



# MURDER AND EXTREMISM IN THE UNITED STATES IN 2016

An Anti-Defamation League Report

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Jared Blum  
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*Senior Research Fellow, Center on Extremism*

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Anti-Defamation League  
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158-3560  
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# MURDER AND EXTREMISM IN THE UNITED STATES IN 2016

**ONE WORD LOOMS OVER THE LANDSCAPE** of deadly extremism and terrorism in the United States in 2016: Orlando.

The June 2016 shooting spree at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, by Omar Mateen—who killed 49 people and wounded 53 more—dwarfed in its lethality all other extremist-related murders this past year. Mateen, who claimed his attack in the name of ISIS, though there are no known connections between him and that terror organization, achieved the dubious distinction of being the deadliest domestic terrorist since Timothy McVeigh bombed the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995.

Last year, the Anti-Defamation League reported that, in 2015, domestic extremists had killed more people than in any previous year since 1995. Largely because of Mateen’s attack, 2016 now supplants 2015 in its deadly toll. ADL’s preliminary tally of extremist-related deaths at the end of 2015 was 52. However, information that has emerged since then has now brought the 2015 total to 65 deaths at the hands of extremists, as it can sometimes take months or years for an extremist connection to a death to come to light.

ADL’s preliminary tally for 2016 is already at 69, a figure that includes the 49 killed by Mateen as well as 20 other murders committed by white supremacists, anti-government extremists such as sovereign citizens, and black nationalists. This grisly toll puts 2016 as the second deadliest year for domestic extremist-related deaths in the United States since 1970, the earliest year for which ADL maintains such statistics (Table 1). The number will inevitably grow higher still as more 2016 murders turn out to have extremist ties.

Were it not for the Orlando shootings, 2016 might have been considered a “mild” year for extremist-related deaths. Including Orlando, there were only 11 lethal incidents in the U.S. in 2016 that can be connected to extremism, compared to 29 incidents in 2015. Moreover, the number of incidents involving multiple fatalities in 2016 was only five, half the number of such incidents in 2015. Leaving out the Orlando shootings, one would have to go back all the way to 2006 to find a number of people killed by extremists smaller than that in 2016. The Pulse massacre was a single event so egregious in its casualty tolls that it can actually distort statistics and perceptions surrounding the extremist landscape.

It is important to note that the number of Americans killed by domestic extremists is small compared to the total number of

murders in the United States or even the number of those who die from gun violence each year. But these deaths represent merely the tip of a pyramid of extremist violence and crime in this country. For every person killed at the hands of an extremist, many more are wounded or injured in attempted murders and assaults. Every year, police uncover and prevent a wide variety of extremist plots and conspiracies with lethal intentions. And extremists engage in a wide variety of other crimes related to their causes, from threats and harassment to white collar crime.

To give just one other measure of extremist violence as an example, for the five years from 2012–2016, at least 56 shooting incidents between police and domestic extremists occurred (the vast majority of them shootouts or incidents in which extremists shot at police). During these encounters, extremists shot 69 police officers, 18 fatally.

Additionally, compared to many other types of violence, extremist-related violence has the power to shock or spread fear within an entire community—or an entire nation—as the Orlando shootings so tragically demonstrated this past year. The enormity of the attack in Orlando shocked and frightened all Americans, but it was a particular blow to the LGBT community in the United States, as the Pulse nightclub was a gay bar and dance club and most of the victims were gay, lesbian, or transgender.

**Table 1: Five Most Deadly Years for Domestic Extremist Killings (1970–2016)**

| Year | Number of Deaths | Significant Incidents (5+ deaths)                                   |
|------|------------------|---|
| 1995 | 184              | Oklahoma City bombing (168 deaths)                                  |
| 2016 | 69               | Orlando shootings (49 deaths)                                       |
| 2015 | 65               | San Bernardino, Chattanooga, Charleston shootings (28 deaths total) |
| 2009 | 46               | Ft. Hood shooting (13 deaths)                                       |
| 2012 | 33               | Oak Creek, Wisconsin, Sikh temple shooting (6 deaths)               |

*Note: Data is less reliable for 1970s–80s and may undercount extremist-related killings in those years. Source: Anti-Defamation League*

# THE PERPETRATORS

**IN A COUNTRY AS LARGE AS THE UNITED STATES**, no one extremist group or movement has a monopoly on violence. The 11 deadly incidents tracked by ADL in 2016 came at the hands of a variety of extremist movements.

Indeed, though Omar Mateen’s Pulse nightclub shootings were by far the deadliest act of extremist violence in 2016, comprising 71% of all such deaths, they also represented the only lethal incident involving domestic Islamic extremists (Chart 1). In this, 2016 bears some similarities to the previous year, in which domestic Islamic extremists committed 29% of the extremist-related murders in 2015 (Chart 2), but those murders were concentrated in only two deadly incidents (the Chattanooga and San Bernardino shootings). As with all extremist movements, it is important to note there were also other incidents in 2016 where domestic Islamic extremists attempted or plotted at deadly violence, but were unsuccessful.

Taken together, these incidents tell us something about the nature of the domestic Islamic extremist terror threat in the United States. First, lethal incidents are rare, which is to be expected for a nascent movement of small size. Second, the few lethal incidents that have occurred have been particularly deadly, largely because the perpetrators chose to use firearms and were either lone wolves or, in the case of the San Bernardino shooters, a cell of only two, man and wife. Attacks with such characteristics are difficult to detect ahead of time and prevent from occurring.

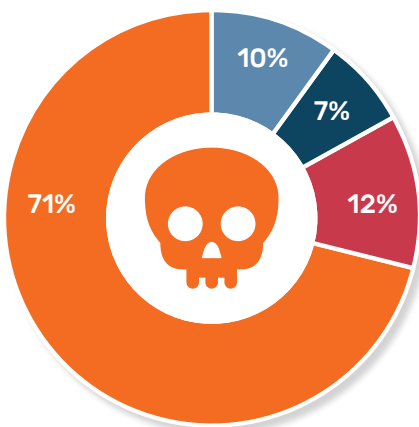
Such sporadic attacks, simple but deadly in nature and carried out largely by self-radicalized extremists influenced by external voices (such as ISIS propaganda) and their own internal demons, are likely to continue to represent the face of domestic Islamic extremism for some time to come.

Though not the most lethal, in some ways the most troubling extremist-related murders that occurred in 2016 were the murders of large numbers of police officers at the hands of black nationalists. Eight police officers were killed in two incidents this past year in which extremists deliberately targeted police officers for murder. In July 2016, Micah Xavier Johnson, who had ties to black nationalist groups such as the New Black Panther Party, killed five police officers (and injured nine others) in Dallas, Texas, in an ambush attack aimed at police maintaining public order at a Black Lives Matter protest. That same month, Gavin Eugene Long ambushed and shot six police officers, three of them fatally, in Baton Rouge. Long was an adherent of black nationalism as well as the anti-government sovereign citizen movement (see below).

Both of these deadly incidents were deliberate acts of retaliation against police officers (and, in the case of Johnson, at white police officers in particular) because of the frequency of African-American men killed during various encounters with police in recent years. These deadly police shootings, many of which were captured in whole or in part on video, have been the subject of much publicity and controversy in recent years, the more so because of the difficulty in securing convictions or even prosecutions of officers suspected of having been involved in wrongful shootings.

The controversies over police shootings have given rise to the Black Lives Matter movement, which protests against such shootings and seeks police reform. Despite a flurry of angry allegations blaming Black Lives Matter for the Dallas and Baton Rouge shootings, however, neither killer actually had an association with Black Lives Matter.

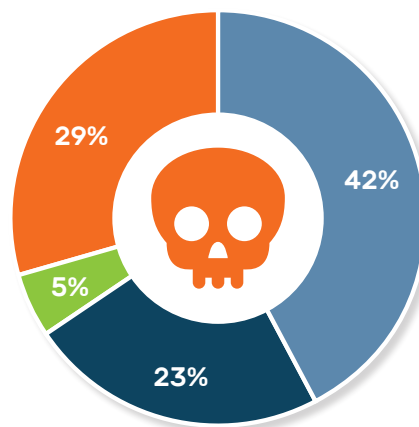
None of the police officers shot by Long or Johnson were themselves involved in any controversial shootings; they were blameless. The killings were acts of indirect retaliation aimed at local law enforcement officers because of earlier officer-involved



**Chart 1: Domestic Extremist-Related Killings in the U.S. by Perpetrator Affiliation, 2016**

**Number of Deaths: 69**

*Note: Includes both ideologically and non-ideologically motivated killings*



**Chart 2: Domestic Extremist-Related Killings in the U.S. by Perpetrator Affiliation, 2015**

**Number of Deaths: 65**

*Note: Includes both ideologically and non-ideologically motivated killings*

- White Supremacy
- Black Nationalism
- Domestic Islamic Extremism
- Anti-Government Extremism
- Anti-Abortion Extremism

Source: Anti-Defamation League

shootings in Dallas and Baton Rouge. These killings represent the worst spate of black nationalist-related murders of police officers since the late 1960s and early 1970s, when more than two dozen police officers, and several more corrections officers, were killed by black nationalists, particularly from the Black Liberation Army and the Black Panther Party (no relation to the New Black Panther Party). The two 2016 incidents alone, in terms of victims, are equivalent to almost a third of that earlier multi-year total (Table 2).

Unfortunately, controversial officer-involved shootings both provide ammunition to black nationalist groups for propaganda

**Table 2: Police Officers Killed in the United States by Domestic Extremists, 1965–2016**

| Years        | By Left-Wing Extremists <sup>1</sup> | By Right-Wing Extremists | By Domestic Islamic Extremists | Total      |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| 1965–1970    | 3                                    | 0                        | 0                              | 3          |
| 1971–1980    | 25                                   | 1                        | 2                              | 28         |
| 1981–1990    | 5                                    | 6                        | 0                              | 11         |
| 1991–2000    | 1                                    | 16                       | 0                              | 17         |
| 2001–2010    | 2                                    | 24                       | 0                              | 26         |
| 2011–2016    | 8                                    | 10                       | 1                              | 19         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>44</b>                            | <b>57</b>                | <b>3</b>                       | <b>104</b> |

*Note:* <sup>1</sup>Includes anarchists, black nationalists  
*Source:* Anti-Defamation League

and recruiting and also can directly influence lone wolves such as Johnson and Long to attempt acts of deadly violence. It is important to note that, though Johnson and Long were the only extremists with black nationalist ties successfully to kill law enforcement officers, they were not the only ones who attempted to do so in 2016. For example, in September 2016, Marc LaQuon Payne, a man with black nationalist beliefs and anger about recent police shootings, allegedly attempted to run over Phoenix, Arizona, police officers with his vehicle (the officers, though seriously injured, survived).

Unless significant reforms in police use-of-force policies and training occur, more controversial police shootings are likely to occur in the future—which could in turn lead to future attempts at violent retaliation and more deaths like the officers who perished

in Dallas and Baton Rouge. This daunting prospect, combined with the need to reduce officer-involved shootings themselves, makes significant reform measures all the more urgent.

The year 2016 was also unusual in that right-wing extremists did not dominate the murder statistics, as they have each year since the mid-1980s. In 2015, for example, 70% of all extremist-related killings were perpetrated by right-wing extremists, including white supremacists, anti-government extremists and anti-abortion extremists. This past year, however, anti-government extremists were responsible for only either 17% or 22% of extremist-related deaths, depending on how one classifies Gavin Eugene Long, while white supremacists were responsible for only 10%. Other right-wing extremist movements committed no murders in 2016.

Long, as discussed above, was a black nationalist, but he also belonged to another extremist movement, the sovereign citizen movement, which is traditionally part of the right-wing anti-government extremist movement, alongside militia groups and tax protesters. Indeed, Long even started his own Washita Nation group (a type of sovereign group). When ADL encounters extremists who adhere to more than one extremist movement, it classifies them (for the purpose of this annual report) by the movement with which they seem primarily to identify. Long seems to have identified equally with both, and either classification would be justifiable. However, for the charts in this report, Long is included as a black nationalist.

Long was not the only person with sovereign citizen ties to commit a triple homicide in 2016. Far less covered by the media, in part because they took place in Morgan County, West Virginia, were the murders allegedly committed by Erick David Shute in May 2016. Shute, who was an adherent of the sovereign citizen movement, as well as of many militia-style conspiracy theories, was arrested after reportedly ambushing and killing three of his neighbors, with whom he had a long-running dispute.

By ADL’s preliminary tally, at least, white supremacists were responsible for only seven of the 69 extremist-related murders committed in the United States in 2016. This represents an uncharacteristically low number for white supremacists, who are typically responsible for more such killings than any other extremist movement. These low figures also occurred during a year in which non-violent white supremacist activity was particularly high, in large part due to agitation and propaganda by the so-called alt-right and other white supremacists in connection with the 2016 presidential election.

It should be noted that the ADL tally does not include several murders committed in 2016 by people associated with the Irish Mob, an Oklahoma-based gang that some media sources have referred to as white supremacist but which seems to be more a

white-based traditional criminal prison gang (most white prison gangs are also white supremacist—but not all).

Because extremist murder statistics are volatile and can vary considerably between any two given years, the low figure for white supremacist-related murders in 2016 should not be taken as indicative of a trend, given much higher figures for white supremacist-related deaths in recent years. It may only be an example of an aberrant year. Only if this low number repeats itself in 2017 can it be considered a possible trend.

A white supremacist was responsible for one of 2016's triple homicides, in July 2016, when long-time Washington white supremacist Brent Luyster was arrested on aggravated murder and other charges for allegedly killing three of his own friends and associates and nearly killing a fourth, apparently in a rage over his federal and state criminal legal troubles, as well as his reported desire to see his child by an ex-girlfriend.

That murder may not have been ideological in nature, but others were, including the alleged murder in Gresham, Oregon, of Larnell Bruce, an African-American teenager from Vancouver, Washington, by white supremacist Russell Courtier, a member of the white supremacist European Kindred gang. Courtier allegedly admitted to a detective that he deliberately hit Bruce with his car after an altercation outside a convenience store. Hunt was arrested for murder and a hate crime, as was his girlfriend, Colleen Hunt, who allegedly encouraged Courtier to fight, yelling "get him, baby, get him!"

## THE MURDERS

**THE YEAR 2016 WAS THE FOURTH YEAR IN A ROW** that extremist-related killings have increased, from only 25 in 2013 to 69 in 2016. It was the second year in a row that fatalities topped 60; a "typical" recent year would normally have seen somewhere between 20–30 deaths. This growth in lethality is troubling and can be attributed largely to domestic Islamic extremists and white supremacists deliberately embarking on shooting sprees designed to cause large numbers of deaths.

The 69 murders preliminarily documented by ADL's Center on Extremism in 2016 occurred in 11 different incidents, with five of the 11 incidents involving multiple murders. The Orlando nightclub shooting spree was the only incident to top five deaths.

Ideology seems to have played a primary or secondary role in only five of the incidents, but those incidents were responsible for the great majority of the deaths, at 59. It is common for adherents of extremist movements to commit non-ideological acts of violence, which can range from killing a suspected

informant to assassinating a rival to acts of violence stemming from traditional criminal motives, such as anger or greed. For example, 10 Louisiana members of the Aryan Circle, one of the nation's largest and most violence white supremacist prison gangs, were arrested on various charges in connection with the alleged murder of a man after an alleged dispute at a Fourth of July party. The victim may himself have been a member or associate of the Aryan Circle. Though adherents of any extremist movement can commit non-ideological crimes of violence, typically white supremacists make up the majority of such cases, as many of them engage in a large amount of gang-related and traditional criminal activity in addition to violence stemming from their white supremacist beliefs.

Once again, firearms were responsible for the vast majority of the deaths in this study. In 2016, 65 of the 69 victims identified by ADL were killed by firearms. The other four deaths included two stabbing deaths, one victim who was run over by a vehicle, and one death the cause of which has not yet been released by authorities. Though it is common for people to associate extremists with exotic weapons such as bombs or other weapons of mass destruction, overwhelmingly extremists in the United States, regardless of movement, are at their most lethal when employing firearms (Table 3).

## NOTES ON METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

### THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE'S CENTER ON EXTREMISM

has compiled a list of over 1,000 known murders/killings by perpetrators associated with domestic extremist movements of all types since 1970—essentially the post-Civil Rights era. These are primarily murders committed by American extremists on U.S. soil, though a few cases involving American extremists murdering other Americans abroad (such as at Jonestown) are also included.

Because extremist connections to some murders can take months or years to be revealed, statistics for the most recent years will inevitably be revised upward in future years. For example, in ADL's report on extremist-related murders in 2015 counted 52 murders; within a year, ADL had uncovered 13 more extremist-related murders for 2015 and revised its numbers accordingly. Similar upward revision is likely to occur in the future for the 2016 statistics presented here.

The incidents are derived primarily from public sources, leading to some limitations regarding cross-era or cross-movement comparisons. Regarding cross-era comparisons, generally speaking, information on extremist-related killings from the

1970s and 1980s is more difficult to obtain than for later years; thus it may not be meaningful to compare or contrast figures from the earlier era with figures from the 1990s or later.

The main limitation of cross-movement comparisons is that extremist connections to killings are easier to determine for some movements than for others. For example, white supremacists, who frequently sport many racist and white supremacist tattoos, or who may be documented as white supremacists by gang investigators or corrections officials, are often more easily identifiable. In contrast, it may be more difficult for police or media to identify, say, anti-government extremist associations that a suspect might have. This issue

comes up most often with non-ideological killings rather than ideologically-motivated ones. It is fair to say that non-ideological murders committed by extremists other than white supremacists are probably underrepresented here.

In addition, because murders that occur behind bars often get little or no reporting by the media, and are typically not publicized by prison officials, prison-based violence by all extremist movements is definitely under-represented.

With any such list, the inclusion or exclusion of certain borderline cases may be a judgment call based on the best evidence available, judgments with which others may possibly disagree.

**Table 3: Deadliest Acts of Violence by U.S. Domestic Extremists, 1966-2016**

| Rank     | Fatalities | Year      | Ideology             | Weapon             | Description  |
|----------|------------|-----------|----------------------|--------------------|--|
| 1        | 168        | 1995      | Right-Wing Extremism | Bomb               | Bombing of Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols             |
| 2        | 49         | 2016      | Islamic Extremism    | Firearm(s)         | Shootings at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, by Omar Mateen                                     |
| 3        | 14         | 2015      | Islamic Extremism    | Firearm(s)         | Shootings at Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California, by Syed Farook and Tashfeen Malik |
| 4        | 13         | 2009      | Islamic Extremism    | Firearm(s)         | Shootings by Nidal Malik Hasan at Fort Hood, Texas   |
| 5 (tie)  | 9          | 2015      | Right-Wing Extremism | Firearm(s)         | Shootings at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, allegedly by Dylan Storm Roof         |
| 5 (tie)  | 9          | 1972-1973 | Left-Wing Extremism  | Firearm(s)         | Shootings of police officers and whites in Dec 1972 and Jan 1973 in New Orleans by Mark Essex        |
| 7        | 8          | 1972      | Left-Wing Extremism  | Firearm(s)         | Shootings on St. Croix (U.S. Virgin Islands) by alleged black power activists                        |
| 8 (tie)  | 6          | 2012      | Right-Wing Extremism | Firearm(s)         | Shootings at Wisconsin Sikh temple by Wade Michael Page  |
| 8 (tie)  | 6          | 1977      | Right-Wing Extremism | Firearm(s)         | Workplace shootings by Frederick Cowan in New Rochelle, New York                                     |
| 10 (tie) | 5          | 2015      | Islamic Extremism    | Firearm(s)         | Shootings by Muhammad Youssef Abdulazeez at military locations in Chattanooga, Tennessee             |
| 10 (tie) | 5          | 2001      | Right-Wing Extremism | Firearm(s)         | Workplace shootings by Joseph Ferguson in Sacramento, California                                     |
| 10 (tie) | 5          | 1979      | Right-Wing Extremism | Firearm(s)         | Shootings of left-wing extremists by white supremacists in Greensboro, North Carolina                |
| 10 (tie) | 5          | 1971      | Left-Wing Extremism  | Firearm(s) /Blades | Deadly escape/hostage attempt by George Jackson and other prisoners                                  |
| 10 (tie) | 5          | 1978      | Left-Wing Extremism  | Firearm(s)         | Assassination of Congressman Leo Ryan and others by members of the People's Temple in Guyana         |

Source: Anti-Defamation League



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