

RIGHT WING EXTREMISTS IN THE US, 2015-2020

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Presented to
General Audience

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SOCIAL MEDIA, PROPAGANDA, AND RIGHTWING TERRORISM IN THE US

Project Background

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN RWEX?

- **Racially and Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism (REMVE)**
- **Anti Government Extremism (AG)**

RWEX LANDSCAPE IN THE US TODAY

Extreme Right-Wing Typology, though in practice significant overlap

White Supremacist

- Belief in natural racial/cultural hierarchy
- Impose social and political control over non-white communities
- Ideology based on racism, segregation, xenophobia, and nativism
- Examples: Ku Klux Klan, Hammerskin Nation

Anti-Government

- Conspiracies about the US government turning into a New World Order
- Concerned about erosion of civil liberties like gun rights
- Aim attacks at state and federal officials and buildings
- Examples: Sovereign Citizens and Oath Keepers

Fundamentalist/Religious

- Use sacred texts to justify violence and mobilize support
- Christian identity justifies Aryan superiority
- Maintain hierarchical structures and pre-plan attacks with multiple perpetrators
- Examples: Army of God

OVERLAPPING IDEOLOGIES CASES

REMVE meets AG meets Religious



Joel Schrimsher

- Plotted to set fire to a mosque, shoot at a synagogue, and mail a bomb to the Federal Reserve
- Heavily engaged with Nazi propaganda, racist photos, and footage of shootings
- Openly posted to Twitter about his plans



Christopher Hasson

- Plotted to attack various “leftist” politicians, judges, and professors
- Identifies as a “White Nationalist” and engaged with numerous pro-Russian, pro-fascist, and neo-Nazi literature online



Michael Hari

- Planned to bomb a mosque in Minnesota
- Founded his own militia: the White Rabbits
- Believes Muslims are making America “un-Christian”
- Has described America as a “completely illegitimate police state”

BUILDING THE CPOST RWEX PERP DATABASE

Research Methods

1. IDENTIFYING CASES AND PERPETRATORS, 2015-2020

Used 4 existing databases to find REMVE and AG plotters and attackers, 307 possible events

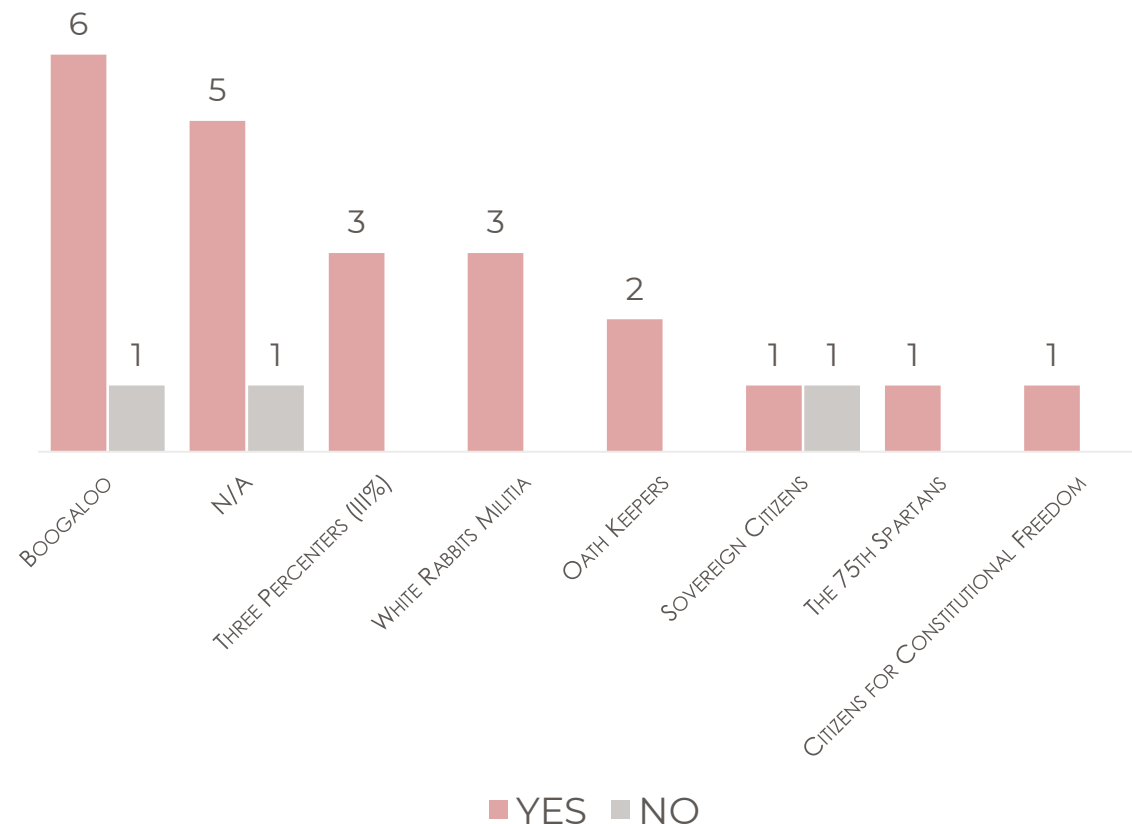
Database Name	Scope	Updated	Contains	Cases
New America Foundation	Narrow	Real-time	Major REMVE attackers only	9
NJ Homeland Security Yearly Reports	Medium	Yearly	Mix of REMVE and anti-govt plotters and attackers	51
Global Terrorism Database	Medium	Yearly	Mix of REMVE and anti-govt attackers	89
ADL	Broad	Real-time	Mix of REMVE and anti-govt plotters and attackers, and also personal disputes	158
TOTAL				307

2. SELECTING CASES FOR IN-DEPTH PROFILES

Getting from 307 possible events to 84 events and 108 associated perpetrators

- Chose cases from the 307 AG and REMVE events with 1) clear ideology AND 2) violent intent linked to ideology
- **Common exclusions:**
 - Non-ideological attacks. ADL catalogs all lethal incidents committed by right-wing extremists
 - So, a domestic assault by a member of the Aryan Brotherhood would not count for our purposes
 - Anti-government, but not RWEX: anarchists and Antifa
 - Threats but no actual plot
 - Harassment or hate speech but no attack or plot
- **Final tally of clear US RWEX cases/perpetrators**
 - 84 events and 108 associated perpetrators (74 REMVE, 34 AG)

Distribution of 108 RWEX perps by mobilization year



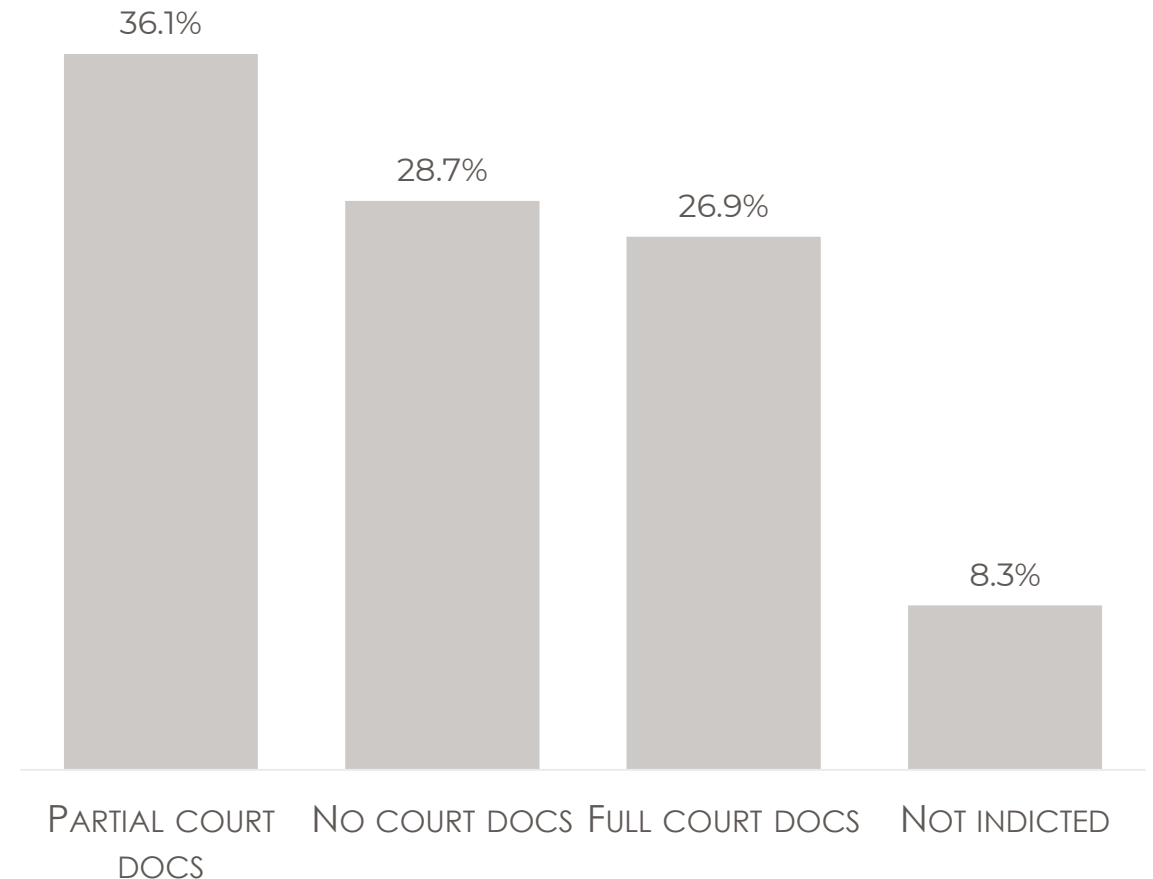
3. COLLECTING INFORMATION ON PERPETRATORS

Collected court documents, social media profiles, and news reporting on each perpetrator

- **92 perpetrators were indicted**
 - **Challenge:** many local cases where court docs are not readily available online
 - **Solution:** contacted local courts and reporters for court docs

- **Court data**
 - **Criminal complaint:** offence severity and nature of the crime
 - **Sentencing memorandum:** perpetrator’s background information
 - **Court transcripts:** perpetrator quotes related to motive
 - **Affidavit:** witness testimony and evidence (often including online activity)

Availability of Court Documents



FINDINGS

OVERALL FINDINGS: DEMOGRAPHICS OF ALL 108 CASES

REMVE and AG perps mostly male, mid-30s and half had a prior criminal record

- **108 total included profiles**
 - 74 REMVE
 - 34 AG
- **63 attacks, 45 plots**
 - 50 total attacks with casualties
 - 13 total attacks without casualties
- **Mostly Male (94%)**
- **Average age at mobilization: 34**
 - US-born ISIS perpetrators mobilized between 2015 and 2019 were younger, average age 29
- **High proportion of prior criminal record**
 - 48% prior criminal record, 30% prior incarceration
 - Compared to ISIS perps 36% / 18%
- **Relatively uneducated, only 19% some college**
 - ISIS indictees were more educated, 31% some college
- **Mental illness: 19% diagnosed, 21% speculated**
 - ISIS 14% diagnosed

COMPARING REMVE AND ANTI-GOVT DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics

- Anti-government slightly more likely to have prior record (54% vs. 40%)
- Mental illness more prevalent in anti-government cases (28% diagnosed vs. 20%)
- Anti-government offenders more religious (41% vs. 26%)
- Anti-government more likely to have had prior military service (24% vs. 15%)
- Both very high indictment rates, but REMVE more likely to be indicted (88% vs. 79%)

Attacks

- Anti-government more likely to be plots disrupted by law enforcement
- REMVE has much higher percentage of attacks with casualties

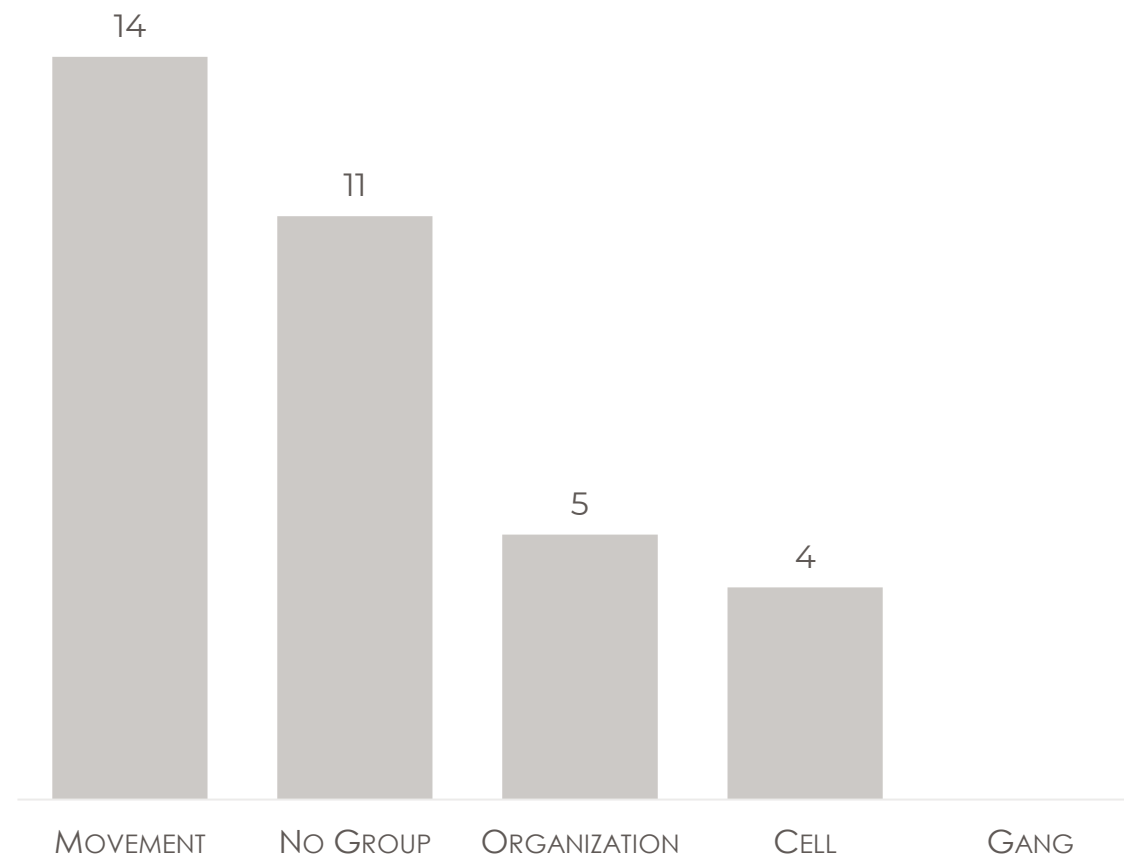
Offense Type	AG	REMVE
Attacks w/ casualties	17.6%	59.5%
Attacks w/o casualties	32.4%	2.7%
Plots	50%	37.8%

MOTIVATIONS

Largely social, but even with court records, data still sparse

- Distribution of motivations is similar for anti-government cases and REMVE cases
- REMVE: 34% social, 10% heroic, 16% mixed
- Anti-govt: 24% social, 9% heroic, 12% mixed
- The similar distribution of social & heroic motives is surprising considering the individualistic nature of the anti-government ideology, especially compared to the more group-organized REMVE sphere

Motivation



THE SOCIAL MOTIVE: EXAMPLES

REMVE Case

- **Robert Bowers conducted a deadly shooting spree at a Pittsburgh Synagogue killing 11**

– Shared a post on Gab.com just before the attack writing, “HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) likes to bring invaders in that kill out people. I can’t sit by and watch **my people** get slaughtered. Screw your optics I’m going in.”



AG Cases

- **Christopher Todd Campbell plotted to attack the US government to prevent martial law**

– Stated that “to even consider the thought of an invasion on American soil by the largest country in the world [China]... was devastating ... all I knew was I was going to try to prepare to **defend my country and family** and pray to God it would never come to that”.



THE HEROIC MOTIVE: EXAMPLES

REMVE Cases

- **Connor Climo plotted attack on synagogue in Nevada.**
 - Joined the FKD because the group **”offered him glory** and the ability to contribute his knowledge of constructing explosive devices toward a 'righteous' cause.”
- **Nolan Brewer set fire to a synagogue in Indiana.**
 - After, Brewer wrote “Holy S. We made CNN, Fox IndyStar WTHR... **Mike Pence even tweeted about us.**” Brewer told the FBI “if there were **news headlines** ... it would be able to spark more radicalism.”

AG Case

- **Eric Reinbold manufactured and stockpiled bombs**
 - Wrote manifesto titled **”How one (1) person Can make a difference:** Instruction Booklet at the HCU (homemade commando university).” Wrote that “Media will label you a serial killer, but **real folk will call you a hero.**” It was an anti-government survivalist **fantasy book inspired by movies.**

ANTI-GOVERNMENT GROUPS

A mix of militias and mobilizing movement ideologies

- **Organizations:** Organized national militia groups such as the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters (III%)
- **Cells:** Small local militias such as the White Rabbit Militia
- **Movements:** Not groups, but clear ideological boundaries and shared online affinity
- **Gangs:** no cases

Movements are key in the anti-government space

- **Sovereign Citizen Movement**
 - Shared ideology that they choose which laws to obey
- **Boogaloo Movement**
 - Boogaloo isn't an org, but a mobilizing meme
 - Online joke about a second civil war



BOOGALOO CASES

Creating shared identity and cohesion online



Steven Carrillo

- Air Force Sergeant who killed two police officers in California in May/June 2020
- Used boog phrases like “I became unreasonable” and “stop the duopoly”
- Hoped to use BLM protests as cover for anti-police violence: “Use their anger to fuel our fire”



Aaron Swenson

- Arrested while livestreaming himself threatening to “ambush and execute” a police officer
- Mobilized by police killing of Duncan Lemp and mourned him on social media



Loomis, Parshall, and Lynam

- Arrested while planning to firebomb police during a BLM protest
- Heavily involved in Boogaloo Facebook groups. Shared IRA training materials

REMVE GROUPS

Mostly white supremacist gangs and local groups

▪ Gangs

- Skinhead or prison gangs such as the AV Skins, Aryan Brotherhood, Hammerskin Nation, European Kindred, etc.



▪ Organizations

- Established national organizations such as the KKK, National Socialist Movement, and Identity Evropa



▪ Cells

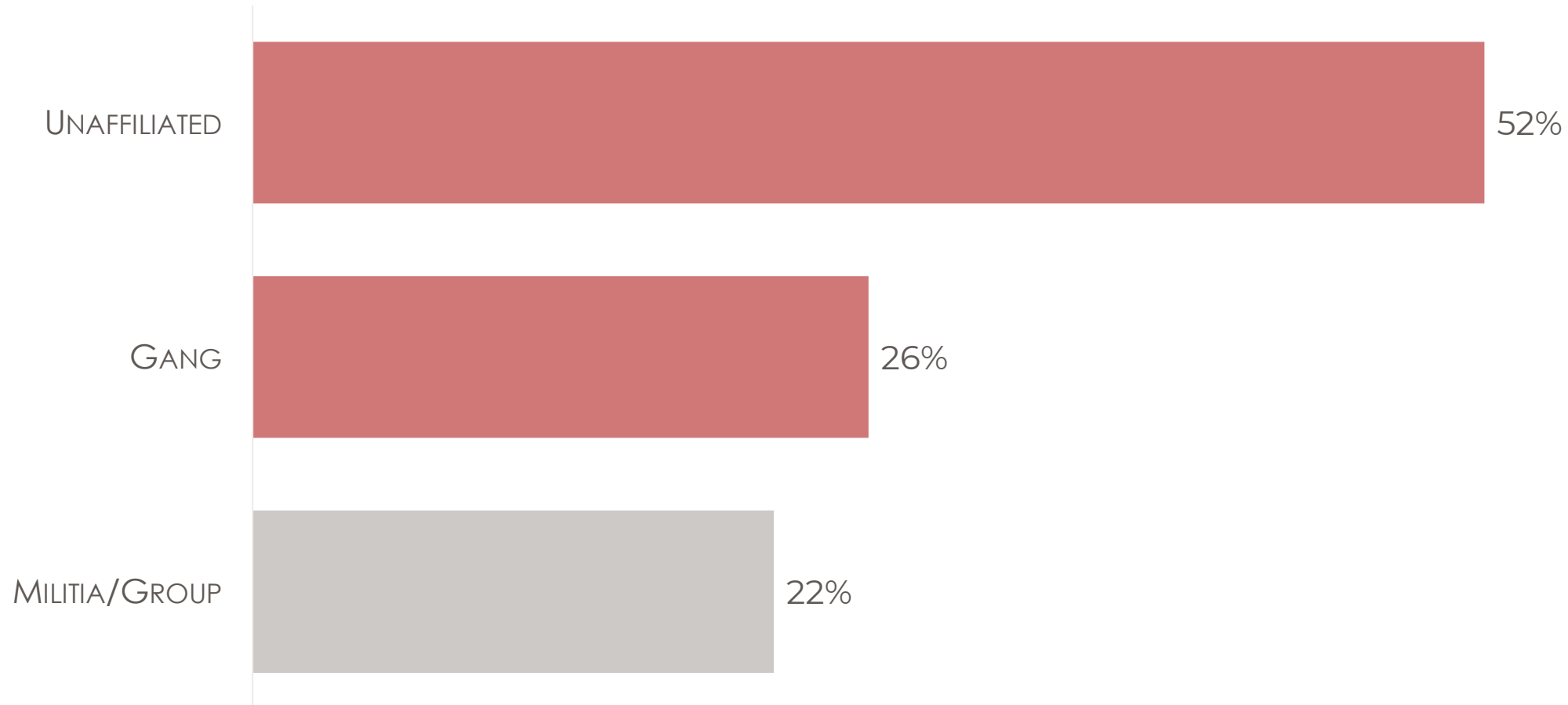
- Small groups such as Atomwaffen, the Base, or Vorherrschaft Division



REMVE GROUP AFFILIATION

Most are unaffiliated or connected to a local or prison gang

Right-wing Extremist Arrests, 2015-2020



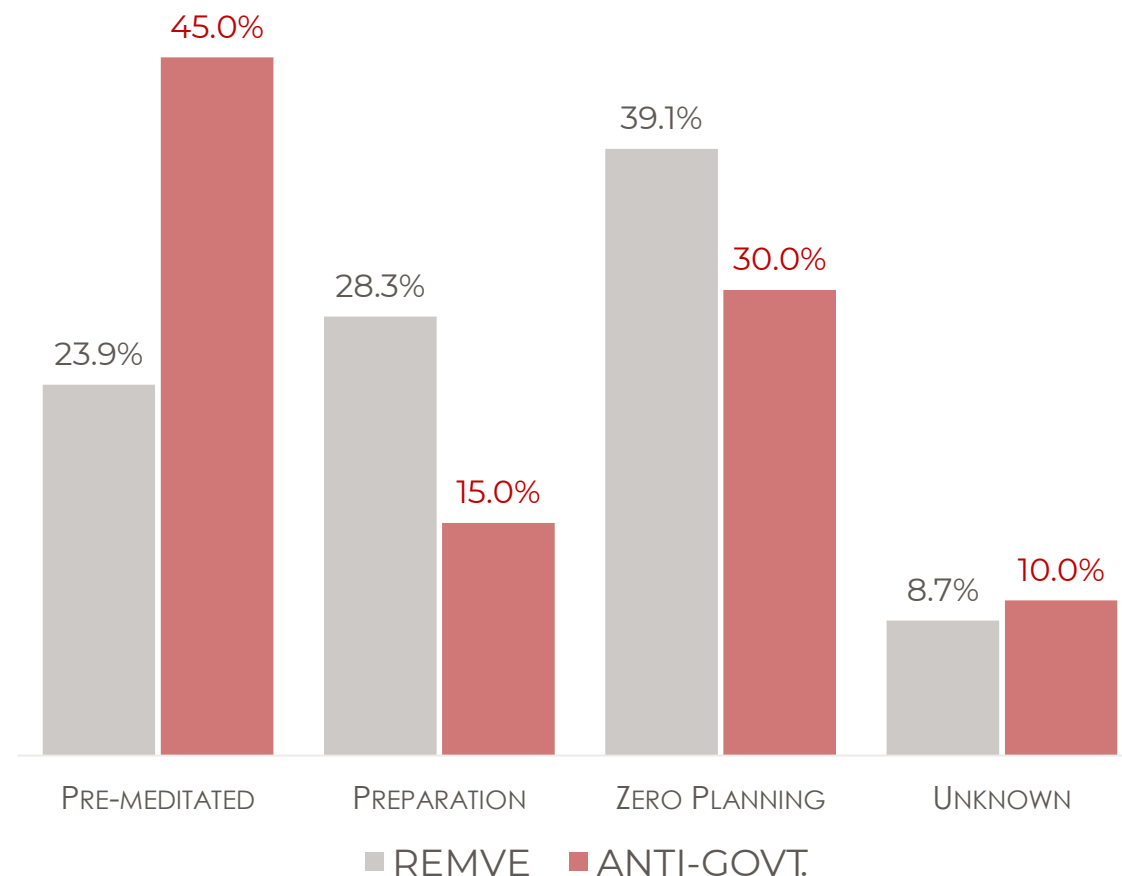
ATTACK PLANNING

AG attacks much more planned than REMVE attackers

46 REMVE and 20 AG attackers

- **Pre-meditated = bringing a weapon and having a clear plan**
 - Anti-government has much higher percentage of planning
- **But sizable percentage of spontaneous attacks for both (39% for REMVE and 30% for anti-government)**
- **Surprising finding: REMVE more prepared (no plan but carrying weapon) than anti-government**
 - Surprising given the heavily armed nature of anti-government individuals

Attack Planning



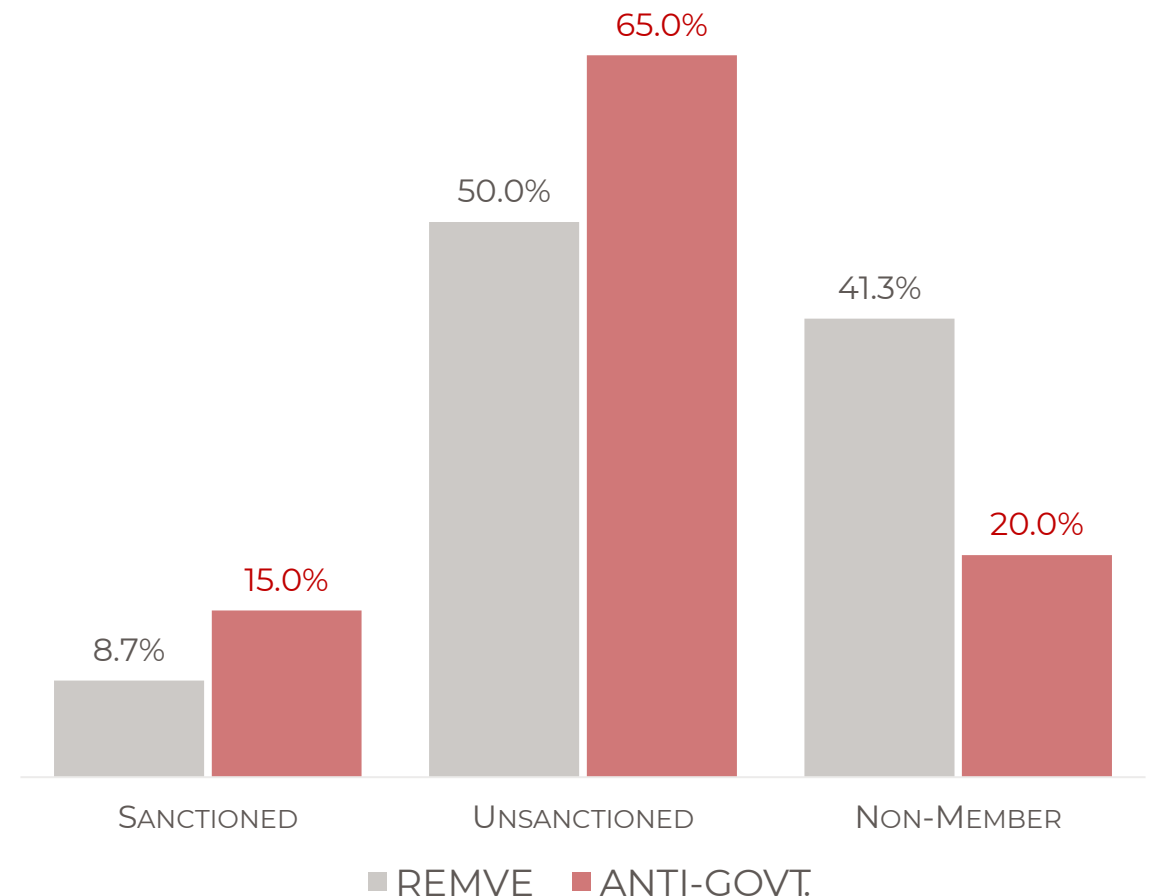
GROUP APPROVAL OF ATTACKS

Both are largely unsanctioned, but REMVE more likely to be carried out by a non-group member

46 REMVE and 20 Anti-Government attackers

- **Attacks are largely not approved by groups**
 - Even when carried out by several group members, such as a gang-up attack
 - Fits with our spring 2020 propaganda finding that NSM and other orgs eschew violent language to avoid legal action
- **40% of REMVE attacks carried out by non-members**

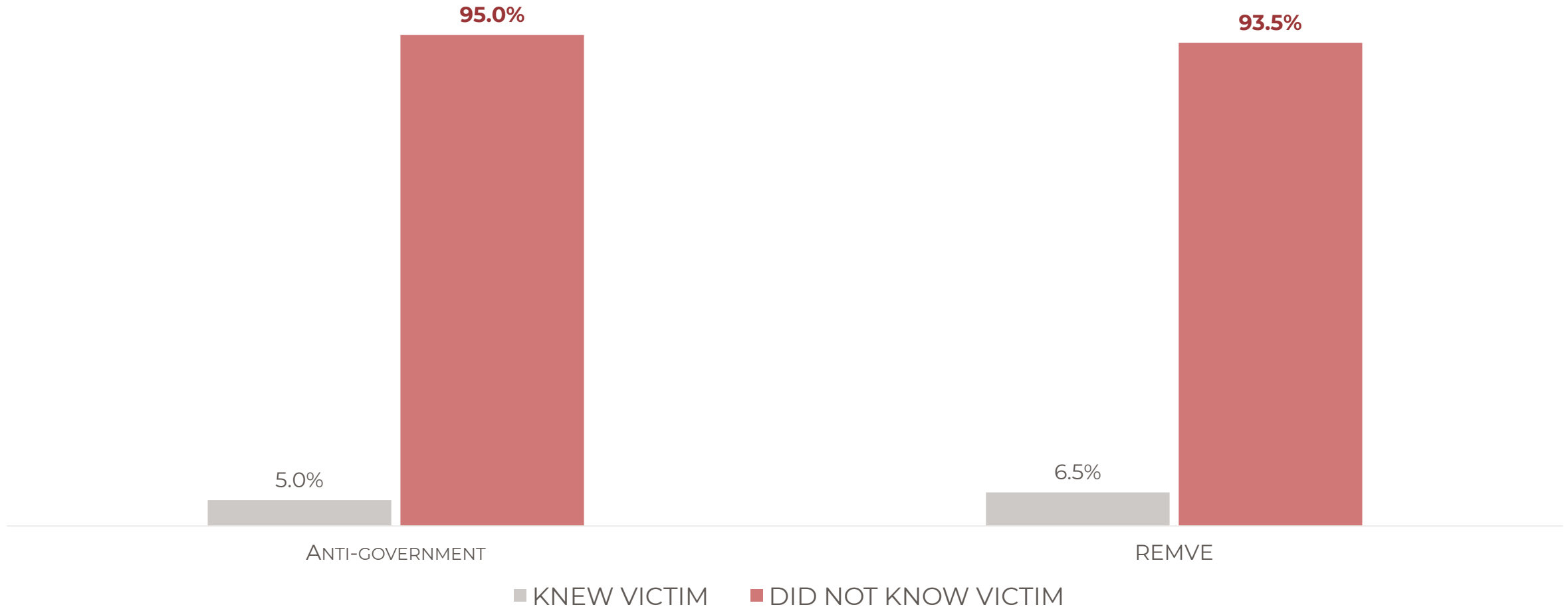
Group Connection to Attack



KNEW VICTIM BEFOREHAND

Both very low. Personal motivation comes from interpersonal disputes with new individuals

Knew Victim Before Attack

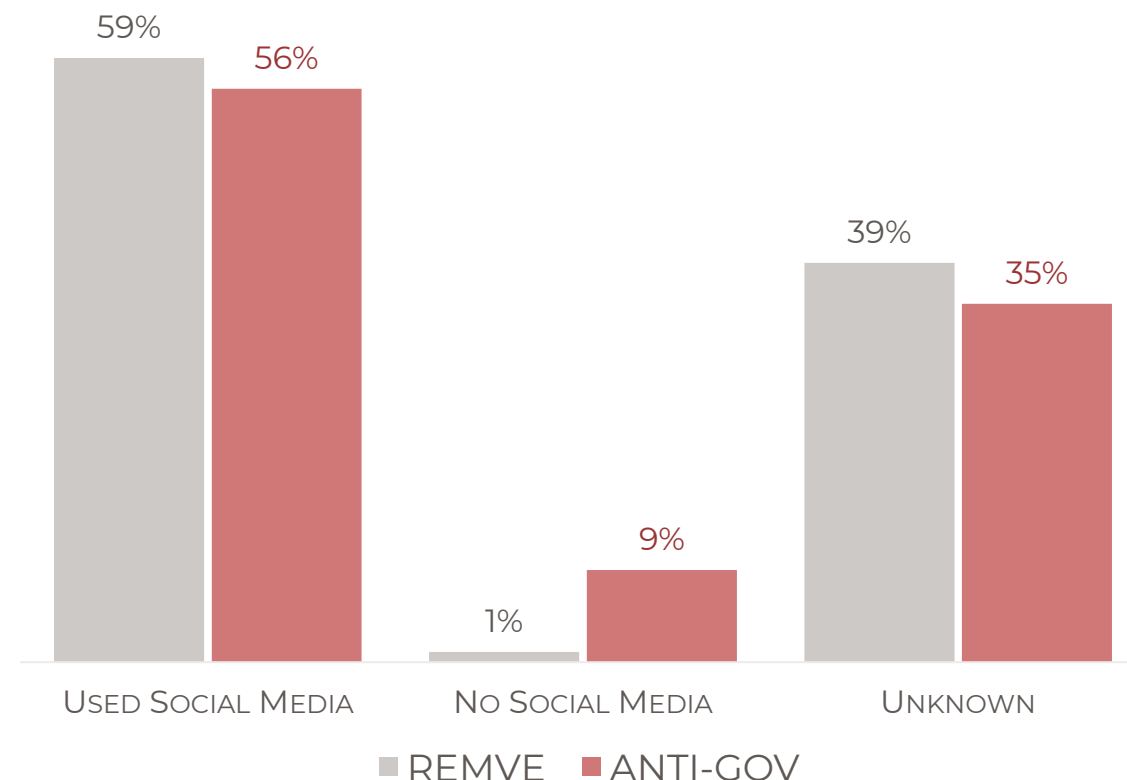


RWEX SOCIAL MEDIA AND PROPAGANDA OVERALL

58% of cases had known social media involvement

- Similar level of social media use by both groups (55-60%)
- Higher percentage of REMVE cases involved watching videos than anti-government cases (21% vs. 6%)
- 9 cases of perpetrators writing manifestos with some available online (REMVE 6, AG 3)
- Facebook, Discord, YouTube, and iFunny were frequently mentioned social media platforms
- **Wide variety in the manner of social media engagement:**
 - Jacob Kaderli stole and slaughtered a ram in a Norse-pagan ritual to produce a propaganda photo for The Base’s social media account.
 - The White Rabbits (a three person “militia”) maintained a YouTube channel where they promoted their militia, shared stories of government corruption, and glorified secessionists and defenders of slavery like Jefferson Davis and John Calhoun.

REMVE vs Anti-Govt. Social Media Cases



SOCIAL MEDIA AND PROPAGANDA FOR ANTI-GOVT CASES

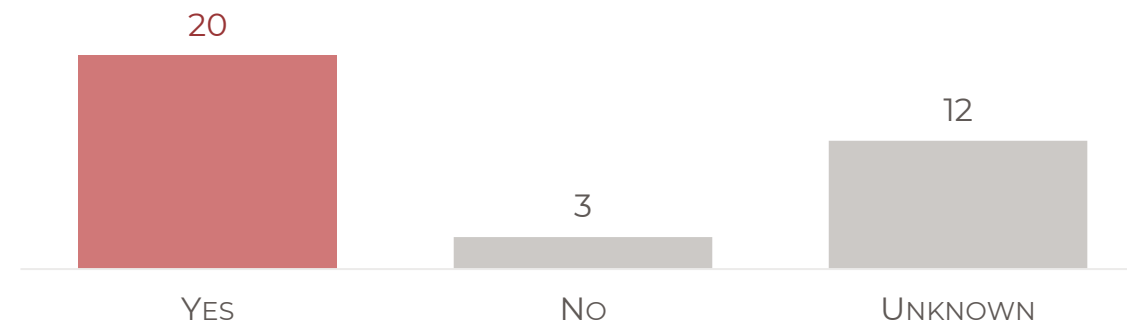
57% were involved in social media

- **Role of Social Media in Cases:**
 - Publicly sharing anti-government messages and misinformation about government conspiracies on Facebook
 - Coordinating in-person meetings

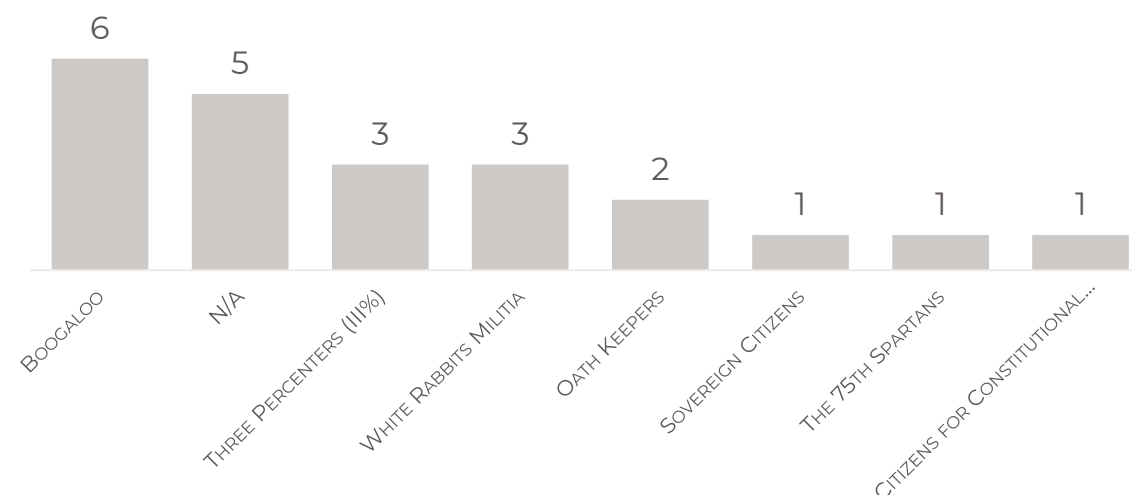
- **Only 6% are known to have watched propaganda videos, compared to 70% for ISIS**

- **The two largest populations engaging with social media are Boogaloo members (15% of the social media cases) and unaffiliated perpetrators (15% of the social media cases)**

Social Media in Cases



Cases with Social Media by Group Affiliation



SOCIAL MEDIA AND PROPAGANDA REMVE

55% were involved in REMVE social media online

- **Role of Social Media in Cases:**

- Following or posting on racist Facebook groups and Telegram channels
- Meeting others online: Lance Scarcella and Julio Suarez, and Atomwaffen

- **Only 17% known to have watched propaganda videos, compared to 70% for ISIS**

- **REMVE propaganda tends to be memes and manifestos rather than attacker-produced videos**

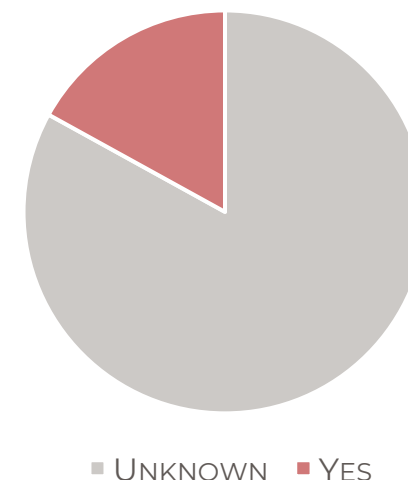
- **Of the 74 attackers, 6 created manifestos, 1 posted a video of themselves, and 2 attempted to livestream**

- **24% of cases with social media use involved perpetrators without group affiliations (the next largest grouping of social media use was 7% by The Base affiliates)**

Social Media in Cases



Watched Videos



ANTI-GOVERNMENT VIDEOS AND MANIFESTOS

Manifestos and videos are most associated with plots and attacks without casualties

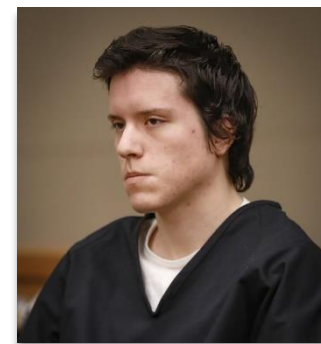


Unlike the REMVE cases, no anti-government cases used livestreaming

	Michael Hari	Paul Rosenfeld	Joshua Blessed
Attack date	August 4, 2017	Planned: Nov 6, 2018	May 7, 2020
Casualties	0 killed, 0 injured	0 killed, 0 injured	0 killed, 0 injured
Social Media	Yes (YouTube)	Yes (Blog)	Yes (YouTube, website)
Manifesto	Yes	Yes, not violent	Yes
Livestream	No	No	No
Group	White Rabbits Militia (self-started)	Sortition theory	None

REMOVE VIDEOS AND MANIFESTOS

Manifestos and videos associated with most violent attackers, all unaffiliated with any group



Dylann Roof

Allen Scarcella

John Earnest

Patrick Crusius

Attack date

June 17, 2015

November 23, 2015

April 27, 2019

August 3, 2019

Casualties

9 killed

0 killed, 5 injured

1 killed, 3 injured

23 killed

REMOVE Social Media

Yes (CCC, sites)

Yes (4Chan)

Yes (8Chan)

Yes (8Chan)

Manifesto

Yes

No

Yes

Yes

Livestream

No

Yes

Attempted

No

Group

None

None

None

None

Primary Inspiration

George Zimmerman

None

Brenton Tarrant

Brenton Tarrant

OVERLAPPING IDEOLOGIES CASES

RWEX Meets Jihadism



Devon Arthurs

- Met roommates online and started Atomwaffen Cell
- Then converted to Islam and supported ISIS
- Arthurs thought far-right groups were “soft because groups like ISIS actually do murder homosexuals”
- May 2017: killed two roommates for mocking his conversion to Islam



Nicholas Young

- DC Metro police officer who converted to Islam in 2006
- Attempted to recruit an undercover FBI officer for ISIS
- Gave financial support to ISIS
- Owned dozens of Nazi artifacts



Roberto Innis & Alphonso Mobley

- Sovereign citizens who attempted to create a “mother of Satan” bomb used in ISIS attacks in Paris and Brussels
- Planned to leave white supremacist symbols at the crime scene to lead police to search for white perpetrators
- Arrested when the bomb went off prematurely, injuring Mobley

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **Propaganda:** Overall, videos play little role in RWEX mobilization (17%)
- **Social Media:** ~60% REMVE and AG perpetrators engaged on social media to follow movement actors and groups, share memes, and coordinate in-person meetings.
 - AG manifestos linked to no casualty incidents; opposite for REMVE
- **Movement Actors:** AG perpetrators less likely to be members of groups than REMVE mostly due to REMVE gang membership
- **Preparation:** AG perpetrators more pre-meditated/planned than REMVE
- **Organization of violence:** is highly heterogenous: spontaneous attacks are largely carried out by gang members while lone actors and cell members tend to plan
- **Group support:** even for group members, group sanction is rare and limited to actions by formal group members

RESEARCH SUPPORT

The following researchers assisted in this report

- Emerson Ahn
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- Chloe Duval
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