

8-2023

Understanding Threats to Public Officials

Peter Simi

Seamus Hughes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/ncitereportsresearch>

Please take our feedback survey at: [https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/](https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE)

[SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE](https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE)

Understanding Threats to Public Officials*

Pete Simi, *Chapman University*
Seamus Hughes, *University of Nebraska at Omaha*

PROJECT OVERVIEW

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

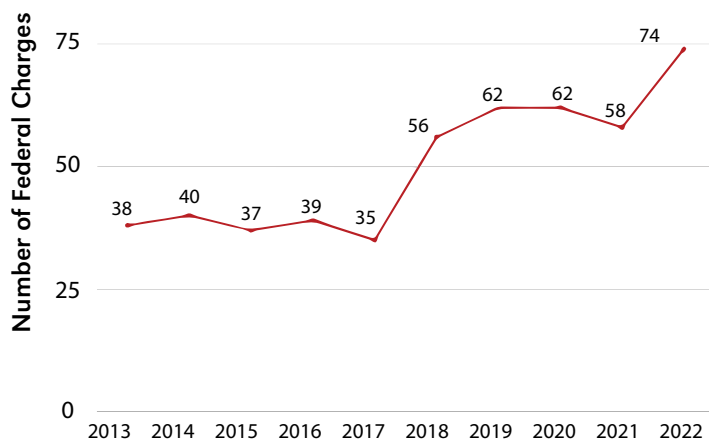
Since 2013, researchers have counted 501 such threats, most resulting in conviction. Threats were most commonly made against members of the criminal justice system, from law enforcement officers to judges. Elected officials and those who run or manage elections comprised the second most-targeted category.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

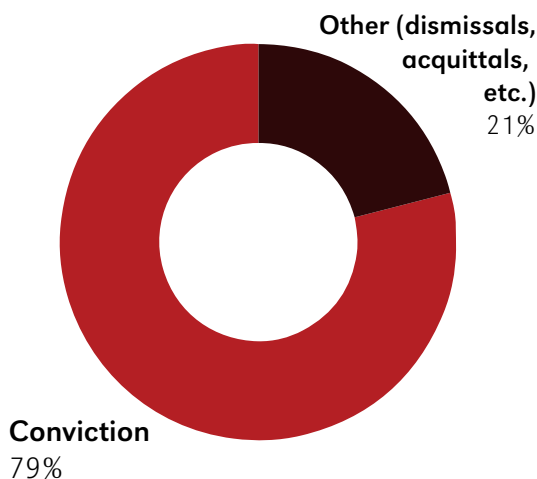
The figures below nevertheless indicate a greater willingness nationally to threaten public officials. The research team is examining the extent to which that reflects a growing public acceptance of and tolerance for political violence – attitudes that threaten U.S. institutions and weaken democracy.

NUMBER OF FEDERAL CHARGES



Total Number of Federal Charges = 501

CASE OUTCOME



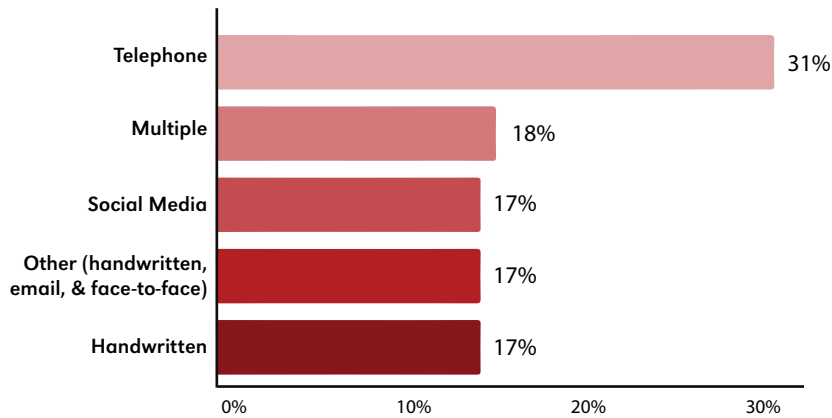
*Sectors = Elections/Elected Officials, Education, Health Care, Law Enforcement

Grant Acknowledgement and Disclaimer: This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security under Grant Award Number 20STTPC00001-03-01. The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security or the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

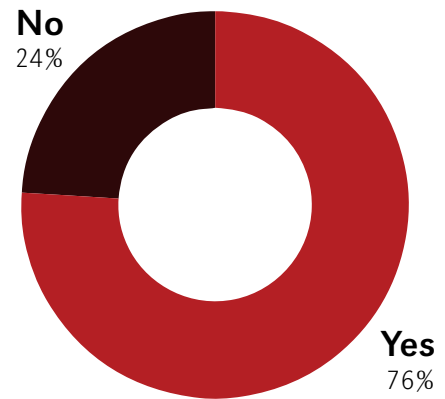


ncite.unomaha.edu
ncite@unomaha.edu
NCITE

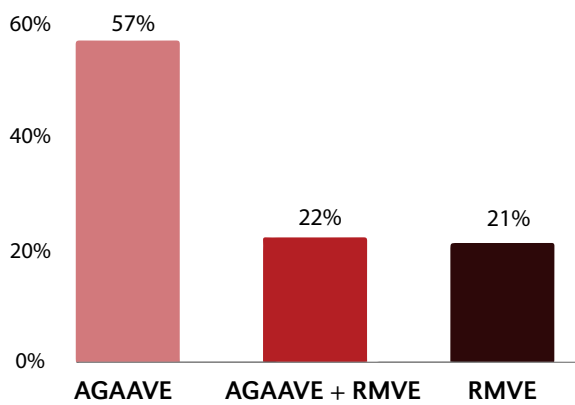
METHOD FOR COMMUNICATING THREAT



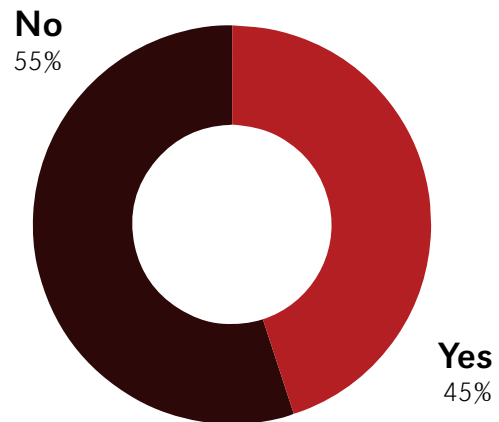
COMMUNICATED SPECIFIC GRIEVANCE



IDEOLOGY**



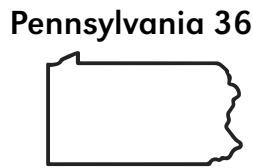
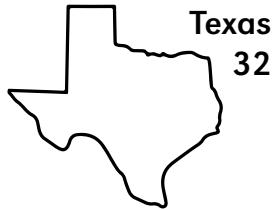
IDEOLOGICAL MOTIVATION



** AGAAVE = Anti-Government and Anti-Authority Violent Extremism
 RMVE = Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism



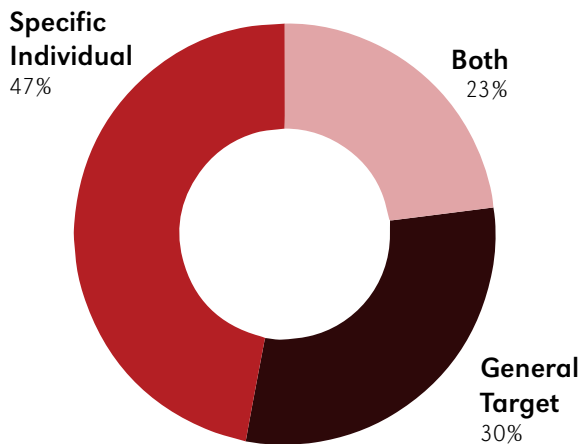
CHARGES BY STATE



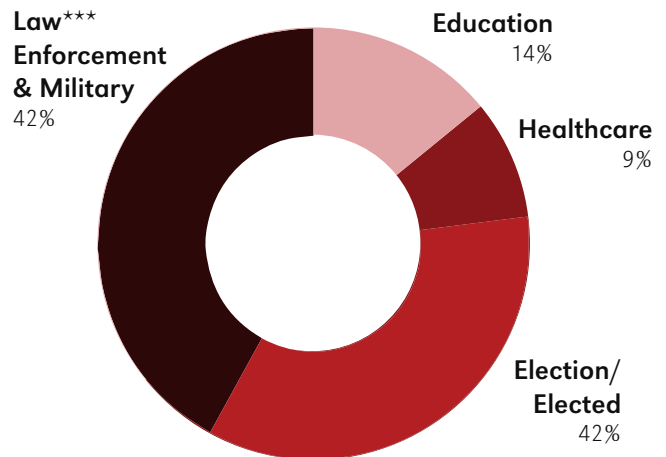
CRIMINAL HISTORY



SPECIFICITY OF THREAT



TYPE OF PUBLIC OFFICIAL



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



TYPE OF PUBLIC OFFICIAL SUMMARIES

LAW ENFORCEMENT

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.

EDUCATION

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.

HEALTH CARE

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.

ELECTION/ELECTED

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.

