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Snapshot of U.S. Federal Cases Against Violent Incels

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Snapshot of U.S. Federal Cases Against Violent Incels

By Seamus Hughes and Camden Carmichael



OVERVIEW

“Incel” and “Involuntary Celibate” refer to members of a group founded on the belief that society unjustly denies them sexual or romantic attention, to which they believe they are entitled. Incels are primarily an online community composed of individuals - most of whom are men - who blame political or social movements, such as feminism, for empowering others to deny them romantic or sexual attention. Through online activity and in some instances violence, Incels primarily target those who they believe are unjustly denying them sexual or romantic attention, which in most cases are women.¹

Many cases involving violent incels have resulted in state-level criminal charges. Other cases involving violent incels resulted in the death of the perpetrator, therefore they were not criminally charged on a state or federal level. However, there have been a growing number of federal arrests. Researchers reviewed nearly 1,000 pages of legal documents in federal criminal cases of incel-inspired arrests since 2014. The documents provide a window into federal efforts to address the rising concern.

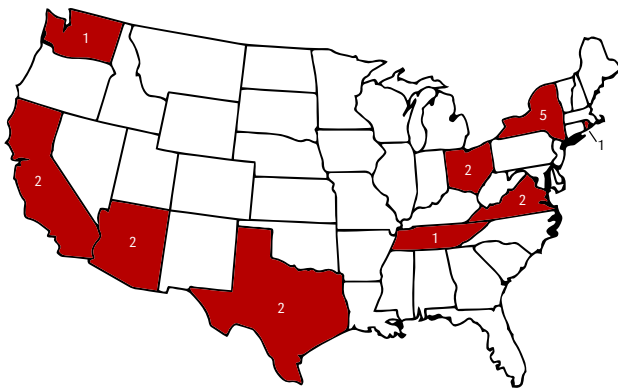
18 individuals have been charged federally in the United States on offenses related to the incel ideology.

¹Definition from the FBI affidavit in U.S. v. Malik Sanchez, Southern District of New York, April 12, 2021

BACKGROUND

Of the federal cases involving incel adherents:

- The first federal arrest of an incel was **June 19, 2014**.
- 18 individuals have been charged with federal crimes. Of those, 11 have pleaded guilty.
- Shortest sentence is one year of probation, the longest sentence is seven years in prison.
- Youngest is 19, oldest is 40
- **Arrests came from nine states:**



CRIMINAL CHARGES

Of the 18 federal cases, prosecutors used an eclectic array of 35 criminal charges.

9 charges of communicating a threat of violence

2 charges of false information and hoaxes

2 charges of coercion and enticement and attempted coercion and enticement

1 charge of attempted hate crime

1 charge of making firearms in violation of the National Firearms Act

1 charge of unlawful possession of a machine gun

4 charges of cyberstalking

2 charges of sexual exploitation of a minor

1 charge of felon in possession of a firearm and ammunition

1 charge of threatening to use a weapon of mass destruction

1 charge of transportation of a minor with intent to engage in illegal sexual activity

1 charge of manufacturing and dealing firearms without a license

3 charges of possession of child pornography

2 charges of false, fictitious, or fraudulent statements to the U.S. government

1 charge of kidnapping and attempted kidnapping

1 charge of possession of a defaced firearm

1 charge of unlawfully engaging in the business of manufacturing and dealing machine guns

1 charge of manufacture and possession of an explosive

EXAMPLES OF INCEL-INSPIRED DEADLY ATTACKS SINCE 2014

According to the FBI, incel-inspired individuals have conducted at least five lethal attacks in the United States and Canada since 2014, resulting in 28 deaths. At least **half** of the individuals arrested with federal charges expressly cited and praised past violent incel attackers. Some notable incel attacks included:

May 23, 2014

Elliot Rodger killed six and injured 14 people in Isla Vista, California. Rodger was a self-described incel and explained in a manifesto his intent to punish women and sexually active men. Rodger, who killed himself following the attack, has taken a 'martyr'-like importance within the violent incel community.

Nov. 2, 2018

Scott Paul Beierle shot six women, two fatally, at a yoga studio in Tallahassee, Florida. Prior to the attack, Beierle, also a neo-Nazi adherent, posted several videos on a social media platform describing himself as an incel and praising Rodger.

May 20, 2020

Armando Hernandez Jr. shot and injured three people at a mall in Arizona. After his arrest, Hernandez stated to investigators that he was specifically targeting couples and that he was angry at society because he felt that women didn't want to date him. He pleaded guilty to two charges of attempted murder and two charges of aggravated assault. He was sentenced to 44 years in prison.

EXAMPLES OF INCEL FEDERAL ARRESTS SINCE 2014

March 2020

An Ohio man was arrested after a standoff with law enforcement officers. He was found with an assault rifle and writings outlining a plot to carry out a mass shooting at Ohio State University that would have coincided with the anniversary of the 2014 Isla Vista attack. The individual, a self-identified incel, also wrote a manifesto which outlined his desire to harm all women. He was charged with attempted hate crime and unlawful possession of a machine gun. He pleaded guilty to both charges.

June 2020

Residents of a Virginia neighborhood reported hearing an explosion at a nearby residence. In the bedroom, law enforcement found bomb schematics, improvised explosive devices, and writings outlining the resident's desire to "make a statement like Elliot Rodgers (sic)" by placing bombs intended to kill cheerleaders at a local high school. When questioned by the FBI in the hospital, the individual said he was injured in a lawn mower accident. He was charged with making a false statement to investigators and possession of an explosive. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to seven years in prison.

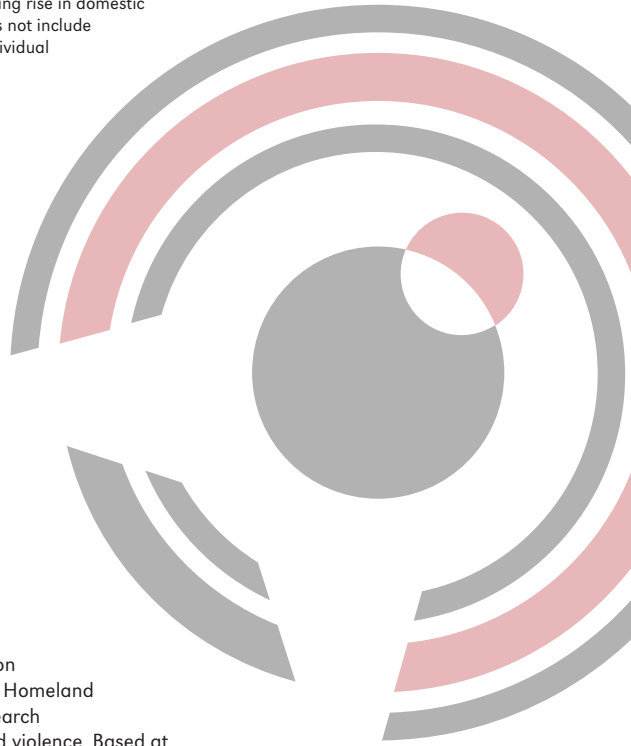
October 2023

An Arizona man was arrested after allegedly threatening to carry out a mass shooting at the University of Arizona in a group chat on social media. The individual self-identified as an incel, made statements about his intent to buy an assault rifle, and threatened the female members of the group chat. He was charged with communicating an interstate threat. A trial date has not been set.

INCLUSION CRITERIA

This dataset uses open source U.S. federal court records to determine if a case should be included. Cases were included if the individual was charged with a federal crime, self-described as an incel, was described by the investigating agency as an incel adherent, or made repeated statements consistent with the incel ideology and terminology in online or handwritten messages. The review also cross-referenced the court records database with Department of Justice press releases on arrests.

This snapshot is a part of a project examining non-terrorism related federal charges used to address the growing rise in domestic violent extremist groups. The dataset does not include state-level charges or cases where the individual died during criminal action.



ABOUT NCITE

The National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center (NCITE) is the Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence for research on countering terrorism and targeted violence. Based at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), the Center was established under a 10-year cooperative agreement grant from the DHS Science and Technology Directorate's Office of University Programs in 2020.

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