

Anti-Catholic FBI memo's origin revealed as bureau absolved of 'malicious intent'

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FBI

DOJ report 'did not find evidence' those who crafted memo were directed to 'find a link between racially motivated violent extremists and any specific religion or political affiliation'



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FBI director drilled on investigations into Catholics

FOX News correspondent David Spunt says lawmakers are demanding answers from FBI Director Christopher Wray on the memo to 'infiltrate the Catholic Church' on 'Special Report.'

The [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) has been exonerated by a Department of Justice review that found investigators did not intend to target traditional Catholics as potential "racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists."

The Justice Department Inspector General review noted, however, that analysts "incorrectly conflated" an investigative subject's religious views with his alleged domestic terrorism activities.

Findings from the 120-day review, which was handled by Justice Department Inspector General Michael E. Horowitz and ordered by Congress, were outlined in a [letter sent to members of Congress](#) on Thursday.

An FBI Richmond, Virginia, [internal memo](#), titled "Interest of Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists in Radical-Traditionalist Catholic Ideology Almost Certainly Presents New Mitigation Opportunities," was leaked in January 2023 and drew instant criticism from Republicans, who demanded immediate answers from the agency.

According to the inspector general's report, the memo, which has been dubbed the "Richmond Product," was circulated amid an investigation of a potentially violent individual who was identified in the report as "Defendant A" and has since been arrested.

GOP SENATORS DEMAND THE FBI 'REPAIR THE DAMAGE' TO ITS CREDIBILITY OVER ANTI-CATHOLIC MEMO DEBACLE



The Federal Bureau of Investigation headquarters building is seen in Washington, D.C., on July 3, 2023. (Getty Images)

Though Defendant A was not been identified in the report, the dates and details of the case match the case against Xavier Lopez, who was indicted on federal weapons charges last June.

The FBI had been monitoring the suspect since 2019 due to his extremist views on social media, according to the inspector general's review.

The review stated that the suspect expressed neo-Nazi rhetoric and described himself as a "Catholic clerical fascist." The FBI said he wrote in a letter to a family member that he needed to "build guns, explosives, and other forms of weaponry" in order to "make total war against the Satanic occultist government and the Zionist devil worshipping bankers who control it."

The indictment against Lopez did not mention the church he attended or that he was monitored ahead of his arrest in November 2022, when a search of his apartment uncovered Molotov cocktails and firearms he was not allowed to possess. Lopez was on probation at the time after pleading guilty to felony vandalism for slashing tires.

Though the investigation was appropriate, the inspector general's review criticized aspects of the memo warning about potential extremism within certain Catholic churches that was shared by the FBI's Richmond field office.

"The [FBI Inspection Division] report found that although there was no evidence of malicious intent or an improper purpose, the [memo] failed to adhere to analytic tradecraft standards and evinced errors in professional judgment, including that it lacked sufficient evidence or articulable support for a relationship between RMVEs (Racially Motivated Violent Extremists) and so-called RTC (Radical Traditional Catholicism) ideology; incorrectly conflated the subjects' religious views with their RMVE activities, creating the appearance that the FBI had inappropriately considered religious beliefs and affiliation as a basis for conducting investigative activity; and reflected a lack of training and awareness concerning proper domestic terrorism terminology," the inspector general noted.

One of the FBI analysts involved in the creation of the memo maintained that the goal was to enable FBI Richmond to conduct outreach to these "faith communities to make them aware of what we would call warning signs to radicalization, for the protection of everybody."

The inspector general noted in his assessment that he and his team "did not find evidence that anyone ordered or directed" the individuals responsible for crafting the memo "to find a link between RMVEs and any specific religion or political affiliation ... or that there was any underlying policy direction concerning such a link."

The inspector general said a review of text messages and other conversations had between those who crafted the memo at the time "did not identify any evidence of discriminatory or inappropriate comments by them" about the church in question in the FBI's investigation "or individuals who practiced a particular religious faith or held specific political beliefs."

The inspector general also noted that he and his team did not find evidence that the FBI took any investigative steps involving the church except to monitor the suspect's interactions. Investigators said they interviewed church members about the defendant's alleged intent to incite violence.

CATHOLIC VOTERS RESPOND AFTER 'DEVOUT' BIDEN ONCE AGAIN SIDES AGAINST HIS CHURCH



Findings from the 120-day review, which was handled by Justice Department Inspector General Michael E. Horowitz and ordered by Congress, were outlined in a letter sent to members of Congress on Thursday. (Tom Williams/CQ-Roll Call, Inc via Getty Images)

"We found that FBI Richmond used these investigative techniques to obtain information about Defendant A and not to prepare the Richmond DP or collect intelligence more generally," Horowitz wrote.

Based on findings by the FBI Inspection Division, the inspector general noted that the FBI "instituted corrective actions, including expanding training on analytical tradecraft standards and domestic terrorism terminology, enhancing review and approval requirements for intelligence products involving a sensitive investigative matter, and formally admonishing the employees involved."

"We did not assess, and therefore do not comment on, the corrective actions taken by the FBI," he said.

Following Horowitz's report to Congress, the FBI released a statement applauding him for his work and concluded that it aligns with their past remarks on the incident.

"We thank the Department of Justice's Office of Inspector General for its review. The FBI has said numerous times that the intelligence product did not meet our exacting standards and was quickly removed from FBI systems," the agency said. "We also have said there was no intent or actions taken to investigate Catholics or anyone based on religion; this was confirmed by the findings of the OIG."

"The FBI's mission is to protect our communities from potential threats while simultaneously upholding the constitutional rights of all Americans. We do not conduct investigations based solely on First Amendment protected activity, including religious practices," it added.



FBI Director Christopher Wray testifies before the Senate Judiciary Committee in the Hart Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 5, 2023. (Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images)

Lopez was indicted in June 2023 in federal court on one count of possessing ammunition while a convicted felon and one count of possessing destructive devices. In March of this year, he pleaded guilty to possessing destructive devices. His sentencing is scheduled to take place in September.

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Horowitz noted that there were preliminary discussions with the FBI's Domestic Terrorism Strategic Unit to draft a similar memo to send to more field offices, but "those discussions ended following the [memo] becoming public."

Fox News' Thomas Phippen, Jake Gibson and Andrew Mark Miller contributed to this report.

Kyle Morris covers politics for Fox News. Story tips can be sent via email and on X: [@RealKyleMorris](#).