



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on December 6, 2023

House Committees Issue Report on FBI Memo Targeting Traditionalist Catholics

A Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) memorandum flagging certain traditionalist Catholics as potential domestic terrorists serves as a “stark reminder that sincerely held religious beliefs must be vigorously protected” against “overzealous” federal agencies, a House committee report recently concluded.

In late January, the FBI’s Richmond (Virginia) Field Office issued an 11-page memorandum connecting “racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists” (RMVEs) with “radical-traditionalist Catholics” (RTCs). RTCs, the agency explained, subscribe to “anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTQ, and white supremacist ideology,” and they are likely to be “catalyzed” by conservative political stances on immigration, affirmative action, and abortion. The FBI expected RTCs, which it attempted to distinguish from other Catholics, to become more dangerous “in the run-up to the next general election cycle” and therefore proposed infiltrating Catholic churches as a means of “threat mitigation.”



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A whistleblower leaked the memo to the public in early February, and subsequent media attention and criticism led the FBI to withdraw the memo and allegedly to delete all related documents from its systems. The leak also triggered an investigation by the House Judiciary Committee and its Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government, the two of which released an [interim report](#) of their findings Monday.

Committee members are, to say the least, unimpressed with the FBI’s actions both in producing the memo and then in responding to their demands for related information.

“From witness testimony and FBI internal documents, the Committee and Select Subcommittee have learned that there were errors at every step of the drafting, review, approval, and removal process of the memorandum,” reads the report.

To begin with, the catalyst for the entire memo was a single investigation of a Richmond domestic-terrorism suspect who agents discovered was calling himself a “radical traditionalist Catholic Clerical Fascist” on social media. According to the report, these agents adopted this curious term and used it in their memo “without fully understanding its meaning,” probably because it is inscrutable to everyone



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except the term's originator.

Nevertheless, on the strength of this one isolated case, the FBI interviewed a priest and a choir director at a Richmond Catholic church, a whistleblower told the congressmen. "The FBI has refused to disclose" anything about the interviews, the committees wrote.

Then came the memo, which, contrary to previous assertions by FBI Director Christopher Wray, was not confined to the Richmond office but involved coordination with other field offices and was disseminated to them.

Furthermore, the memo relied on "biased and partisan sources, including the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), *Salon*, and *The Atlantic*, to support its assessment," says the report. The SPLC [claims](#) that RTCs "may make up the largest single group of serious antisemites in America." (You have undoubtedly spotted them leading the many recent demonstrations threatening American Jews over the actions of the Israeli government.) The report notes:

During an interview as part of the FBI's internal review, one of the analysts even acknowledged that the "SPLC was known to have a political bias." Yet, the analysts did not provide any caveats about the bias or credibility of the source in the memorandum. Instead, they wrote in the memorandum that "FBI Richmond makes this assessment *with high confidence*." [Emphasis in original.]

The FBI's own internal investigation determined that there was not "sufficient evidence or articulable support" to justify the agency's attempts at infiltrating Catholic parishes and that its authors had "failed to consider the potential bias and credibility" of sources such as the SPLC.

Despite this, the memo passed all required reviews at the Richmond office with nary a peep from anyone, including the office's top attorney. Once the document had been published on an FBI-wide system, some agents in other field offices expressed dismay at its contents, but the memo remained on the books.

Only after it was leaked did things start to change. "Without widespread criticism from other agents and public reporting about the Richmond memorandum," asserted the committees, "the document would have remained in FBI systems." FBI Richmond's Special Agent in Charge, Stanley Meador, stated as much in committee testimony.

Meador also revealed that despite the public firestorm and the congressional investigation, the FBI is still considering — as it was before the leak — turning the memo, originally intended primarily for use at Richmond, into an agency-wide document.

After the leak, the FBI issued a statement saying the memo did "not meet the exacting standards of the FBI" and that the agency "will never conduct investigative activities or open an investigation based solely on First Amendment protected activity." However, the committees pointed out, "this memorandum itself is proof that the FBI has done just that."

The FBI's cooperation with the committees' investigations leaves much to be desired. It took two letters to Wray and a subpoena to get a significant number of related documents out the agency, and even then many of them were redacted. Curiously, some were produced long after the FBI claimed to have deleted the memo and all related documents.

"The FBI's internal report, in addition to its latest document production, does not encompass the entire



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picture,” declared the committees, who vowed to continue investigating the matter and to look for legislative solutions to the abuses they had uncovered.

The FBI’s actions, they averred, are “a stark reminder that sincerely held religious beliefs must be vigorously protected or be subjugated to an overzealous federal law enforcement focused on the ends, with little regard for the means.”



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