Understanding Threats to Public Officials

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Threats against public officials are ticking up, a disturbing trend that NCITE researchers are charting in a 10-year examination of federally investigated threats.

Since 2013, researchers have counted 501 such threats, most resulting in conviction. Threats were most commonly made against members of the criminal justice system, from law enforcement officers to judges. Elected officials and those who run or manage elections comprised the second most-targeted category. Educators and healthcare workers also received threats. The following graphics show further analysis.

It is important to note that the figures capture only federally charged cases. There is a high bar for such charges given Constitutional protections for political speech. Most threats, however, are not reported, and this analysis does not include threats that were reported to local authorities.

The figures below nevertheless indicate a greater willingness nationally to threaten public officials. The research team is examining the extent to which that reflects a growing public acceptance of and tolerance for political violence — attitudes that threaten U.S. institutions and weaken democracy.

* Sectors = Elections/Elected Officials, Education, Health Care, Law Enforcement

**CASE OUTCOME**

- **Conviction**: 79%
- **Other (dismissals, acquittals, etc.)**: 21%

**NUMBER OF FEDERAL CHARGES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Federal Charges</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Number of Federal Charges = 501
**AGAAVE = Anti-Government and Anti-Authority Violent Extremism
RMVE = Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism**
**CHARGES BY STATE**

- Texas 32
- Florida 31
- Pennsylvania 36
- New York 43

**CRIMINAL HISTORY**

- Yes: 69%
- No: 27%
- Some Indication: 4%

**SPECIFICITY OF THREAT**

- Specific Individual: 47%
- General Target: 30%
- Both: 23%

**TYPE OF PUBLIC OFFICIAL**

- Law*** Enforcement & Military: 42%
- Education: 14%
- Healthcare: 9%
- Election/Elected: 42%

*** Law enforcement includes judges, district attorneys, and attorney generals

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In 2012, three Florida-based public officials including a judge, state attorney, and FBI task force agent received multiple emails threatening to stalk and physically/sexually assault their family members by a 36-year-old, longtime white supremacist who was convicted of 5 counts of extortion by interstate communications. He was sentenced to 17 ½ years in prison.

In 2017, five high school teachers in Vermont received online threats from a former student at the same high school who was convicted and sentenced to five years of probation.

Between 2015 and 2017, a Chicago-area healthcare clinic that offered reproductive services received online death threats from an email address with a domain name referencing the Army of God. The 35-year-old Indiana-based perpetrator was convicted on interstate communications threats and sentenced to 18 months in prison.

In 2019, a civil rights activist running for city council in Charlottesville, VA, received multiple racially motivated threats communicated via multiple social media platforms. The perpetrator was a 31-year-old longtime white supremacist and online serial harasser of anti-racist activists and their children and was convicted and sentenced to 36 months in prison.