the building. As police arrived on the scene, Dear allegedly engaged them with gunfire, hitting several officers. Eventually, police launched an assault on the building to kill or capture the shooter, precipitating a fire within the clinic. About five hours after the rampage began, Dear surrendered to police, who took him into custody.

The shootings took a deadly toll: killed were two civilians—Ke’Arre Stewart and Jennifer Markovsky—and a University of Colorado-Colorado Springs police officer, Garrett Swasey. Four other civilians and five more officers received non-fatal gunshot wounds.

At this early date, much remains unknown about the attack and the perpetrator’s motives. Dear allegedly made the comment “no more baby parts” to police officers after his apprehension; this, plus the place and nature of the attack itself—at a Planned Parenthood clinic—suggests that an anti-abortion animus may well have been the motivation for the deadly attack. Both the mayor of Colorado Springs and the governor of Colorado subsequently labeled the rampage an act of terrorism.

THE WAR ON REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

If Dear’s motive was indeed related to abortion, the Colorado Springs shooting spree represents the most deadly single act of anti-abortion violence in the United States. However, at the same time, it is only the latest in a long and troubling series of shootings, arsons, and other acts of violence directed against women’s reproductive rights over the years. Many of these acts of anti-abortion violence have gone under-reported, not making it past the local news. In 2012, the Anti-Defamation League issued a report describing anti-abortion violence as [“America’s Forgotten Terrorism”](#) and that is a label that is just as true

today as it was three years ago—indeed, the list of violent anti-abortion acts has grown longer still.

With deadly attacks such as the Colorado Springs shootings or the 2009 assassination of Dr. George Tiller by an anti-abortion fanatic in Kansas, it is fair to refer to a war being waged on the reproductive rights of women across the United States.

This is a war that has several fronts. On the one hand, “mainstream” anti-abortion activists attempt to legislate and to regulate out of existence women’s health clinics that offer abortions among their medical services. Accompanying this is a propaganda campaign designed to demonize abortion providers, a campaign exemplified recently by a series of videos released in 2015 by the anti-abortion Center for Medical Progress that purport to show Planned Parenthood officials selling “baby parts.” The respected New England Journal of Medicine described the videos as a “campaign of misinformation.”

It is important to acknowledge that this flood of “mainstream” demonization of the women’s health centers that offer abortion services does play a role in abortion-related violence itself, providing an impetus to and justification for violent acts, even when the propaganda itself may not call for violence. When one analyzes acts of anti-abortion violence in the United States, a clear duality emerges. Many of the acts of anti-abortion violence are committed by hard-core, extremists, who often have been in the movement for years, and who frequently remain active in the movement even after being jailed for their acts. Such extremists need no further encouragement.

However, there is also a group of offenders that does not have that sort of prior history and record of commitment. Rather, they tend to be isolated and impressionable, sometimes with a history of mental or emotional problems, becoming receptive to the anti-abortion messages they hear around them to the point that they decide to target women’s health providers with arson or worse. The growth of social media has made such messages even more common and accessible.

Those violent offenders represent the other front in the war against reproductive rights: a sustained campaign of harassment, stalking, threats and violence directed against women’s health care clinics, as well as the doctors, nurses, employees and patrons of such facilities. For the most extreme anti-abortion activists, physically disrupting or halting the operations of clinics is a key goal, even if it means threatening, injuring or killing the people inside such clinics. For many of them, violence is indeed the solution. To give just one example, Michael Bray, a long-time anti-abortion extremist who spent time in prison for a series of clinic bombings in the 1980s, subsequently wrote and published the book *A Time To Kill*, which advocates the use of violence “in defense of the child in the womb.” The book is currently sold

on the website of The Army of God, a site devoted to portraying the perpetrators of anti-abortion violence and terrorism as heroes and martyrs and to advocating that others follow in their path.

ANTI-ABORTION VIOLENCE AS SINGLE ISSUE TERRORISM

The most extreme tactics used by anti-abortion activists—including arsons and firebombings, bombings, and assassinations and shooting sprees—constitute terrorist acts. Anti-abortion violence is a form of “single issue terrorism,” which is terrorism committed by extremists who are centered on a very specific and often narrow issue. Most single issue terrorist movements are actually the extreme wing of broader, more mainstream movements; that is certainly the case with anti-abortion terrorism. Many people in the United States oppose abortion, on various grounds, but only a minority is willing to commit extreme and violent acts to end the practice.

As a movement, anti-abortion extremists are extremely loosely organized—though well-networked. Organized, formal groups are typically shunned in favor of shadowy “conceptual” groups such as the so-called Army of God. The Army of God has no formal membership, structure, or leader; anyone can affiliate themselves with it simply by committing a violent act designed to further the anti-abortion cause.

A lot of anti-abortion extremist activity can be described as efforts intended to support the use of violence. Websites and documents created by anti-abortion extremists provide the addresses of clinics, as well as the names and personal information of doctors and others who work at such clinics. As with other extremist movements that use the same tactic, the hope is that individuals will be inspired to use such information in the commission of an act of violence. Some anti-abortion extremists have even provided instructions on constructing bombs and incendiary devices. Prominent anti-abortion extremist Dave Leach, for example, used his *Prayer & Action* magazine to distribute information about making plastic explosives and fertilizer bombs.

For those people who do commit violent acts, the movement acts as a support network, providing moral and other support for people convicted of acts of anti-abortion violence. Such prisoners—including notorious killers Paul Hill, Eric Rudolph, James Kopp and Scott Roeder, among others—are considered martyrs to the cause of ending abortions.

Many such extremists even continue their crusade from behind bars, hoping to influence others to follow their examples. Convicted murderer Scott Roeder, for example, has managed to provide the content for at least two anti-abortion videos on YouTube, one of which contained an implicit threat against a former employee of the physician Roeder murdered. Eric Rudolph, too, has provided written materials for the anti-abortion movement even while behind bars.

Because anti-abortion extremists constitute a mostly leaderless and structure-less movement, it is no surprise that much of the violence that emanates from the movement is lone wolf violence. What is perhaps surprising is the extent of the lone wolf violence coming from what is a relatively small movement—small in comparison to the major segments of the extreme right, such as white supremacist and anti-government extremist movements. A [recently published study](#) of lethal lone wolf violence in the United States by ADL Center on Extremism Director Mark Pitcavage observed that most lethal lone wolf violence was committed by right-wing extremists. Among them, anti-abortion extremists were among the most numerous, second only to white supremacists in number. One reason for this is the degree to which assassinations of physicians or clinic workers is condoned or even encouraged by anti-abortion extremists. With such encouragement, it is not surprising that self-appointed crusaders emerge from the shadows to do the deed.

At the less extreme end of the spectrum of anti-abortion violence are incidents of harassment, threats, and stalking. Such acts are intended to make life miserable for people associated with women's health clinics or to hinder or obstruct their operations.

One of the most notorious anti-abortion extremists who engaged in these sorts of activities was Clayton Lee Waagner, a violent criminal who became an anti-abortion crusader in the late 1990s. In the early 2000s, while a fugitive after an escape from jail, Waagner sent envelopes full of white powder to hundreds of clinics around the country. Notes enclosed in the envelopes claimed the powder was anthrax. As these incidents occurred shortly after the deadly anthrax letters of late 2001, the letters proved highly disruptive to health clinics, often forcing shutdowns and decontamination procedures. Waagner also send death threats to a variety of clinic employees. After his capture and conviction, Waagner received a 19-year prison sentence, but has continued anti-abortion activities from behind bars.

Waagner has many modern-day equivalents. In 2013, for example, a Kansas judge upheld a protection from stalking order against a Wichita anti-abortion activist, Mark Holick, for stalking and threatening the director of a local women's health clinic. He repeatedly showed up at her home and in her

neighborhood, on one occasion with a sign that read “Where’s Your Church?”—a reference to Kansas physician George Tiller, killed at his church by anti-abortion and anti-government extremist Scott Roeder in 2009. Anti-abortion extremist Angel Dillard targeted a Wichita physician, Mila Means, sending a letter to Means in which she claimed that people were constantly watching Means and that Means would have to check under her car every day, “because maybe today is the day someone places an explosive under it.” Dillard subsequently claimed that her letter had been “divinely inspired.”

Operation Save America, one of the more active organized anti-abortion extremist groups, embarked upon a campaign several years ago in which they placed “Wanted” posters in cities with clinics that allegedly provided abortion services—posters that listed addresses, even home addresses, of clinics and doctors.

Threats and harassment attempts have increased sharply in recent months after the release of the Center for Medical Progress videos in July 2015. According to the National Abortion Federation, harassment incidents rose sharply in the months that followed.

Some anti-abortion extremists are willing to do more than threaten and harass. They engage in violence against property, taking advantage of the fact that women’s health clinics are permanent, immobile and mostly “soft” targets. This sort of violence can range from vandalism, petty or severe, up to more serious attacks such as bombings, firebombings, and arsons.

Many such incidents occur at night, suggesting that such attacks are primarily designed to target property, forcing the temporary or permanent shutdown of clinics by damaging them or even burning them to the ground. However, there are anti-abortion extremists who do target people themselves for attack, assaulting clinic workers or physicians or engaging in lethal violence. The Colorado Springs shooting spree may be an example of one such attack. The assassination of Dr. George Tiller by Scott Roeder certainly was. This attack, in which Roeder murdered Tiller while the doctor was serving as an usher at his church during Sunday services, was one of the key acts of terrorism that heralded a new resurgence of right-wing extremism that began in 2009 and continues to the present day.

There is one other fact about anti-abortion violence that is worth noting. As some of the below examples illustrate, a number of the extremists convicted for acts or attempts of anti-abortion violence over the years have also engaged in violence against other targets, notably Muslim and GLBT, but also sometimes Jewish, targets. These other acts of violence lend credence to the notion that anti-abortion violence in the United States is a form of distinctly “Christian” terrorism, with many of these attacks

stemming directly from the religious views of the extremists. Religious themes are a near constant within the world of anti-abortion extremism. As one judge characterized an anti-abortion extremist he was sentencing for attempted murder, “your religious certainty is so superior you thought you have the right to kill your intended victims.”

SELECTED INCIDENTS OF ANTI-ABORTION THREATS AND VIOLENCE, 2006-2015

Note: This is only a partial list. Many anti-abortion incidents never even make it onto the media or into domestic terror databases.

- **Arson/Vandalism. Thousand Oaks, California, October 2015.** A Planned Parenthood clinic in the Newbury Park area of Thousand Oaks was victim to an arson attempt, only weeks after it suffered a vandalism attack. The building’s sprinkler system put out the fire but in the process caused water damage.
- **Arson. Pullman, Washington, September 2015.** An arsonist caused substantial damage at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Pullman, Washington, forcing its closure for over a month.
- **Vandalism. Metairie, Louisiana, August 2015.** Prosecutors charged William Kennedy with criminal damage and a hate crime after he allegedly vandalized the Causeway Medical Clinic. Louisiana’s hate crime law can be applied to someone who commits a crime against persons or property “because of actual or perceived membership or service in, or employment with, an organization.”
- **Vandalism. Jackson, Mississippi, March 2015.** The Jackson Women’s Health Organization building was the victim of serious vandalism.
- **Obstruction/Interference. Jackson, Mississippi, July 2014.** Three anti-abortion extremists were convicted of obstruction and interference with a lawful business after attempting to obstruct people’s access to the Jackson Women’s Health Organization. One of them, Chet Gallagher, had previously spent time in prison for using his status as a Las Vegas, Nevada, police officer, to gain access to a women’s health clinic and destroy property inside.
- **Arson. Joplin, Missouri, October 2013.** Federal prosecutors charged Jedediah Stout with attempted arson of a building used in interstate commerce after twice attempting to set on fire a

Planned Parenthood clinic in Joplin. After his arrest, Stout confessed to the arson attempts, and also confessed to having twice set fire to the mosque belonging to the Islamic Society of Joplin—the second time succeeding in completely destroying the building. As of October 2015, his case had not yet gone to trial.

- **Vandalism. Bloomington, Indiana, April 2013.** Bloomington police officers arrested Benjamin Curell of Ellettsville on burglary and criminal mischief charges for using an axe to destroy windows and computers at a local Planned Parenthood clinic, causing extensive damage. In July 2014, Curell pleaded guilty to violating the federal Free Access to Clinic Entrances Act.
- **Arson. Atlanta and Marietta, Georgia, May 2012.** Blazes were set at two clinics in Georgia, one in Marietta and one in Atlanta, that provide abortion services. It is not clear if any arrests were ever made in these incidents, or if the incidents are connected.
- **Arson. Grand Chute, Wisconsin, April 2012.** Francis Grady set fire to a Planned Parenthood building in Grand Chute, causing damage but no injuries to people. He was convicted and, in February 2013, sentenced to 11 years in prison.
- **Firebombing. Pensacola, Florida, January 2012.** Bobby Joe Rogers used a Molotov cocktail to burn down a reproductive health clinic in Pensacola, Florida. That clinic had been repeatedly victimized with bombings and shootings since the 1980s. After pleading guilty, Rogers received a 10-year federal prison sentence.
- **Firebombing. McKinney, Texas, July 2011.** A Planned Parenthood clinic in McKinney, Texas, was firebombed with a Molotov cocktail-like incendiary device, causing moderate damage.
- **Assassination Plot. Madison, Wisconsin, May 2011.** Madison police uncovered a plot by Ralph Lang to assassinate physicians at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Madison. He was convicted of attempted first-degree intentional homicide in May 2013 and in August sentenced to 10 years in prison.
- **Bomb Plot. Greensboro, North Carolina, September 2010.** In a sting operation, federal agents arrested anti-abortion extremist Justin Carl Moose, on charges of providing information related to making a bomb or weapon of mass destruction to a person Moose thought was going to bomb a women’s health clinic. On his Facebook page, Moose referred to himself as an “extremist radical fundamentalist” and argued that abortion should be fought “by any means necessary and at any

cost.” Moose pleaded guilty and received a 30-month federal prison sentence.

- **Firebombing. Madera, California, September 2010.** A Planned Parenthood clinic in Madera, California, was firebombed by someone claiming to be from the “American Nationalist Brotherhood.” Vandalism at a local mosque was also claimed by the alleged group. An FBI investigation revealed that the culprit of both incidents was Donny Eugene Mower, a white supremacist. Mower pleaded guilty to federal counts of arson, damaging religious property and violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act. In 2012, he was sentenced to five years in prison.
- **Threats. Plano, Texas, April 2010.** FBI agents arrested Erlyndon J. Lo in Plano on allegations that he made death threats against the Southwestern Women’s Surgery Center, charging him with using interstate commerce to communicate a threat to injure and threatening force to intimidate and interfere with clients and employees of a reproductive health service. He claimed that “my religious beliefs include the beliefs that an individual is alive at the moment of conception, abortion is murder and is the worst murder of all murders possible because these babies are completely defenseless, and I am entitled under my religious beliefs to use deadly force if necessary to save the innocent life of another.” He was subsequently ruled incompetent to stand trial.
- **Threats. Spokane, Washington, June 2009.** Donald Hertz of Spokane, Washington, threatened the family of a Colorado physician whose office performed late term abortions. The threats came only weeks after the murder of another such physician, George Tiller, in Kansas. Hertz pleaded guilty and received a sentence of five years of probation.
- **Murder. Wichita, Kansas, May 2009.** Long-time anti-abortion and anti-government extremist Scott Roeder murdered physician George Tiller at Tiller’s church in Wichita, Kansas. An unrepentant Roeder was convicted of first degree murder and aggravated assault and sentenced to life in prison.
- **Arson. Eureka, California, February 2008.** An arson occurred at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Eureka, California. A note taped to the front door made a reference to God and babies.
- **Arson. Albuquerque, New Mexico, December 2007.** On Christmas day, 2007, arsonists attacked two Planned Parenthood clinics in Albuquerque, damaging one with a Molotov cocktail and the other with vandalism. Earlier that month, on December 7, two men, Sergio Baca and Chad Altman,

firebombed another New Mexico clinic because Baca's former girlfriend was going to have an abortion performed at that clinic. In 2009, they pleaded guilty to the crime, Baca receiving a 46-month federal sentence and Altman a 40-month sentence. They were also ordered to pay restitution of \$796,531.92. It is not clear if anyone was ever arrested for either of the other two arsons.

- **Assassination. Amherst, New York, June 2007.** In 2007, anti-abortion assassin James Kopp, who murdered Dr. Bernard Slepian in New York in 1998, received a sentence of life imprisonment plus 10 years following a conviction on charges related to the 1998 killing. Slepian previously received a 25 years to life sentence on a second-degree murder charge in a New York court. Canadian authorities have also charged Kopp with the 1995 shooting of a physician in Ontario; he is suspected of possibly having shot a number of doctors in Canada in the 1990s. He has not been extradited to stand trial, however.
- **Bombing Attempt. Austin, Texas, April 2007.** Paul Ross Evans left a large bomb outside a women's health clinic in Austin, Texas, but it was discovered by an employee before detonating. Evans, who pleaded guilty to attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction, told a judge, "I never meant for anyone, except for the abortionists, to get hurt." He received a 40-year federal prison sentence.
- **Threats. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, November 2006.** Pennsylvania State Police charged Mark Christian Stauffer with threatening to bomb a Planned Parenthood clinic in Lancaster. The disposition of the case is not known.
- **Arson. Davenport, Iowa, September 2006.** David McMenemy drove his car into the lobby of the Edgerton Women's Health Care Center in Davenport, Iowa, then used a Molotov cocktail to set the place on fire. He pleaded guilty to charges related to the attack in 2007 and received a five-year prison sentence.
- **Planned Bombing. Greenbelt, Maryland, June 2006.** Authorities arrested Robert Weiler for building a bomb to use to attack a local women's health clinic in Greenbelt, Maryland, as well as to shoot people inside. He was charged with possessing a pipe bomb and being a felon in possession of a firearm and subsequently pleaded guilty. He received a five-year sentence. In 2014, Prince George's County law enforcement officers arrested Weiler on charges of disorderly conduct and assault on a law enforcement officer outside a women's health clinic near College Park. The case

was placed on Maryland's stet docket, which typically means that the charges will be dropped if certain conditions are met (such as community service, anger management classes, etc.).

- **Firebombing. Shreveport, Louisiana, January 2006.** Shreveport police charged Patricia Hughes and Jeremy Dunahoe with firebombing the Hope Medical Group for Women with a Molotov cocktail in December 2005. Luckily, the incendiary device was placed too far from the building and thus did little damage. Hughes pleaded guilty to the firebombing, while Dunahoe pleaded guilty to being an accessory. Hughes received a six-year sentence; Dunahoe a one-year sentence.