Terrorism and Hate Crimes: Dealing with All of the Threats from Extremism

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The focus on terrorism and Islamist extremism often leads Americans, our politics, and U.S. media to ignore the fact that what we call "terrorism" and Islamic extremism is only one part of the pattern of American extremism and violence. The FBI publishes an annual summary of the patterns in hate crimes, and one that has steadily improved its coverage of all forms of religious extremism.

For example, the latest report—covering 2015—was issued in November 2016 and is the first to include seven new religious anti-bias categories (anti-Buddhist, anti-Eastern Orthodox, anti-Hindu, anti-Jehovah’s Witness, anti-Mormon, anti-other Christian, and anti-Sikh), as well as an anti-Arab bias motivation.

The Overall Patterns in Hate Crimes versus Patterns in Terrorism

The overall patterns in hate crimes are shown in Figure One, and excerpted and summarized below:

- There were 5,818 single-bias incidents involving 7,121 victims. Of those victims, 59.2 percent were targeted because of a race/ethnicity/ancestry bias; 19.7 percent because of a religious bias; 17.7 percent because of a sexual orientation bias; 1.7 percent because of a gender identity bias; 1.2 percent because of a disability bias; and 0.4 percent because of a gender bias.

- There were an additional 32 multiple-bias incidents that involved another 52 victims.

- Of the 4,482 hate crime offenses classified as crimes against persons, intimidation accounted for 41.3 percent of those offenses, while 37.8 percent involved simple assault and 19.7 percent involved aggravated assault.

- There were 2,338 hate crime offenses classified as crimes against property, and the majority of those (72.6 percent) were acts of destruction/damage/vandalism.

- During 2015, most reported hate crime incidents (31.5 percent) happened in or near residences or homes.

- Of the 5,493 known offenders, 48.4 percent were white, 24.3 percent were black or African-American, and race was unknown for 16.2 percent of the offenders. The rest were of various other races.

The FBI analysis also reported that:

- 59.2 percent of the 7,123 victims were targeted because of the offenders’ bias against race/ethnicity/ancestry.

- 19.7 percent were victimized because of bias against religion.

- 17.7 percent were targeted because of bias against sexual orientation.

- 1.7 percent were victims of gender-identity bias.

- 1.2 percent were targeted because of bias against disability.
• 0.4 percent (30 individuals) were victims of gender bias.

**Figure One: Hate Crimes in 2015**

Here’s a breakdown, by category, of why the 7,121 victims of the 5,818 single-bias incidents were targeted:

- **Gender identity bias**: 1.7%
- **Disability bias**: 1.2%
- **Gender bias**: 0.4%
- **Sexual orientation bias**: 17.7%
- **Religious bias**: 19.7%
- **Race/ethnicity/ancestry bias**: 59.2%

*From Hate Crime Statistics, 2015*
Hate Totals Versus Terrorism Totals

These data are a grim warning that overt, criminal acts of racism still present a major challenge in U.S. society. They make up more than 59 percent of all "single bias" hate crimes—over 3,440 incidents, and single bias crimes are the most clearly identifiable of the 5,850 criminal incidents and 6,885 related offenses that were motivated by bias against race, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, or gender identity. These totals only involve reported incidents and reporting on hate crimes is far less comprehensive than terrorist attacks—all of which get massive media attention.

Religion was the second greatest cause of hate crimes—59.2 percent were targeted because of a race/ethnicity/ancestry bias; 19.7 percent because of a religious bias; and 17.7 percent because of a sexual orientation bias. These three causes alone led to the targeting of 96.6 percent of "single bias" hate crimes.

By comparison, the START database on terrorism—which the U.S. State Department uses to estimate the level of terrorism from all causes—found a total of 38 incidents of terrorism in the U.S. in 2015. START reported that 16 of these 38 attacks had some connection to religion, but did not specify the faith involved.

The worst terrorist attacks did have more serious human consequences than hate crimes. They killed a total of 44 persons in 2015, and injured 52 others—a total of 96 victims inside the United States. START also estimates that 16 of the 52 incidents had some form of religious motive.

In contrast, the FBI reports that 4,482 victims of hate crimes were victims of crimes against persons in 2015. Regarding these victims and the crimes committed against them:

- 18 persons were murdered and 13 were raped. (Concerning rape, data for 12 rapes were submitted under the UCR Program’s revised definition; 1 rape was submitted under the legacy definition.)
- 41.3 percent of the victims were intimidated.
- 37.8 percent were victims of simple assault.
- 19.7 percent were victims of aggravated assault.
- 0.4 percent (20) were victims of other types of offenses, which are collected only in the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).

If one compares the total victims from terrorism to the number of hate crimes, 96 victims—including 44 murders have to be compared to 7,121 victims of hate crimes, and 2,608 of these victims suffered from physical hate crimes against persons ranging from simple assault to murder. A total of 883 of this total suffered from aggravated assault in addition to the 18 murders and 13 rapes.
Terrorism and Religious Extremism versus Racism

It is equally important to note the relative size of racist hate crimes to terrorism, and how important racist incidents that are formally labeled as crimes remain in American society. The FBI annual report for 2015 states that, "law enforcement agencies reported that 4,029 single-bias hate crime offenses were motivated by race/ethnicity/ancestry in 2015."
Of these offenses,

- 52.7 percent were motivated by anti-Black or African American bias.
- 18.2 percent stemmed from anti-White bias.
- 9.4 percent were classified as anti-Hispanic or Latino bias.
- 3.4 percent were motivated by anti-American Indian or Alaska Native bias.
- 3.4 percent were a result of bias against groups of individuals consisting of more than one race (anti-multiple races, group).
- 3.3 percent resulted from anti-Asian bias.
- 1.2 percent were classified as anti-Arab bias.
- 0.1 percent (6 offenses) were motivated by bias of anti-Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.
- 8.2 percent were the result of an anti-other Race/Ethnicity/Ancestry bias.

The data on the patterns in victims showed there were 4,216 victims of race/ethnicity/ancestry motivated hate crime.

- 52.2 percent were victims of crimes motivated by their offenders’ anti-Black or African American bias.
- 18.7 percent were victims of anti-White bias.
- 9.3 percent were victims of anti-Hispanic or Latino bias.
- 3.8 percent were victims of bias against a group of individuals in which more than one race was represented (anti-multiple races, group).
- 3.3 percent were victims of anti-American Indian or Alaska Native bias.
- 3.2 percent were victims of anti-Asian bias.
- 1.1 percent were victims of anti-Arab bias.
- 0.1 percent (6 individuals) were victims of anti-Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander bias.
- 8.1 percent were victims of anti-Other Race/Ethnicity/Ancestry bias.

Traditional racism is still by far the leading cause of hate crimes and all forms of hate-related violence. It is interesting to note, however, that while terrorism produced more fatalities and many critical injuries, the 1.2% of racist crimes that were anti-Arab still amounted to 48 incidents—more than the total number of terrorist incidents from all causes. There were 46 Arab victims of physical attack.

_Terrorism and Religious Extremism versus Traditional Religious Hate Crimes_
Like racism, America's past heritage of religious prejudice and bigotry still dominates its total number of incidents. Hate crimes motivated by religious bias accounted for 1,354 offenses reported by law enforcement, and antisemitism made up over 51%. Less than 4% involved hate crimes against a Christian sect, a significant decline from the past pattern of hate crimes up until the early 1960s—although accurate trend data are lacking.

The number of anti-Muslim incidents, however, ranked second at 22.2% of the total or 301 incidents. This was nearly 8 times the total number of terrorist incidents, and 19 times the total number of terrorist incidents that START reports had any link to religion. It also does not take account of cases where non-Muslims were confused with Muslims.

The FBI report shows that a breakdown of the bias motivation of religious-biased offenses showed:

- 51.3 percent were anti-Jewish.
- 22.2 percent were anti-Islamic (Muslim).
- 4.4 percent were anti-Catholic.
- 4.2 percent were anti-multiple religions, group.
- 3.7 percent were Anti-Eastern Orthodox (Russian, Greek, Other).
- 3.5 percent were anti-Protestant.
- 1.3 percent were anti-Other Christian.
- 0.6 percent were Anti-Mormon.
- 0.4 percent (6 offenses) were Anti-Sikh.
- 0.4 percent (5 offenses) were Anti-Hindu.
- 0.1 percent (2 offenses) were anti-Atheism/Agnosticism/etc.
- 0.1 percent (1 offense) were Anti-Buddhist.
- 0.1 percent (1 offense) were Anti-Jehovah’s Witness.
- 7.7 percent were anti-other (unspecified) religion.

The data on the patterns in victims showed there were 1,402 victims of anti-religious hate crimes:

- 52.1 percent were victims of crimes motivated by their offenders’ anti-Jewish bias.
- 21.9 percent were victims of anti-Islamic (Muslim) bias.
- 4.3 percent were victims of anti-Catholic bias.
- 4.1 percent were victims of bias against groups of individuals of varying religions (anti-multiple religions, group).
- 3.6 percent were victims of anti-Eastern Orthodox (Russian, Greek, Other) bias.
- 3.4 percent were victims of anti-Protestant bias.
- 1.3 percent were victims of anti-Other Christian bias.
- 0.6 percent were victims of anti-Mormon bias.
- 0.4 percent were victims of anti-Hindu bias.
• 0.4 percent were victims of anti-Sikh bias.
• 0.1 percent were victims of anti-Jehovah’s Witness bias.
• 0.1 percent were victims of anti-Buddhist bias.
• 0.1 percent were victims of anti-Atheist/Agnostic bias.
• 7.6 percent were victims of bias against other religions (anti-other religion).

These figures indicate there were 307 Moslem victims, compared to 96 victims from all forms of terrorism—only 48% of which had any link to religion. Once again, however, it is important to point out that the levels of violence and numbers killed in religious hate crimes were far lower than was the case in serious terrorist attacks.

**Sexual-Orientation and Disability Bias**

It is far harder to relate the other forms of hate crimes to specific aspects of the terrorist threat, but they do make it clear that other than to note that American extremism and extremist violence have many causes that do far more cumulative damage than terrorism. If one only examines the remaining hate crimes relating to a sexual orientation bias, the FBI reports that law enforcement agencies reported 1,219 hate crime offenses based on sexual-orientation bias in 2015. Of these offenses:

• 62.2 percent were classified as anti-gay (male) bias.
• 19.3 percent were prompted by an anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (mixed group) bias.
• 13.8 percent were classified as anti-lesbian bias.
• 2.9 percent were classified as anti-bisexual bias.
• 1.9 percent were the result of an anti-heterosexual bias.

There were 1,263 victims targeted due to sexual-orientation bias:

• 62.2 percent were victims of crimes motivated by their offenders’ anti-gay (male) bias.
• 19.6 percent were victims of anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (mixed group) bias.
• 13.5 percent were victims of anti-lesbian bias.
• 2.8 percent were victims of anti-bisexual bias.
• 1.9 percent were victims of anti-heterosexual bias.

There were also 29 offenses of gender bias reported in 2015. Of these, 21 were anti-female, and 8 were anti-male. This involved 122 victims of gender-identity bias: 76 were victims of anti-transgender bias and 46 were victims of anti-gender non-conforming bias.

In addition, 52 crimes were committed out of bias against physical disability and 38 against mental disability. This produced a total of 88 victims of hate crimes due to the offenders’ biases against disabilities: 52 were victims of anti-physical disability bias and 36 were targets of anti-mental disability bias.
Putting Terrorism and Islamist Extremism into Perspective

There are several aspects of these figures that need to be kept in careful perspective:

- **First**, hate crimes and extremist behavior—as well as seemingly senseless violence and crimes caused by stress and mental illness are normal parts of human behavior. No society can eliminate them, they are hard to label and categorize with any accuracy and consistency, and the numbers counted for any given country depend more on its quality of law enforcement and concern for human rights than national differences. The fact that most nations and societies prefer not to address them—or find other labels to describe such crimes—in no way means that they do not exist.

- **Second**, the previous comparisons do not mean in any way that there is not a serious terrorist threat. The events of 9/11 showed all too clearly what a failure to prevent a few major attacks can do. The fact that such events have since been far less serious is a matter of major improvements in counterterrorism and targeted law enforcement efforts, and the fact that the United States has been able to work with strategic partners outside the U.S.—including most of the governments in largely Muslim states—to fight a common threat where over 90% of the victims are the result of Muslims killing Muslims.

- **What these numbers do show**, however, is that there is no statistical justification for any form of Islamophobia or for singling out all Muslims. The numbers of terrorist incidents involving any relation to religion are far too small relative to all the other forms of crime and violence driven by religion and race, and more Muslims in the United States suffer from hate crimes than other Americans suffer from terrorism.

More broadly, the FBI totals on hate crimes show all too clearly how important it is to maintain the focus of all law enforcement agencies on such crimes, and to look beyond terrorism at all U.S. forms of extremism. Put bluntly, no class of Americans—regardless of race, religion, gender, or any socially meaningful categorization—is immune to either committing or being the victim of such forms of crime, violence, and extremism. The defense of freedom and of a functioning civil society means that hate crimes must have the same priority as terrorism—they pose just as critical a threat.

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