

**FROM:** FBI WFO JTTF 

**TO:** United States Park Police ICTB

**DATE/TIME:** 4 January 2021

**REF:** DHS Intelligence In Depth (IA-47801-21)



## OFFICE of INTELLIGENCE and ANALYSIS

## INTELLIGENCE IN DEPTH

30 DECEMBER 2020

IA-47801-21

## TERRORISM

**(U//FOUO) Diverse Domestic Violent Extremist Landscape Probably Will Persist Due to Enduring Grievances**

*(U//FOUO) Scope Note: This Intelligence In Depth (IID) provides a strategic overview of the threats posed by actors DHS, FBI, and NCTC consider domestic violent extremists (DVEs) as defined by our shared lexicons. It examines the ideological motivations that shape the threat landscape from DVEs in general and then provides an assessment of the current threat – and historical context – of each ideologically driven movement. This IID also provides an overview of some of the drivers that persist across the broader DVE landscape. This IID does not assess threats from homegrown violent extremists inspired by a foreign terrorist organization or criminal actors. The information cutoff date for this IID is October 2020.*

**(U) Key Judgments**

- *(U//FOUO) Key Judgment 1: We assess that, during the last several years, the DVE landscape has been dominated primarily by individuals and small groups adhering to a range of violent extremist ideologies, some of whom have mobilized in response to current events. The prevalence of lone actor activity, use of social media and encrypted platforms to communicate, and limited bystander awareness of potential violence will probably continue to constrain our ability to detect and disrupt DVE plotting.*
- *(U//FOUO) Key Judgment 2: In 2020, DVEs often were influenced by developments related to the COVID-19 pandemic and civil unrest, which resulted in increased anti-government/anti-authority violent extremist activity. Militia violent extremists (MVEs) – including those influenced by the “boogaloo” concept – pose an increased lethal threat, particularly to government officials, based on their perceptions of government overreach. Separately, if significant civil unrest continues, some anarchist violent extremists likely will engage in non-lethal violence against law enforcement and others perceived as oppressive.*

- (U//FOUO) *Key Judgment 3:* Lone actor racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (RMVEs) who believe in the superiority of the white race and DVEs with personalized ideologies will probably pose the most persistent threats of mass civilian casualty attacks, judging from our review of recent attack trends and violent extremist rhetoric. A range of other DVEs motivated by differing ideologies—including involuntary celibate (Incel) violent extremists (IVEs)—have maintained persistent levels of threat activity through the years, and we assess that these primarily individuals or small cells will continue to act based on their perceptions of current events.



**(U) Domestic Violent Extremists Responses to Current Events**

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*(U//FOUO) We assess that DVEs from across the ideological spectrum are driven to act by a combination of enduring grievances and their perception of current events.* In 2020, a range of threat actors were inspired to act by issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, government responses to and the economic impact of the pandemic, ongoing civil unrest, or grievances stemming from the election season. Our ability to detect and disrupt DVE plotting will continue to be constrained by the insular nature and frequency of lone actor activity; the use of social media to make threats of violence upon which DVEs often do not act; bystanders' often limited awareness of DVE ideologies; and some DVEs' continued use of encrypted platforms to promote violent extremist ideology, recruit new adherents, and incite or plan attacks.

- *(U//FOUO) A range of DVEs have called for intentionally spreading COVID-19 or retaliating through violent action against perceived government overreach in response to the pandemic, according to open source reporting. Some RMVEs claim government responses to the pandemic could crash the global economy, hasten societal collapse, and lead to a race war, according to a report by a non-profit organization. In addition, some DVEs probably are being influenced by online conspiracy theories describing the pandemic as a government-perpetrated hoax, according to the same report by a non-profit organization. Several DVEs allegedly have sought to conduct, or have conducted, acts of violence or attempts to destroy critical infrastructure, citing the COVID-19 pandemic as a factor in the timing or motivation of their plotting, according to media reporting and government press releases.*
- *(U//FOUO) On 24 March 2020, the FBI disrupted Missouri-based RMVE Timothy Wilson's plot to attack a Missouri medical center using a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device. Wilson, who is now deceased in relation to his plot, indicated that he selected a healthcare facility and accelerated the timing of his intended attack because he believed it would likely result in increased media attention during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to media reporting. Wilson named his plot "Operation Boogaloo."*
- *(U//FOUO) Some DVEs have recently engaged in violence based on their perceptions of political issues such as immigration, particular political figures, and social justice topics. Their perceptions of the outcome of the 2020 general election could combine with their enduring political and social views and lead some DVEs to mobilize to violence in the coming months.*
- *(U//FOUO) Many DVEs adapt their online behaviors to avoid scrutiny or move to more permissive platforms because they perceive some technology companies have made the online environment more hostile to DVE content, such as the incitement or glorification of violence. DVEs' expanded use of encrypted platforms could result in some undetected plotting in the coming months.*



**(U) Militia Violent Extremists Violence Against Law Enforcement, Other Perceived Threats**

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*(U//FOUO) We assess that MVEs are driven to act by activities they perceive to be representative of government overreach, and they likely pose an increased threat to law enforcement, government personnel, and associated facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic due to their belief that government shutdown orders violate the Constitution.* MVE perceptions of government overreach also frequently include enduring concerns about government-led gun confiscation violating the Second Amendment to the Constitution. Some MVEs use the “boogaloo” concept to reference a second civil war or uprising against the government in response to perceived government incursions on constitutional rights, including the Second Amendment, or other actions perceived as government overreach. Some MVEs’ illegal activities have also been driven by anti-immigrant sentiments, which has led to their targeting of Muslims, suspected undocumented immigrants, and perceived ideological opponents.

- *(U//FOUO)* Between 7-15 October 2020, coordinated arrests disrupted 14 MVEs across multiple states, according to a federal criminal complaint. Six were arrested on federal charges related to a conspiracy to kidnap the Governor of Michigan based on their perception that the governor infringed upon the US Constitution. Eight were arrested on state charges for providing material support to terrorism.
- *(U//FOUO)* On 29 May 2020, two individuals allegedly ambushed Protective Security Officers, who were contracted with the Federal Protective Service, outside the United States Courthouse in Oakland, California. One of the individuals allegedly shot the officers, killing one, according to a federal criminal complaint. On 6 June 2020, the same individual allegedly ambushed two Santa Cruz County Sheriff’s Office deputies, killing one, after engaging them with firearms and explosives in Ben Lomond, California, according to the same criminal complaint. The shooter was wounded during the 6 June incident, and, prior to his arrest, used his own blood to write on a car “Boog” and “I became unreasonable,” which is language often associated with boogaloo supporters.
- *(U)* On 15 April 2019, a New Mexico-based MVE detained six migrants at gunpoint, according to press reporting and a Department of Justice (DOJ) press release. The MVE was found guilty of false impersonation of a Border Patrol agent. On 28 January 2017, a self-described MVE firebombed a mosque in Victoria, Texas, according to a DOJ press release. He was convicted and sentenced to over 24 years in prison.

**(U) Anarchist Violent Extremist Clashes Result in Violence**

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(U//FOUO) *We assess that anarchist violent extremists likely will continue to pose a threat of violence—much of which will be non-lethal—against law enforcement, individuals, and institutions they view as symbols of authority, capitalism, and perceived oppression, particularly those believed to be racist or fascist.*<sup>a</sup> Anarchist violent extremists likely will continue to use a variety of criminal tactics against individuals and institutions, including assault, the use of improvised weapons, and acts of arson or property damage to infrastructure. In addition, we remain concerned that anarchist violent extremist clashes with law enforcement or individuals with opposing views could escalate to lethal violence. Reporting from a variety of sources suggests that violent clashes between anarchist violent extremists and others, including law enforcement or individuals with opposing views, occurred on several occasions over the last several years.

- (U//FOUO) On 29 August 2020, a person self-identifying as “Antifa” allegedly fatally shot a man in Portland, Oregon who was participating in a political rally. The investigation into this incident and potential motives of the shooting is ongoing.
- (U//FOUO) On 13 July 2019, an anarchist violent extremist set fire to a vehicle and a private detention facility linked to ICE operations in Tacoma, Washington using incendiary devices, according to media reports citing law enforcement. The attacker was killed when he engaged responding law enforcement with a semi-automatic rifle that malfunctioned.
- (U//FOUO) On 1 May 2016, during an unpermitted annual protest in Seattle, Washington, an anarchist violent extremist threw a Molotov cocktail at a line of police officers, which led to at least one officer sustaining a burn injury. He was sentenced to 37 months in prison for this incident.

**(U) Sovereign Citizen Violent Extremist Threats During Law Enforcement Encounters**

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(U//FOUO) *We assess that sovereign citizen violent extremists (SCVEs) likely will continue to engage in opportunistic lethal and non-lethal violence against law enforcement and government personnel on the basis of their perceived immunity from government authority and laws.* Most SCVE violence has occurred during encounters with law enforcement, including traffic stops and service of warrants, and has involved lone actors or pairs of individuals.

- (U) On 9 February 2018, in Locust Grove, Georgia, an SCVE engaged in a shootout with law enforcement officers, during which one officer was killed and two were wounded, following an attempt by local law enforcement to serve a warrant for failure to appear in court. The subject was killed during the incident.

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<sup>a</sup> (U//FOUO) Identifying with “Antifa” alone does not constitute anarchist violent extremism and may be constitutionally protected activity.



**(U//FOUO) Sovereign Citizen Criminals Engage in Fraudulent, Harassing Activity**

(U//FOUO) The FBI notes that some non-violent sovereign citizen criminals also attempt to implement fraudulent “common law” concepts, including unofficial “common law grand juries,” posing as judges or officials, and impersonating law enforcement officers in efforts to free detained associates, circumvent or intervene in legal or law enforcement processes, or plot “arrests” of legitimate officials. SCVEs and sovereign citizen criminals continue to threaten and harass government officials, including court personnel and judges, law enforcement officers, and other public representatives, including with fraudulent liens and illicit monetary claims.

**(U) Mass Casualty Threat from Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists Motivated by Belief in the Superiority of the White Race**

(U//FOUO) *We assess that RMVEs motivated by their belief in the superiority of the white race likely pose the primary threat of mass casualty attacks.* RMVEs probably will use current events to accelerate their attack plotting, inform their target selection, and influence their online incitement efforts. While most RMVE activity is attributed to lone actors who may connect with others online or gain inspiration from high-profile attacks, some RMVEs have engaged in person with other RMVEs to expand their network and receive training, which could increase their capacity for violence.

- (U//FOUO) On 3 August 2019, an RMVE allegedly killed 23 people in an attack using a semi-automatic rifle at an El Paso, Texas retail store before surrendering to authorities, according to open source reporting. On 27 April 2019, a separate RMVE lone actor allegedly killed one and injured three at the Chabad of Poway Synagogue in Poway, California, using a recently purchased AR-15 semi-automatic rifle, but failed in his attempt to livestream the attack. Both of these RMVEs claimed inspiration from the March 2019 RMVE New Zealand mosque shooter, and the Poway attacker also cited the October 2018 RMVE Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania synagogue shooter, according to their manifestos.
- (U//FOUO) In October 2018, several members of the California-based RMVE group Rise Above Movement<sup>USPER</sup> were arrested and later pleaded guilty for their roles in engaging in violence against counter protestors at rallies in 2017 – including several in California and the torch-lit “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, according to the criminal complaint and a DOJ press release. At least one of these members traveled to Ukraine in April 2018 to meet with like-minded individuals and receive training from a Ukrainian paramilitary organization, according to press reporting.



**(U) Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremist Groups Exhibit Varying Levels of Organization**

(U//FOUO) Multiple RMVE groups promote a leaderless resistance model, in which affiliated individuals or small cells in the Homeland and potentially overseas are encouraged to independently engage in violent real-world activities to further the group's goals. Some of these groups consist of a defined set of members, while others are loosely organized and may only be identified by a shared set of terminology and iconography. Many recent RMVE groups influenced by the *Siege* publication have disseminated their media products on publicly available social media and have used encrypted messaging applications to discuss more sensitive operational matters.<sup>b</sup> The longevity and success of these movements in engaging in or inspiring attacks likely will be influenced by their operational security, as in-person and virtual activities in the past have been vulnerable to infiltration by law enforcement, anti-fascist activists, and investigative journalists. Participating in or associating with any group is not itself indicative of domestic violent extremism and is protected activity under the First Amendment; law enforcement efforts to interdict violent activities associated with any group requires criminal predicates.

- (U//FOUO) In February 2020, FBI investigations led to the arrests and pending trials of five members of Atomwaffen Division<sup>USPER</sup> (AWD), a Neo-Nazi RMVE group that was formed in approximately 2015, which has targeted racial minorities, the Jewish community, the LGBTQ+ community, the US Government, journalists, and critical infrastructure, according to multiple criminal complaints and an affidavit. AWD claims to operate using geographically decentralized cells in a leaderless resistance model, according to the same sources. As of July 2020, former AWD members reportedly rebranded as National Socialist Order<sup>USPER</sup>.
- (U//FOUO) In January 2020, the FBI arrested seven members of "The Base"<sup>USPER</sup>, which emerged as a primarily online RMVE group in July 2018 with the objective of uniting members of like-minded groups worldwide to commit acts of violence against minorities and the US Government in order to create a white ethno-state in the United States, according to multiple criminal complaints. The subjects are awaiting trial.
- (U//FOUO) US persons have participated in the past two years in Feuerkrieg Division (FKD), the Green Brigade, Moonkrieg Division<sup>USPER</sup>, and Sonnenkrieg Division, which are all RMVE groups operating primarily online and have been vulnerable to infiltration and pressure from Western governments and other actors, according to a body of DOJ information and open source reporting. Many

<sup>b</sup> (U//FOUO) *Siege* is a collection of essays written by James Mason<sup>USPER</sup>, which advocates for individual actors to engage in terrorism tactics. *Siege* gained popularity among RMVE groups and individuals in the Homeland and overseas after the Atomwaffen Division<sup>USPER</sup> promoted it. However, we assess that most individuals who read and promote *Siege* do not intend to commit violence.



of these groups are defunct or inactive online as of October 2020. Two US-based individuals affiliated with FKD were arrested last year and pled guilty to possessing or disseminating instructions for bomb-making components in unrelated incidents, according to DOJ press releases.

**(U) Threat from Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists Motivated by Perceived Racism or Desire for a Separate Black Homeland**

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*(U//FOUO) We assess that RMVE attacks driven by a violent extremist interpretation of a desire for a separate black homeland and/or perceptions or acts of racial injustice in American society probably are prone to periodic spikes against law enforcement or Jewish institutions. Such ideologically motivated crimes against law enforcement often occur in response to some high-profile officer-involved deaths of African-Americans, and ideologically motivated crimes against Jewish institutions often occur in response to heightened anti-Semitic rhetoric. Some RMVEs driven by black separatism view faith-based communities, especially Jewish communities, as participants in an unjust institutionalized system.*

- *(U//FOUO) On 10 December 2019, two RMVEs fatally shot a local law enforcement officer at a cemetery in Jersey City, New Jersey before traveling to a nearby kosher supermarket where they killed three individuals before barricading themselves inside and firing at responding officers. The attackers surveilled the supermarket prior to the attack and were fatally wounded during the encounter. The RMVEs were part of the Black Hebrew Israelite movement, which espouses that Western hemisphere-based black, Native American, Hispanic, and Caribbean people are the true Jewish race and the chosen people of God. Some RMVEs interpret Black Hebrew Israelite beliefs in a way that justifies violence, although the movement as a whole does not advocate violence.*
- *(U) On 18 April 2017, an RMVE targeted Caucasians in a shooting spree at multiple locations in Fresno, California after news reports identified him as a suspect in an earlier shooting, resulting in the death of three before local law enforcement arrested him, according to press reporting. The suspect praised a previous RMVE who targeted law enforcement. He was found guilty of charges stemming from this attack.*
- *(U) On 7 July 2016, an RMVE used a semi-automatic rifle to shoot law enforcement officers providing security for a First Amendment-protected event related to prior officer-involved shootings of African Americans in Dallas, Texas—killing five and injuring nine before being killed by law enforcement, according to press reporting. The shooter stated a desire to kill white law enforcement officers in reaction to officer-involved shootings of African Americans and contributed to the mobilization of a separate RMVE who ambushed law enforcement in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on 17 July 2016.*



## **(U) Heightened Risk from Domestic Violent Extremists Espousing Personalized Beliefs**

*(U//FOUO) We assess that DVEs with personalized belief systems could seek to mobilize in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, political changes they view as unfavorable, or lawful protests related to the officer-involved deaths of unarmed African Americans. DVEs with personalized belief systems often develop their worldviews by consuming a variety of violent extremist content online, as well as trending conspiracy theories promoting violence. These DVEs typically engage in violence against individuals or institutions that represent symbols of their grievances and mobilize as lone actors because they are often not part of real-world violent extremist movements.*

- *(U//FOUO) In October 2018, a DVE sent 16 packages containing explosives, none of which detonated, to political figures, public figures, and an identified national media organization the DVE believed posed threats to the United States, according to a DOJ press release. The DVE posted incendiary comments—including threats of violence—about political figures for several years prior to his attempted attacks and promoted a variety of fantastical conspiracy theories, according to the same source and press reporting. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison.*
- *(U) On 14 June 2017, an individual DHS considers a DVE targeted and shot members of Congress in Alexandria, Virginia in an attack during which five were wounded, according to press reporting. The shooter reportedly surveilled and specifically targeted Republican members of Congress at a baseball field where they practiced for a charity event. Prior to conducting the shooting, he asked a member of Congress if “the team practicing was a Democrat or Republican team.” He was killed by responding law enforcement.*

### ***(U//FOUO) Conspiracy Theories Influencing Some Domestic Violent Extremist Threats***

*(U//FOUO) Some conspiracy theories are central to particular DVE movements, such as the “Zionist-Occupied Government” conspiracy theory for some RMVEs or the “New World Order” conspiracy theory for some MVEs. Other conspiracy theories contributing to a small number of DVEs’ mobilization are often related to current events and have broad appeal among a range of DVEs, such as the QAnon conspiracy theory or conspiracy theories linking the spread of COVID-19 to the expansion of the 5G cellular network.*

- *(U//FOUO) On 31 March 2020, a DVE allegedly purposely derailed a train he was operating in an attempt to damage a naval hospital ship docked in the Port of Los Angeles to support local hospitals responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to statements to law enforcement after the derailment, the DVE shared conspiracy theories about the true purpose of the ship, discussed its purpose as “segregating us” and stated, “you only get this chance once... the whole world is watching.” The DVE also stated that “Q” influenced his ideological viewpoint, an apparent reference to the QAnon conspiracy theory.*



- (U//FOUO) Since at least February 2020, some DVEs on social media encouraged attacks against 5G infrastructure during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as through the destruction of cell towers, according to FBI reporting and DHS open source reporting. Since December 2019, unidentified actors have conducted arsons against several cell towers or engaged in other acts of sabotage, such as disabling electrical breakers, according to DHS field reporting.

#### (U) **Involuntary Celibate Violent Extremists Motivated by Previous Attackers**

(U//FOUO) *We judge that involuntary celibate violent extremists (IVEs), who represent a subset of the Incel movement, likely will continue to draw inspiration from previous attackers when they target individual women, heterosexual couples, or individuals they see as successful in sexual or romantic pursuits as a way of expressing to society their perceived grievance. IVEs probably will most often continue to mobilize as lone actors and use firearms in mass casualty attempts, often specifically targeting women.*

- (U) In May 2020, a self-identified Incel allegedly shot and injured three individuals at an outdoor mall in Glendale, Arizona before authorities detained him, according to press reporting.
- (U//FOUO) In May 2014, now-deceased IVE Elliot Rodger used an edged weapon, firearms, and vehicle ramming to kill six people and injure 14 in Santa Barbara, California. Prior to the attack, he posted a self-recorded video and manifesto detailing his grievances toward women. Numerous IVE attackers in the Homeland and Canada have cited Rodger's video and manifesto and referred to him as "Saint Elliot," the "Supreme Gentleman," the "Supreme Alpha," and the "Founding Forefather" of the Incel movement, according to a body of press reporting.
- (U//FOUO) The four IVE attacks in the Homeland, which occurred in 2014, 2015, 2018, and 2020, all involved lone actors using firearms—one of which also used an edged weapon and vehicle.

#### (U) **Persistent Threat from Abortion-Related Violent Extremists**

(U//FOUO) *We assess that abortion-related violent extremist threats likely will be elevated when there are significant abortion-related legislative and legal debates. Abortion-related violent extremists—most often individuals motivated by pro-life beliefs—likely continue to pose a threat of violence or property damage, including arsons, primarily to reproductive healthcare facilities (RHCFs), personnel, and patients. Abortion-related violent extremists motivated by pro-choice beliefs likely will continue to engage in fewer threats or property damage, and they will most often target organizations, facilities, or personnel expressing anti-abortion views.*

- (U) On 3 January 2020, an individual allegedly vandalized a Newark, Delaware RHCF before throwing an incendiary device at the front window of the building, starting a fire that damaged the front porch and window before subsiding within a minute, according to a DOJ press release. The suspect's social media presence included several anti-abortion posts, that may be constitutionally protected, and the Latin phrase "Deus Vult" – the same phrase which was spray painted on the RHCF. Deus Vult translates to "God wills it" and was used during the First Crusade, according to press reporting.
- (U//FOUO) In the early morning of 10 February 2019, an individual used a Molotov cocktail to start a fire in an RHCF in Columbia, Missouri, forcing a weeklong closure for repairs, according to a DOJ press release and media reports. The individual was sentenced to five years in prison for this incident.
- (U//FOUO) On 27 November 2015, an individual allegedly opened fire with a semi-automatic rifle inside a Colorado Springs, Colorado RHCF, resulting in three deaths and nine injuries, according to the arrest warrant and media reports. Upon his arrest, the individual claimed he attacked the clinic because he was "upset with them performing abortions and the selling of baby parts," based on beliefs promoted within the pro-life extremist movement, and that "he was happy with what he had done because his actions...ensured that no more abortions would be conducted at the [RHCF] facility in Colorado Springs."

#### (U) **Animal Rights, Environmental Violent Extremists Damage, Disrupt Infrastructure**

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(U//FOUO) *We judge that opposition to oil and natural gas infrastructure development or expansion projects, particularly those near perceived ecologically sensitive habitats or waterways, likely will continue to drive most environmental violent extremist activity. Opposition to farming or selling food and clothing derived from animals likely will drive most animal rights violent extremist activity.* Animal rights violent extremist and environmental violent extremists probably will continue to attempt to damage property or otherwise disrupt the operation of critical infrastructure – rather than targeting people – in violation of various state and local laws, based on their perception of the impact these actions have on the industries they target and their belief that these actions are justified. Both movements remain non-hierarchical and autonomous, and historically there has been significant overlap between the two.

- (U) On 19 September 2019, two women were federally indicted for allegedly conducting several incidents of arson in 2016 and 2017 that were intended to damage several portions of the Dakota Access Pipeline.<sup>c</sup> At least three of these incidents involved the use of an

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<sup>c</sup> (U) The Dakota Access Pipeline, also known as the Bakken Pipeline, is a crude oil pipeline extending from North Dakota's northwest Bakken oil fields through parts of South Dakota and Iowa to a distribution hub in Patoka, Illinois. Construction of the pipeline began in 2016 and became commercially operational in June 2017.

oxy-acetylene torch, and at least one incident involved the use of gasoline-soaked rags on tires, according to a criminal indictment and government press release. The subjects are awaiting trial.

- (U//FOUO) On 9 March 2015, a suspected animal rights violent extremist targeted a fast food restaurant in Reno, Nevada with Molotov cocktails and spray-painted messages indicative of support for animal rights, according to an FBI press release.