

Program on Extremism

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



Extremism in Texas:

History and Current Trends

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JIHADISM

Jihadism is an ideology that promotes violence to establish a society that follows an extremist interpretation of Islamic law (Sharia). Jihadist groups interpret "jihad," or "struggle," as a "holy war" against what they view as the enemies of their interpretation of Islam. In recent years, domestic jihadist mobilization has largely been inspired by underlying ideologies of groups like Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (ISIS), despite actors themselves becoming increasingly independent. Defined as Homegrown Violent Extremists (HVEs) by the FBI, these actors are frequently radicalized online without direct support or operational instruction from known terrorists associated with Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs), which creates a significant challenge for law enforcement.

Jihadism in Texas

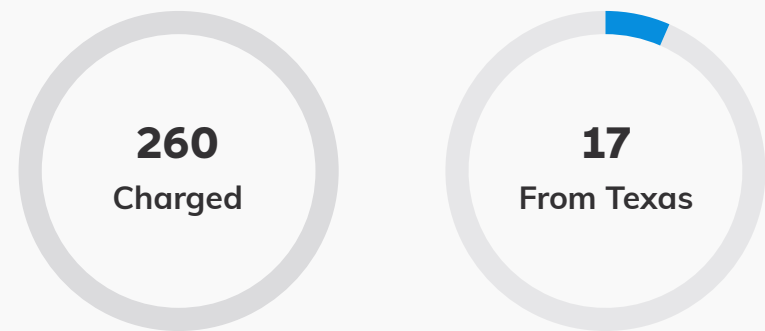
In recent years, law enforcement in Texas has disrupted several prominent HVE plots by individuals inspired by ISIS. Texas has also witnessed two notable jihadist attacks, by Nidal Malik Hasan at the Fort Hood military base in Killeen in 2009, and by Elton Simpson and Nadir Soofi at the “Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest” in Garland in 2015. In line with nationwide trends in jihadist mobilization, many homegrown violent extremists who have been arrested in Texas have sought to support foreign terrorist groups like ISIS or Al-Qaeda – either in the form of a domestic plot or by attempting to travel to join the group overseas.

Case Studies

Attacks:

November 5, 2009 – Nidal Malik Hasan, a 39-year-old Army Major and psychiatrist, killed 13 soldiers and wounded 31 others at Fort Hood military base in Killeen. Hasan’s attack remains a pertinent case study in lone-actor homegrown violent extremist radicalization and mobilization. Following his mother’s death, Hasan experienced religious radicalization,

Since 2014, 260 individuals have been charged in the US with crimes related to their support for ISIS, of which 17 individuals are from Texas.



94.1 % are male
16/17



47.0 % attempted to or successfully traveled to join ISIS overseas.
8/17



which led him to research increasingly radical Islamic scholars.^[1] While at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center for his residency, Hasan made public remarks legitimizing suicide bombers and asserting the superiority of Islamic law over the US Constitution. During this time, he began obsessively listening to taped sermons by Al-Qaeda ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki, and sent over a dozen emails to al-Awlaki through the messaging feature on his website. While al-Awlaki responded twice to Hasan's emails, there was no evidence of any explicit directive or instruction to commit violence. Indeed, Hasan's mobilization was seemingly triggered by the announcement of his upcoming deployment to Afghanistan, which aligns with broader trends in HVE mobilization.

May 3, 2015 – Elton Simpson and Nadir Soofi

attempted to conduct an attack at the Curtis Culwell Center in Garland, which was hosting a "Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest." Both Simpson and Soofi were killed by law enforcement. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, and the subsequent investigation discovered that Simpson was in contact with at least two "virtual entrepreneurs" associated with ISIS prior to the attack.^[2] Shortly before the attack, Simpson

used Twitter to urge users to follow an account associated with ISIS operative Junaid Hussain. While no definitive evidence exists that Hussain directed the attack on behalf of ISIS, it is clear that he played a role in Simpson's mobilization to violence.

Foiled Attacks

Homegrown Violent Extremism – May, 2018 – Matin Azizi-Yarand, a 17-year-old high school student living in Plano, began communicating online with FBI undercover employees, he believed to be fellow ISIS supporters, about his intentions to either "make hijrah" (travel to join ISIS) or conduct a terrorist attack in the US. Azizi-Yarand frequently referenced ISIS during their conversations and attempted to persuade individuals to commit a crime with him during Ramadan 2018. He ultimately decided to carry out the attack at the Stonebriar Centre mall in Frisco, Texas, sending over \$1,400 to one of the undercover FBI employees to purchase weapons and tactical gear for the operation. Azizi-Yarand was arrested in May 2018 and later pleaded guilty. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison for solicitation of capital murder and making terroristic threats.

Material Support Case Studies

Said Azzam Mohamad Rahim: A 42-year-old US citizen living in Dallas, Rahim moderated the “State of the Islamic State” channel on the direct messaging application Zello. Through this channel, which had more than 10,000 subscribers, Rahim disseminated ISIS propaganda, recruited others to join the group, and celebrated acts of violence claimed by ISIS. After the 2016 Orlando Pulse Nightclub shooting, Rahim posted on the channel that “We rejoice for this attack which took place in America... Now starts the outreach activity at all mosques, especially in America, to publicize this operation.” Rahim was arrested at the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport, where he was attempting to board a flight to Amman, Jordan. When interviewed by law enforcement following his arrest, Rahim denied supporting ISIS or advocating travel for the purposes of jihad, for which he was charged with making false statements involving international terrorism. Rahim was sentenced to 30 years in federal prison after being convicted of making false statements and attempting to provide material support to ISIS.

Omer Kuzu: A 23-year-old US citizen, born in Dallas, was captured in Syria by Syrian Democratic Forces in March 2019 and repatriated to the US to face federal charges. Kuzu admitted that he and his brother traveled from Houston to Turkey in 2014 to join ISIS. He stated they were smuggled into Syria before traveling to Mosul, Iraq, to receive weapons training from ISIS instructors. According to court records, Kuzu returned to Syria and was tasked with repairing communications equipment for frontline ISIS fighters. Kuzu pleaded guilty and was sentenced in September 2024 to 84 months in federal prison. This case highlights the enduring threat of young Americans being radicalized in the US and traveling abroad to join jihadist groups like ISIS.

Symbols



ISIS flag



Al-Qaeda flag

Trends

- **Threat Evolution of HVEs:** Large-scale plots orchestrated by FTOs, such as ISIS, have diminished due to successful counterterrorism efforts. However, despite the loss of the territorial caliphate, ISIS and other jihadist groups continue to make inroads with domestic jihadists. Recent arrests demonstrate the enduring appeal of jihadist ideology. Continued lone-actor plots and material support prosecutions highlight the increasingly online nature of domestic radicalization by jihadists, with many of these cases involving no in-person communication with or direct instruction from formal members of jihadist groups.
- **Lone Actor HVEs:** Lone actor HVEs operate independently, inspired by FTO propaganda but without direct organizational ties. This trend, which is exemplified in cases such as that of Matin Azizi-Yarand, remains one of the most challenging vectors for law enforcement disruption. These actors often target vulnerable locations, using easily accessible weapons such as firearms, knives, or vehicles. Their rapid mobilization and reliance on encrypted communication – or, in some cases, absence of any meaningful communication that may trigger a tripwire - make detection and prevention challenging.
- **Varied HVE Travel Mobilization:** While cases like Omer Kuzu's show the unique appeal that characterized the pinnacle of the ISIS caliphate, the desire for domestic jihadists to travel overseas and join ISIS or Al-Qaeda affiliates remains a trend to monitor. The growth of these affiliates in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and Afghanistan represent a new vector for such mobilization, and with it comes potential avenues for radicalizing narratives and grievances that may influence domestic jihadists.

ISLAMISM

Islamism is a political ideology based on the principle that all aspects of life, society, and government should be ruled by a particularly strict interpretation of Islamic law. Islamists are typically anti-West, anti-democracy and antisemitic. Unlike jihadist groups, Islamists utilize not just violence but a combination of tactics, including participation in the political process, to achieve their goals.

Prominent Islamist Groups

Muslim Brotherhood (MB)

Founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood is a longstanding and influential Islamist organization. With the motto, "Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. Qur'an is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope," the Brotherhood uses a combination of social service, proselytism, and at times, violent tactics to achieve its goals. Over decades, it has established branches throughout the Middle East, becoming a powerful influence in the region.

Hamas as a Branch of the Muslim Brotherhood

Hamas, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), was founded in 1987 in response to the First Intifada. Also known as the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas was created to intensify resistance against Israel through both military and ideological efforts. MB's branches worldwide, including in the US, were directed to support Hamas, building a network that advances its goals through fundraising, influence operations, and

strategic outreach in multiple countries. While the MB is not a banned organization, Hamas has been designated as a Specially Designated Terrorist (STO) organization by the US government since 1995 and a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) since 1997.

Both the MB and Hamas aim to spread their ideology through grassroots efforts, using preachings and teachings (dawa) to win the hearts and minds of the population. The MB believes that violent jihad is acceptable to overthrow non-Islamist governments once it has garnered popular support.

Iran

A Shia majority country, Iran follows its own distinct form of Islamism. It supports a network of proxies throughout the Middle East which calls itself the Axis of Resistance. Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and a constellation of militia in Iraq and Syria belong to this network.

Iran also supports front organizations in the US. These groups advance Iran's ideological agenda, often promoting anti-Israel and anti-American views. Iran exerts influence by fostering protests on college campuses that echo its revolutionary slogans.

In July 2024, the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) highlighted Iran's growing aggressiveness in foreign influence efforts, including adapting cyber tactics and exploiting social media to undermine democratic institutions. The DNI noted, "In recent weeks, Iranian government actors have sought to opportunistically take advantage of ongoing protests regarding the war in Gaza... posing as activists online, seeking to encourage protests, and even providing financial support to protesters."^[3]

Case Studies

United States v. Holy Land Foundation, et al. (HLF) is to date the Department of Justice's largest successful terrorism financing prosecution as it involved the conviction of the HLF and five of its officers for their support of Hamas. The Richardson, TX-based HLF operated from early 1988, funding Hamas entities in

Gaza and the West Bank, until it was designated as a Specially Designated Terrorist in 2001. The HLF and seven officers were charged with provision of material support to Hamas in 2004. At the trial in 2008, the government produced evidence of the conspiracy dating back to December 1987, when Hamas was created. With the blessings and encouragement from the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and its leadership established a US based infrastructure to support the group with media, money and manpower. HLF served as the fundraising arm of that infrastructure. The HLF and five of the officers were ultimately convicted in 2008, while the two remaining defendants are international fugitives.

United States v. Infocom, et al. involved Infocom, a computer company and internet service provider in Richardson, TX, founded and operated by Ghassan Elashi and his brothers across the street from the HLF where Ghassan was also an officer. In 2002, Infocom and the Elashi brothers were charged with various IEEPA (International Emergency Economic Powers Act) violations, relating to their dealings with Mousa Abu Marzook, a Specially Designated Terrorist and leader of the Hamas Political Bureau, as well as export

violations involving shipments of prohibited items to state sponsors of terrorism. Trials were held separately on the export violations and the IEEPA violations, with the defendants convicted on all charges. Ghassan Elashi was also later charged and convicted of providing material support to Hamas based on his involvement with the HLF.

Campus Protest Groups

Since October 7, 2023, US campuses have seen an intense wave of pro-Palestinian protests. Many of the protests included rhetoric that celebrated the October 7 attacks. While many of these student groups are not defined as Islamist groups per se but rather embrace variations of Marxist or ultra-leftist politics, some have strong connections to Islamist actors and/or utilize broader Islamist themes.

In Texas, several student organizations on university campuses are recognized for their pro-Palestinian activism which often transcends into support for Hamas, anti-American views, antisemitism, and glorification of violence. Some of the most active groups in Texas are notably:

Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP): Active on multiple Texas campuses, including the University of Texas at Dallas and the University of Houston, SJP focuses on pro-Palestinian activism. While primarily advocating for Palestinian rights, the group has been associated with broader Islamist perspectives, particularly in its opposition to Israeli policies and its alignment with anti-Zionist narratives. In May 2024, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) filed a lawsuit on behalf of several SJP chapters in Texas, challenging Governor Greg Abbott's executive order on campus free speech, which they argued targeted pro-Palestinian groups.^[4]

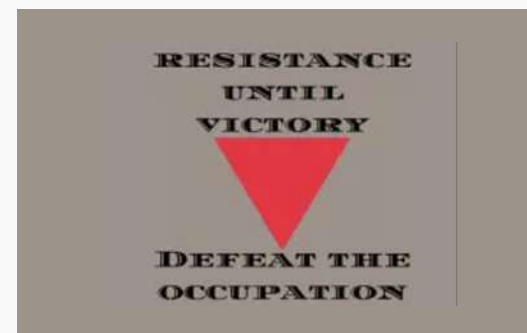
Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC): Present at institutions like the University of Texas at Austin, PSC engages in activism supporting Palestinian causes. The group's activities often intersect with broader Islamist themes, including advocacy against perceived Western injustices in the Middle East. In April 2024, PSC organized a protest at UT Austin, leading to arrests and subsequent legal actions concerning free speech rights on campus.^[5]

Rise Against Oppression (RAO): A Texas-based student group, registered as a 501(c)(3) organization, presents itself as a grassroots Muslim activist collective while downplaying its ties to the Iranian government. RAO has a history of organizing anti-Israel protests and collaborating with other student organizations, such as the SJP. RAO has also been noted for its praise of the Iranian regime. In June 2024, the group hosted a conference called the Imam Khomeini Conference, featuring topics such as the “Palestinian Struggle.”

Symbols

The inverted red triangle symbol is a pro-Hamas symbol that has become widely used in pro-Palestinian protests. This symbol first appeared in Hamas videos of the current fighting in Gaza where it was used to mark an Israeli target about to be attacked by Hamas. Protestors began to depict the symbol at anti-Israel rallies after October 7, 2023, using a two-handed sign, in which the index and middle fingers of one hand form an upside-down “V,” and another finger of the other hand forms the top part of the triangle. Although it can be used

innocuously in pro-Palestine posts on social media, the inverted red triangle is now used to represent Hamas itself in many popular anti-Zionist memes and political cartoons, further glorifying its use of violence. For example, individuals will place the triangle over an image of Israeli soldiers or on a Star of David as an effort to call for further violent resistance.



Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) Flag
a designated foreign terrorist group



Hizballah Flag— a designated foreign terrorist group



Hamas Flag— a designated foreign terrorist group



Houthi Logo— a designated foreign terrorist group

Hamis supporters' common slogans

- Resistance is justified when people are occupied
- Globalize the intifada!
- We don't want two states! We want '48!
- There is only one solution. Intifada Revolution!
- From the river to the sea! Palestine will be free!
- End the occupation
- Hey hey, ho ho, Zionism/colonialism/imperialism has got to go!

Definition of slogans

- **Resistance**—aka “armed struggle” includes suicide bombings, car rammings, stabbings and other attacks perpetrated by Palestinian terrorists
- **Intifada**—shaking off; refers to the use of violence to “shake off” or eliminate Israeli security or political control
- **From the river to the sea**—from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, covering the entire land of Israel
- **Occupied**—the land of Israel that Palestinians claim is theirs by right

- **Colonialism/imperialism**—Israeli habitation anywhere within the Jewish ancestral homeland, which Palestinians consider to be theirs
- **1948**—we want “48” refers to the time before the State of Israel was established in May 1948. The slogan envisions a Middle East with no State of Israel whatsoever.

Trends

The current trends regarding Islamism and support for Hamas show a deliberate, long-term influence campaign that successfully penetrated various sectors in the West, including academia, politics, and public opinion. Key points include:

1. **Strategic Messaging:** Hamas and its affiliates use carefully tailored messaging to appeal to different audiences. They frame the conflict in religious terms within Muslim communities while using the language of social justice and postcolonial theory for Western progressive audiences. This approach resonates particularly with youth on college campuses and within activist circles.
2. **Establishment of Front Organizations:** Hamas operatives and supporters have created numerous organizations over the past few decades to advance their agendas without overtly displaying ties to terrorism. These groups, often presented as academic or cultural entities, help in normalizing anti-Israel narratives and legitimizing support for Hamas as part of larger social movements.
3. **Political and Academic Support:** Politicians and academic institutions have, either knowingly or unknowingly, provided platforms that amplify Hamas-aligned narratives.
4. **Funding Networks:** Hamas has established funding channels through charities and nonprofits, some of which have been prosecuted for funneling money to the organization. This support network has been instrumental in sustaining Hamas's operations and influence activities in the West.
5. **Media Savvy:** Western-based activists connected to Hamas have learned to navigate media and political narratives in the West, linking Hamas's cause with broader social justice issues. This is illustrated by comparisons like equating Israel's

actions with racism and genocide which aligns Hamas's messaging with popular Western concerns about systemic discrimination.

Overall, the trends indicate a sophisticated, multifaceted influence operation by Hamas and other Islamist groups to cultivate sympathy and support within Western societies, especially among younger, progressive audiences. This campaign has leveraged academic and political systems to normalize pro-Hamas sentiment and increase pressure against Israel while disguising overt ties to extremist objectives.

DOMESTIC EXTREMISM

Domestic violent extremists are US-based actors who operate without direction or inspiration from foreign organizations or ideologies, instead conducting or threatening actions in the name of purely domestic ideologies. Domestic violent extremists include racially motivated (e.g., white racially motivated, black racially motivated, etc.), anti-government (e.g., militia, sovereign citizen, and anarchist), and single issue (i.e., animal rights, environmental, abortion, and involuntary celibate [Incel]) actors. According to the FBI, racially motivated and anti-government militia violent extremists represent the deadliest elements of the domestic terrorism threat.^[6] In particular, lone actors and small cells of actors motivated by these ideologies represent a particularly challenging threat due to the decentralized and online nature of many modern extremist networks. In recent years, domestic actors have increasingly been motivated by a blend of seemingly contradictory ideologies or narratives, with antisemitism and misogyny typically serving as the 'glue' connecting these disparate concepts.^[7] Finally, the mobilizing concept of perceived government abuse or overreach continues to inspire numerous domestic violent extremist movements. This includes the Boogaloo movement and non-affiliated anarchist violent extremists, individuals self-identifying as 'Antifa,' and other anti-authority violent extremists

Texas-specific dynamics:

Texas has experienced a significant amount of domestic violent extremist activity in recent years, including several deadly mass shootings motivated by domestic violent extremist ideologies. In addition to the attacks in El Paso (2019) and Allen (2023), racially motivated and anti-government militia violent extremists have continued to mobilize across the state. Additionally, white supremacist propaganda distribution has spiked in recent years, driven largely by the prevalence of local white supremacist groups like Patriot Front. Anti-immigrant rhetoric has also inspired a range of domestic extremists to travel to Texas, with several instances of thwarted mass violence plots emanating from these networks. Furthermore, extremist groups associated with the Black Hebrew Israelite movement reportedly continue to maintain an active presence in Texas, including Israel United in Christ, the Pennsylvania-based Israelite School of Universal Practical Knowledge, and the California-based Sicarii Hebrew Israelites. Finally, it is likely that anti-authority violent extremists, anarchist violent extremists, and other single-issue actors will continue to mobilize in Texas, including as counter protesters at LGBTQ+ events or in response to perceived federal government overreach or abuses.

According to the ADL Center on Extremism data, Texas had 855 incidents of white supremacist propaganda between 2021 and 2022, the highest total number in the United States.^[8]



Atomwaffen cases from Texas



Benjamin Joost Bogard;
Aiden Bruce-Umbaugh;
John Cameron Denton;
Beau Daniel Merryman

Base cases from Texas



Philip Russell Archibald;
Daniel Austin Dunn;
Ivan Harrison Hunter;
Cameron Emerson Casey Rankin;
Aaron Caleb Swenson

Mass casualty DVE incidents in Texas



El Paso shooting, Allen mall shooting, 2019 Earle Cabell Federal Building attack (incl)

Case Studies

Great Replacement/Saints Culture case study - 2019

El Paso shooting: On August 3, 2019, Patrick Crusius, a 21-year-old from Allen, Texas, entered a Walmart Supercenter in El Paso and opened fire on shoppers, killing 23 and injuring 22. Crusius, who pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 90 consecutive life sentences in prison, was inspired by white supremacist and antisemitic narratives, namely the Great Replacement conspiracy theory. Crusius promoted the Great Replacement in his manifesto, which he posted on the message board 8chan shortly before the shooting. Additionally, he credited the white supremacist responsible for the Christchurch Mosque shootings in New Zealand in 2019, Brenton Tarrant, who was already becoming 'sainted' by far-right online subcultures.^[9] These neo-Nazi communities, which glorify far-right mass shooters like Crusius and Tarrant, continue to attempt to incubate and incite the next copycat attacker. This lineage of violence is observed through attacks in Poway, California, and Buffalo, New York, with timely law enforcement disruption preventing numerous lone-actor plots with similar ideological drivers.



Salad bar attack case study - 2023 Allen mall

shooting: On May 6, 2023, 33-year-old Mauricio Garcia, murdered eight people and injured seven more in a mass shooting at the Allen Premium Outlets mall in Allen, Texas. Garcia affixed several patches and symbols to his body armor that signaled his embrace of white supremacist ideologies, in combination with his social media posts frequently referencing involuntary celibate (incel) narratives. However, Garcia did not livestream his attack or produce a manifesto in the style of other 'Saints Culture' mass shooters like Patrick Crusius. Instead, Garcia's digital footprint displays seemingly conflicting and often contradictory viewpoints, which nonetheless collectively trigger the mobilization to violence.

Accelerationist case study – Korb Walmart 2021

Plot: In May 2021, Kerr County Sheriff's Office arrested Coleman Thomas Blevins after they saw a message "indicating that Blevins was preparing to proceed with a mass shooting" specifically threatening a local Walmart. Blevins, a neo-Nazi who was the leader of a small neo-Nazi community active on Telegram, owned several flags connected to extremist ideology or movements, including a Falange flag (connected to the

Spanish far-right), a flag bearing a sonnenrad, the Confederate flag, a Calvary variant of Russian Orthodox, and others. Also contained within Blevins' property was a Saudi flag and a Qur'an. This ideological incoherence is seemingly the product of accelerationism, an ideologically agnostic doctrine that supports the use of violence to collapse the system. Militant accelerationism has primarily, but not exclusively, embraced by the far-right in recent years, becoming the doctrinal core for neo-Nazi cells like Atomwaffen Division and The Base, and the 'Terrorgram' network.



Antisemitic mobilization case study – GDL ‘Tour’: In addition to organized white supremacist activity by Patriot Front and similar groups, antisemitic provocateurs associated with the Goyim Defense League (GDL) have engaged in acts of harassment and hate in Texas. This includes an October 2021 ‘tour’ that appeared in Austin, Houston, San Antonio,

Selma, Tyler, and Universal City. During this tour, the group harassed individuals on the streets and highways, protested outside Jewish institutions, distributed antisemitic propaganda while posing as Jews, and drove around in a van shouting profanity-laced slurs from the windows.



Minadeo with other GDL participants who posed as Jews while distributing propaganda in Canyon, Texas in 2021



Patriot Front logo, with fasces in the center surrounded by thirteen stars. A Texas-based white supremacist group led by Thomas Ryan Rousseau, Patriot Front attempts to brand themselves as “American nationalists,” embracing patriotic aesthetics and symbols while continuing to use white supremacist and antisemitic rhetoric in their messaging.



Aryan Freedom Network logo, with a Nazi Totenkopf or “death’s head,” as well as the Christian Identity reference to “Yahweh’s Elite.”



Goyim Defense League logo. Goyim Defense League (GDL) is a network of neo-Nazis and antisemitic provocateurs led by Jon Minadeo II, who primarily engage in street actions and propaganda stunts targeting Jews.

Trends

- **High frequency of Patriot Front mobilization, largely through public demonstrations and propaganda distribution.** Patriot Front has frequently engaged in public propaganda efforts across the United States and Texas, including banner drops, distributing antisemitic fliers, as well as large marches in cities. On July 8, 2023, an estimated 100 members of Patriot Front held an Independence Day flash demonstration in Austin. Members carried riot shields, a banner reading “Reclaim America,” and upside-down American flags.



Members of the white supremacist group Patriot Front marched in Austin on July 8, 2023 (Telegram)

- **White supremacists continue to use anti-immigrant rhetoric in their propaganda, and violent extremists mobilize offline to the southern border as a result.** On April 6, 2024, approximately a dozen Patriot Front members held a demonstration outside the San Ysidro Port of Entry, one of the largest land border crossings in the United States. During the demonstration, one of the members gave a speech, stating, “We are here today to recognize and draw attention to the invasion of this country and the displacement of its true-born inheritors.” In addition to serving as propaganda material for white supremacist groups, this anti-immigrant rhetoric inspires out-of-state domestic extremists to travel to Texas to engage in acts of domestic terrorism. In November 2024, a jury convicted two militia members who planned to travel to Texas to shoot at illegal immigrants crossing the United States–Mexico border. They also planned to murder officers and employees of the US Border Patrol who would attempt to stop them.

- **Local white supremacist groups like Aryan Freedom Network continue to mobilize offline and attempt to foster white unity online.** The Aryan Freedom Network is a white supremacist group that espouses accelerationist and Christian Identity tenants such as the seemingly impending Racial Holy War (RaHoWa). The group participated in multiple anti-LGBTQ protests in Texas in 2022 and has also held annual “White Unity” conferences in an attempt to bring together disparate regional white supremacists and far-right extremists. The group’s antisemitic and white supremacist worldview is displayed in a propaganda video that discusses the imminent need for Whites to “wake up” as “the n*****s are organizing, and the Jews are running it.” The video cuts to chants of “white power” and an image of a burning wooden swastika before concluding with footage of a dozen individuals firing assault weapons at a mannequin painted with a Star of David and a hammer and sickle.



AFN protestors in Grand Prairie, Texas in December 2022 (image courtesy of the Dallas Morning News).



AFN protestors in Katy, Texas in September 2022.

ANTISEMITISM

Texas was the first US state to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's "Working Definition of Antisemitism". 'Antisemitism' means a certain perception of Jews that may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. The term includes rhetorical and physical acts of antisemitism directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals; or their property; or towards Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.^[10] Examples of antisemitism "might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. However, mere criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic. Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for 'why things go wrong.' It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits."^[11]

Statistics of Antisemitic Incidents in Texas

Antisemitic incidents^[12] have increased dramatically in Texas since 2020.^[13] In 2021, the number of anti-Jewish incidents doubled from the previous year, and then doubled again in 2022.^[14] Mirroring the major increase documented nationwide in 2022,^[15] Texas reported the fifth-largest number of antisemitic incidents (212) behind New York, California, New Jersey and Florida. The dramatic increase in these incidents in 2022 in almost all categories - vandalism, harassment and assault - was not attributed to any one particular cause or ideology.^[16] From 2021 through the first half of 2023, a total of 365 incidents were logged in the state.^[17] Vandalism increased by 418%, and “harassment increased by 28% (122 incidents in 2022, compared to 95 in 2021). Two antisemitic assaults occurred in Texas in 2022, up from zero in 2021.”^[18]

In the wake of the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks in Israel, Gov. Abbott asked the commissioners of the Texas Holocaust Genocide and Antisemitism Advisory Commission (THGAAC),^[19] on October 30, 2023, to

develop ways to identify acts of antisemitism and quickly report them to law enforcement. In addition to identifying preemptive measures law enforcement, the state, and local governments can implement against dangerous acts of antisemitism before they occur.^[20]

The THGAAC list of recommendations^[21] includes developing a “single, quick, efficient, and confidential statewide reporting system for antisemitic threats and actions” to ensure that tips from different areas and time periods are combined to provide a more integrated picture to law enforcement, similar to the “iWatchTexas initiative, which is part of the Department of Public Safety Intelligence and Counterterrorism Division.

Case Studies

Some examples of antisemitic incidents occurring in or linked to Texas include:

A Houston man, Anas Said, was arrested and charged in the fall of 2024 with attempting to provide material support to ISIS and planning a terrorist attack on sites that included Jewish and Israeli targets.

Jeremy Joseph from Houston was sentenced to prison in April 2024 for sending a series of antisemitic death threats by email to former work colleagues, and to many other Jewish people. The emails, detailing how the defendant planned to murder them, included photographs of pipe bombs, ammunition, and a firearm. The emails also included personal information about the victims and their families. Two days into the trial, the accused pleaded guilty.

In Colleyville in January 2022, British citizen Malik Faisal Akram held a rabbi and congregants hostage during Sabbath services for 10 hours, demanding the release of Aafia Siddiqui, an Al Qaeda linked operative who had been convicted for the attempted murder of

US nationals in Afghanistan. Akram held conspiratorial antisemitic beliefs about Jews' power in the US. The standoff ended when the rabbi threw a chair at the attacker and broke free. Akram was killed by law enforcement.

In October 2022, a member of a small network of virulently antisemitic individuals known as the Goyim Defense League (GDL) pepper-sprayed an Austin high school student who tried to remove antisemitic material the GDL individual was distributing.

In Austin in October 2021, a synagogue was set on fire in an incident linked to Franklin Barrett Sechriest, causing thousands of dollars in damage to the sanctuary and building. At the court hearing where Sechriest pled guilty to a hate crime and arson charges, he described his hatred for Jews and his efforts to target them. Sechriest was sentenced to ten years in prison. Authorities say Sechriest possessed stickers with white supremacist propaganda and symbols, and journals that included racist and antisemitic writings.

Trends

- Classification of incidents according to ideology is becoming murkier. Prior to October 7, 2023, many researchers claimed the primary underlying ideology involved was that of far-right groups and individuals. Since October 7, however, many more reported incidents are categorized as based on Islamist and far-left ideologies. At the same time, researchers have documented a greater difficulty in classifying various incidents according to a particular ideology due to the increasing overlap among motivations.
- Nationally, there is an increasing widespread belief in anti-Jewish tropes. These views include stereotypes about Jews, such as whether they have too much power in running banks and government, with further examples listed in the IHRA definition described above. Following the recent 2024 election, researchers have documented a dramatic increase in conspiracy theories about Jewish control of the US government.^[22]
- Social media plays an increasingly major role in the spread of antisemitic propaganda and

misinformation, and in the recruitment by various groups. It facilitates the spread of lies and conspiracy theories without any consequence.

NOTES



^[1] Katharine Poppe, Nidal Hasan: A Case Study in Lone-Actor Terrorism, Program on Extremism, October 2018, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/fileszaxdzs5746/files/Nidal%20Hasan.pdf>

^[2] Seamus Hughes and Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, The Treat to the United States from the Islamic State’s Virtual Entrepreneurs, CTC Sentinel, March 2017, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/CTC-Sentinel_Vol10Iss331.pdf .

^[3] Camille Phillips, “Student groups sue Texas governor, universities over executive order on campus free speech,” Texas Public Radio, May 17, 2024, <https://www.tpr.org/education/2024-05-17/student-groups-sue-texas-governor-universities-over-executive-order-on-campus-free-speech>.

^[4] Jahmal Kennedy, “UT suspends Palestine Solidarity Committee; cites alleged violation of institutional rules,” CBS Austin, April 26, 2024, <https://cbsaustin.com/news/local/ut-suspends-palestine-solidarity-committee-cites-alleged-violation-of-institutional-rules>.

^[5] Director of National Intelligence, “Statement from Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines on Recent Iranian Influence Efforts,” Press Release, July 9, 2024, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/press-releases/press-releases-2024/3842-statement-from-director-of-national-intelligence-avril-haines-on-recent-iranian-influence-efforts?highlight=WyjliwiaXMILCJpc2UiLCJpc2UncyIsImZlZXMiLCJpc2UnliwiJ2lziwiYyBpcyJd>.

^[6] “Assessing the Mass Attacks Threat to Texas, Texas Fusion Center”, Intelligence & Counterterrorism Division, Texas Department of Public Safety, January 2020, https://www.dps.texas.gov/director_staff/media_and_communications/2020/txMassAttackAssessment.pdf.

^[7] Ibid.

^[8] Center on Extremism, “Hate in the Lone Star State.”

^[9] Jonathan Lewis, Joshua Molloy, and Graham Macklin, “The Lineage of Violence: Saints Culture and Militant Accelerationist Terrorism,” GNET, April 27, 2023, <https://gnet-research.org/2023/04/27/the-lineage-of-violence-saints-culture-and-militant-accelerationist-terrorism/>.

[10] Title 4, Subtitle D, Chap. 448, Subchapter A, Sec. 448.001(2) <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/docs/GV/htm/GV.448.htm>

[11] The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), "Working Definition of Antisemitism," IHRA, 2016, <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>. The IHRA definition has also been adopted by the U.S. State Department, many other countries, and by the Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission (THGAAC).

[12] See, e.g. US Department of Justice, Texas Hate Crimes Incidents in 2022, Bias Motivation Categories, Religion, 2022, accessed November 17, 2024, https://www.justice.gov/d9/2024-01/texas_hate_crimes_incidents_2022.pdf.

[13] The number of incidents of antisemitism in Texas reported to one monitoring organization were 14 in 2020, 33 in 2021, and 60 in 2022. Texas Holocaust Genocide and Antisemitism Advisory Commission (THGAAC), 2022 Study on Antisemitism in Texas, November 1, 2022, ["Texas 2022"], 2. <https://thgaac.texas.gov/assets/uploads/docs/THGAAC-Study-on-Antisemitism-12-2022.pdf>. The statistics

reported by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) include those from several agencies that gather material, including the Community Security Initiative (CSI), Community Security Service (CSS), Hillel International, Secure Community Network (SCN), Union of Reform Judaism and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. Center on Extremism, ADL Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2022 Executive Summary, ADL, March 23, 2023, accessed October 29, 2024, <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2023-03/ADL-2022-Audit-of-Antisemitic-Incidents-2021.pdf> and <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/audit-antisemitic-incidents-2022>.

[14] In its first-ever study of antisemitism in the state, released in November 2022, the THGAAC noted that antisemitic incidents had grown more frequent and more extreme. Texas 2022, 2. <https://thgaac.texas.gov/assets/uploads/docs/THGAAC-Study-onAntisemitism-12-2022.pdf>. The THGAAC is charged with the task to submit a study on antisemitism every two years in advance of legislative sessions subsequent to its first report. The study will use the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA) definition of antisemitism. Ibid. Page 1.

[15] Center on Extremism, ADL Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2022 Executive Summary .

[16] Ibid.

[17] Center on Extremism, “Hate in the Lone Star State,” 5.

[18] Ibid, 7.

[19] THGAAC is an advisory commission to the Texas Historical Commission, created as of September 1, 2021. <https://thgaac.texas.gov/about> . Its mission is to bring awareness of the Holocaust, genocides, and antisemitism to Texas students, educators, and the general public by ensuring the availability of resources and advising on relevant matters. <https://thgaac.texas.gov/about/our-services>. See also THGAAC, Confronting Antisemitism in Texas: How to Respond, THGAAC, (n.d.), <https://thgaac.texas.gov/assets/uploads/docs/THGAAC.ConfrontingAntisemitism.v3-1.pdf> .

[20] THGAAC. Study on Antisemitism in Texas, THGAAC, December 2023, 2. <https://thgaac.texas.gov/assets/uploads/docs/DecemberMemov6.pdf>.

[21] Ibid.

[22] FCAS Newsletter, “Rise in Antisemitic Conspiracy Theories After Election,” FCAS, November 1-8, 2024, <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Jewish-Voters-Backlash--Amsterdam-Attacks--and-More-from-the-Command-Center.html?soid=1141518249890&aid=ZknOO9oYC7w>.

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