**START**

NATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR THE
STUDY OF TERRORISM AND RESPONSES TO TERRORISM

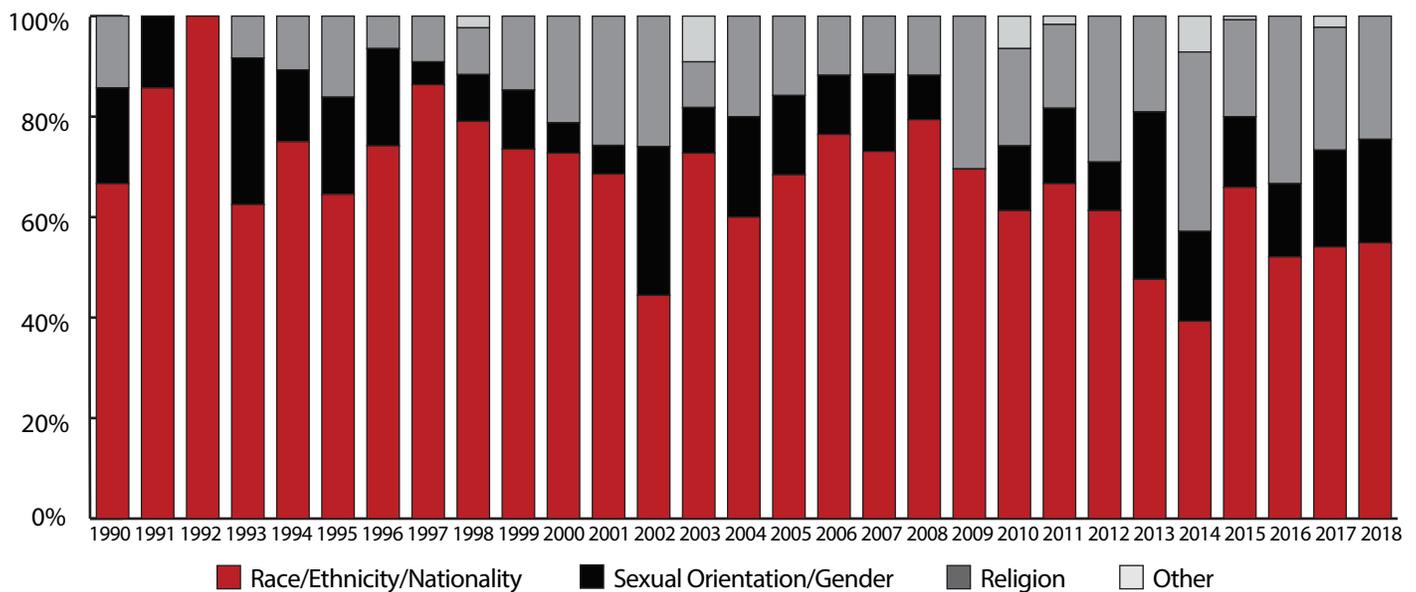# Motivations and Characteristics of Hate Crime Offenders

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The **Bias Incidents and Actors Study (BIAS)** is a multi-method project that examines the characteristics, motivations, and behaviors of a sample of individuals who committed hate crimes in the United States from 1990-2018. The project includes a dataset of 689 violent and 277 non-violent bias crime offenders who were motivated by bias based on (1) race, ethnicity, and nationality, (2) religion, (3) sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity, (4) age, or (5) disability. Individuals were selected at random for inclusion in the dataset from a pool of potential subjects that were reviewed according to the project's inclusion criteria and minimum information requirements. Hate crime charges or hate crime sentencing enhancements were not requirements for individuals to be included in the database. The BIAS dataset was coded entirely from open-source materials and contains more than 100 variable fields with information on hate crime events, victim characteristics, and offender motivations, demographics, and personal histories.

## MOTIVATIONS OF OFFENDERS

The BIAS data illustrate that United States hate crime offenders have been motivated by a diverse set of hate beliefs.

### BIAS Motivations by Year, 1990-2018



Legend: ■ Race/Ethnicity/Nationality  ■ Sexual Orientation/Gender  ■ Religion  □ Other

*Note: "Other" includes individuals who harbored bias against elderly individuals or those with cognitive or physical disabilities. Categories are not mutually exclusive; that is, an offender can be motivated by more than one of type of bias.*

**Bias towards individuals on the basis of race, ethnicity, or nationality is the most prevalent (N=671) category in the dataset.**
Offenders motivated by bias based on religion (N=235) and sexual orientation and gender identity (N=171) are the second and third most common motivations in the BIAS data. From 2014-2018, the data show an increase in the number of offenders with these motivations.

While attacks targeting African Americans account for more than 40 percent of the crimes in the dataset, they are especially concentrated in the 1990s, when they accounted for nearly 58 percent of all attacks. At the same time, hate crimes targeting victims perceived as Latinx and Muslim and/or Arab grew as a percentage of the total number, from less than 5 percent in the 1990s, to over a quarter of all attacks in the database over the last two decades.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF OFFENDERS

Similar to United States political extremists, bias crime offenders are diverse in terms of demographic and background characteristics.

## OFFENDER CHARACTERISTICS & BIAS MOTIVATIONS

| Offender Characteristic | Bias Motivation | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Sexual Orientation/ Gender /Gender Identity* (N = 171) | Race/Ethnicity/ Nationality (N = 671) | Religion (N = 235) |
| Violent | 86% | 72.6% | 52.8% |
| Age (Median) | 24 | 26 | 31 |
| Female | 4.7% | 6.7% | 8.5% |
| Married | 12.8% | 18.6% | 27.3% |
| Children | 15.7% | 23.5% | 23.3% |
| Military | 9.2% | 6.8% | 16.3% |
| Education (High School or Below) | 69.3% | 72.8% | 53.3% |
| Poor Work History | 47% | 40.1% | 39.5% |
| Abuse | 8.2% | 4.8% | 5.5% |
| Mental Illness | 15.8% | 15.1% | 34.4% |
| Criminal History | 56.6% | 66.9% | 58.2% |
| Substance Abuse | 23.4% | 23.4% | 22.1% |
| Hate Group Member | 20.1% | 42.7% | 34.5% |
| Trauma | 11.7% | 10.6% | 14.5% |

Regardless of hate motivation, offenders displayed significantly higher rates of

- low educational attainment,
- poor work performance,
- mental illness,
- substance abuse, and
- criminal histories

than the general population.

*Note: Bias categories are not mutually exclusive. Offenders who selected their victims on the basis of two or more identity characteristics are included in all applicable bias categories.*

## TARGET SELECTION ON THE BASIS OF RELIGION

**The youngest subset of offenders targeted victims on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.*** With a median age of 24 years old, they were also the most likely to commit crimes with the intent of injuring or killing their victims. In comparison to other types of offenders in the database, these individuals had the highest rates of poor work performance and they were the least likely to be married or have children.

**The majority (70.7%) of the violent offenders in BIAS targeted victims on the basis of race, ethnicity, or nationality.** With a median age of 26 years old, offenders motivated by racial and ethnic discrimination also had the highest rates of non-bias criminal records, membership in organized hate groups, and low educational achievements (high school degree or lower).

Offenders who selected their targets on the basis of perceived religious characteristics had the highest rates of military service and mental illness in the database.

They were also, on average, older than other bias offenders when they committed their hate acts and they were the most likely to be married and have children at the time of their crimes.

Overall, the individuals in the database who selected their victims on the basis of their perceived religion were less often violent than other types of hate crime offenders. These individuals often committed property crimes against symbolic targets, such as mosques and synagogues.

At the same time, Jewish targets were greatly over-represented as victims of mass casualty attacks compared to other types of violent crime. While anti-Semitic perpetrators account for only 10.4 percent of all offenders in the BIAS data, they comprise over a third (38.1%) of the individuals in the data who planned or committed mass casualty attacks.

*  *Sexual Orentation/Gender/Gender Identity category includes male supremacist attacks on cis-women.*

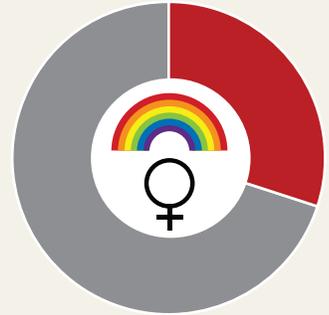## OTHER CHARACTERISTICS & MOTIVATIONS

**Offenders who targeted their victims because of their ages or mental/physical disabilities are far less common in the database.** With rare exceptions, these offenders had mixed motives for committing their crimes. In particular, they often selected their targets because they perceived them to be easy targets for financial gain or theft.

Although most hate crime offenders had no previous relationship to their victims, nearly 20 percent of those motivated by anti-Black sentiment, and nearly 30 percent of those motivated by animus towards women or perceived lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, or queer people (LGBTQ), knew their victims prior to the attack.

**20%** of anti-Black offenders
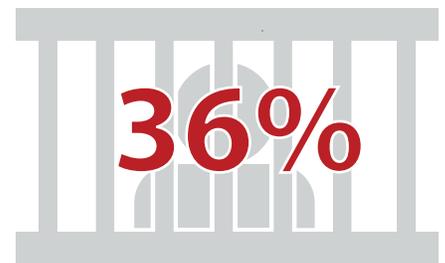
**30%** of anti-LGBTQ/ anti-woman offenders

**KNEW THEIR VICTIM**
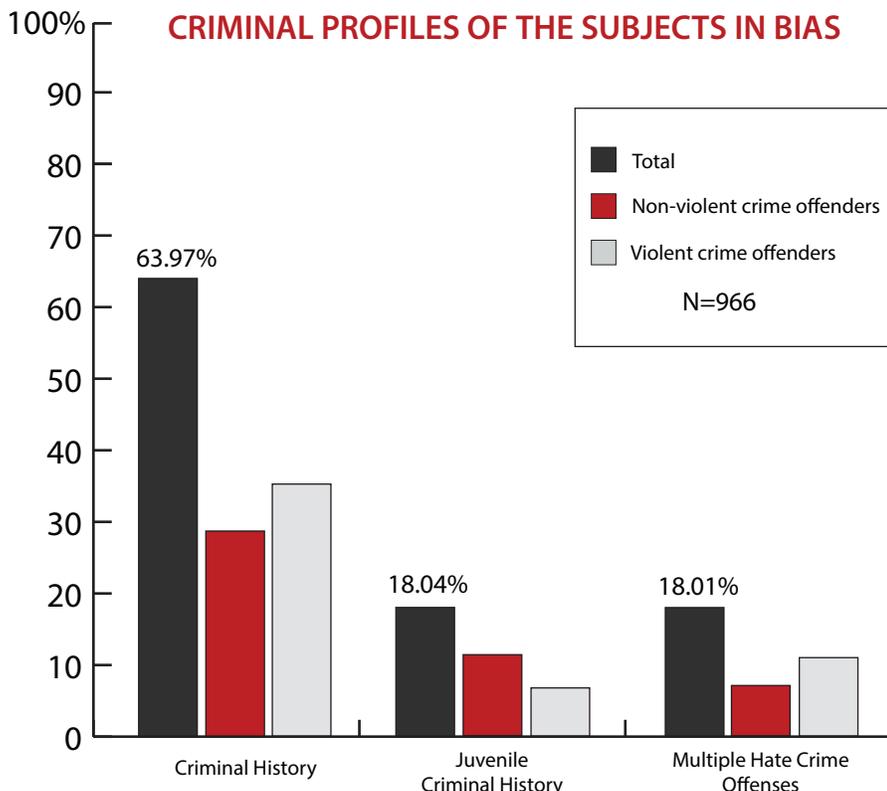
## CRIMINAL PROFILES OF OFFENDERS

**More than 60 percent of the offenders had criminal records** prior to committing the hate crimes that prompted their inclusion in the BIAS database.

Just over 28 percent of the individuals in BIAS committed prior non-violent crimes, such as drug offenses, theft, and vandalism, while 35.2 percent committed previous violent crimes, such as homicide, assault, and armed robbery.

Of the individuals in BIAS with criminal histories, 36 percent are known to have spent time in US prisons or jails prior to committing their hate crimes.

**36%**

**CRIMINAL PROFILES OF THE SUBJECTS IN BIAS**

Legend:
- Total
- Non-violent crime offenders
- Violent crime offenders

N=966

Criminal History: 63.97%
Juvenile Criminal History: 18.04%
Multiple Hate Crime Offenses: 18.01%

**18%** Multiple hate crime offenses.

**11%** Multiple violent hate crime offenses.

**7%** Multiple non-violent hate crime offenses.

Just over 18 percent of the subjects in BIAS were charged with, or convicted of, multiple hate crime offenses. Just over 7 percent of the subjects in BIAS committed multiple non-violent hate crimes, while nearly 11 percent committed multiple violent hate crimes.

Of the 689 violent offenders in BIAS, 589 (85.5%) were arrested for a single hate crime, and only six offenders were arrested for a violent hate crime after being arrested for a non-violent hate crime.

The vast majority (70%) of the subjects in BIAS with criminal histories were engaged exclusively in non-bias criminal behaviors prior to committing the hate offenses that prompted their inclusion in the database.

Approximately 18 percent of the offenders in the BIAS dataset began committing crimes as juveniles. More specifically, 11.5 percent of the subjects in BIAS committed non-violent crimes as juveniles, while 6.8 percent committed violent crimes or a mix of non-violent and violent crimes.

A small percentage (3.7%) of the individuals in BIAS were known members of non-ideological street gangs at the time of their involvement in hate activities.

## MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BIAS

The subjects in BIAS were identified through a review of more than 35,000 news articles on hate crimes in the U.S. since 1990, as well as searches of crime databases and other publicly available information. To be included in the dataset, individuals must meet the following inclusion criteria:

1. The subject was arrested or indicted for committing a criminal offense in the United States from 1990-2018;
2. The subject was 18 years of age or older at the time of engaging in the criminal act;
3. The subject was residing in the United States at the time of engaging in the criminal act;
4. There is substantial evidence that the subject committed or escalated the criminal act because of bias against the victim or target's real or perceived identity characteristics (e.g., race, nationality, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, etc.);
5. There is enough information about the subject in open-source materials to code the relevant details of their crimes and, at a minimum, the majority of their demographic traits.

Given the nature of source deterioration over time and news coverage, the BIAS data over-represent cases from the second decade of the 2000s and high-publicity attacks, which are often cases that are violent and involve the most explicit expressions of prejudice. BIAS was not designed as a comprehensive accounting of all hate crime activity in the United States. Users interested in aggregate hate crime trends should consult data sources that are designed to capture such metrics, like those generated by the FBI's Hate Crime Statistics Program.

### www.start.umd.edu/bias

**PROJECT TEAM**

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