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DOJ, FBI targeting Catholics as 'violent extremists' under scrutiny by state AGs: 'Bigotry' is 'festering'

GOP AGs say that a FBI field office memo targeting Catholics is 'unconstitutional and deeply un-American'

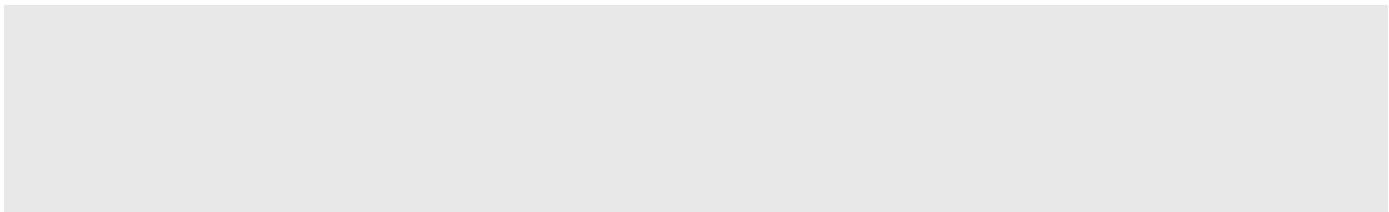
By Brianna Herlihy , Kelly Laco | Fox News

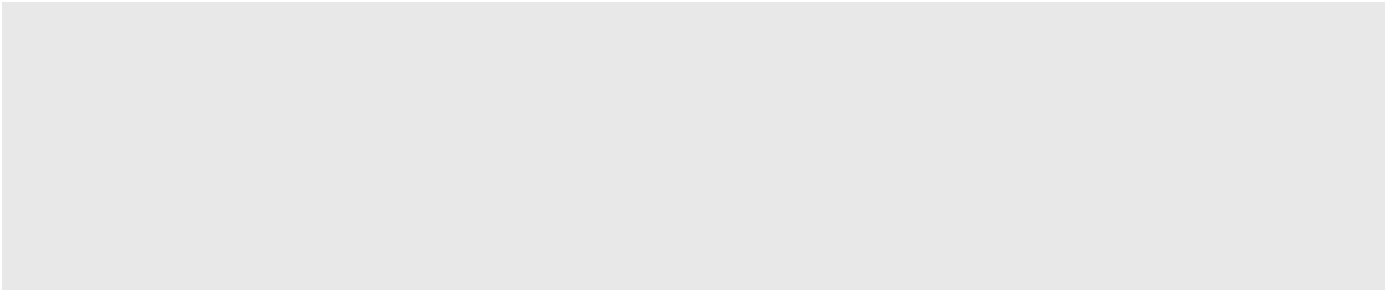


'Tucker Carlson Tonight' - Thursday, Feb. 9

Self-Defense, FBI, Catholics

EXCLUSIVE: Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares and 19 GOP state attorneys general are demanding answers from the FBI and Justice Department and threatening legal action after a leaked internal FBI memo revealed that the agency had efforts underway to identify and treat Catholics as "[potential terrorists](#)."

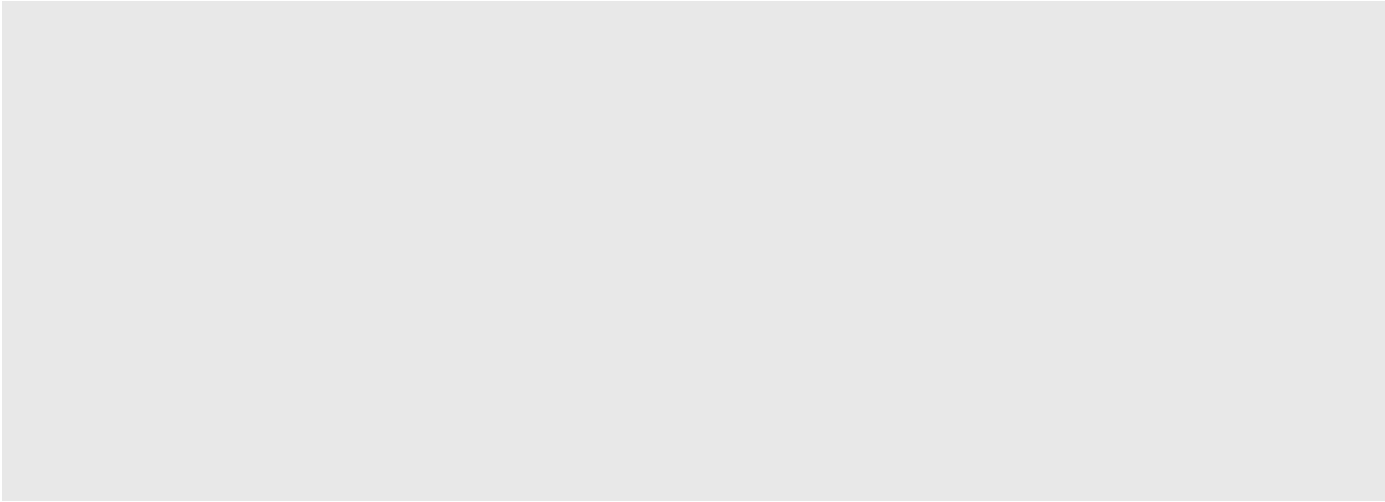




Miyares and his colleagues, [in a letter exclusively obtained](#) by Fox News Digital, told the FBI and DOJ to "desist from investigating and surveilling Americans who have done nothing more than exercise their natural and constitutional right to practice their religion in a manner of their choosing" and asked that they "reveal to the American public the extent to which they have engaged in such activities."

"Anti-Catholic bigotry appears to be festering in the FBI, and the Bureau is treating Catholics as potential terrorists because of their beliefs," the AGs wrote to FBI Director Christopher Wray and U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland.

"We are the chief legal officers of our respective States charged not only with enforcing the law, but also with securing the civil rights of our citizens," they continued. "The FBI must immediately and unequivocally order agency personnel not to target Americans based on their religious beliefs and practices," they said, adding that they will take "and appropriate means to protect the rights of our constituents as guaranteed by our Constitution."



[FORMER FBI SPECIAL AGENT NICOLE PARKER SAYS BUREAU BECAME 'POLITICALLY WEAPONIZED,' TRICKLED DOWN FROM HQ](#)



Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares. (Anna Money maker/Getty Images)

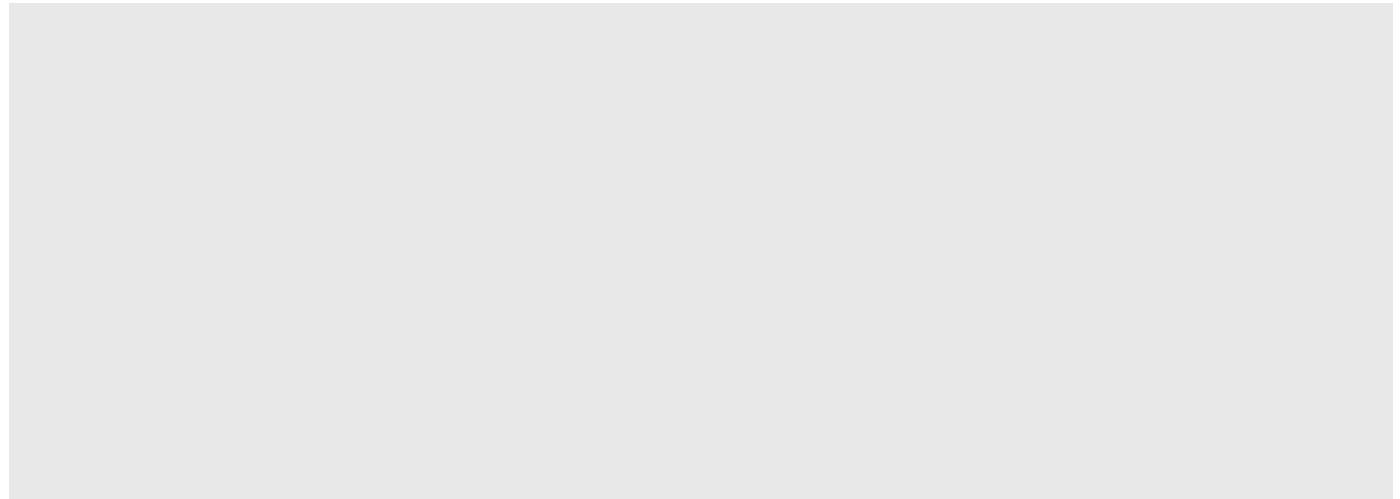
"The targeting of Catholics for treatment as 'violent extremists' because of the language in which they pray or because of the beliefs to which they subscribe is unacceptable, unconstitutional, and deeply un-American," they said.

Friday's letter comes after an internal memo produced by the FBI's Richmond, Virginia, Field Office on Jan. 23, 2023, was leaked. That memo, according to the AGs, "identifies 'radical-traditionalist Catholic[s]' as potential 'racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists.'"

PURPORTED FBI DOCUMENT SUGGESTS AGENCY MAY BE TARGETING CATHOLICS WHO ATTEND LATIN MASS

Following the leak of the memo, the FBI told Fox News Digital that "headquarters quickly began taking action to remove the document from FBI systems and conduct a review of the basis for the document."

"While our standard practice is to not comment on specific intelligence products, this particular field office product — disseminated only within the FBI — regarding racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism does not meet the exacting standards of the FBI," the statement read.



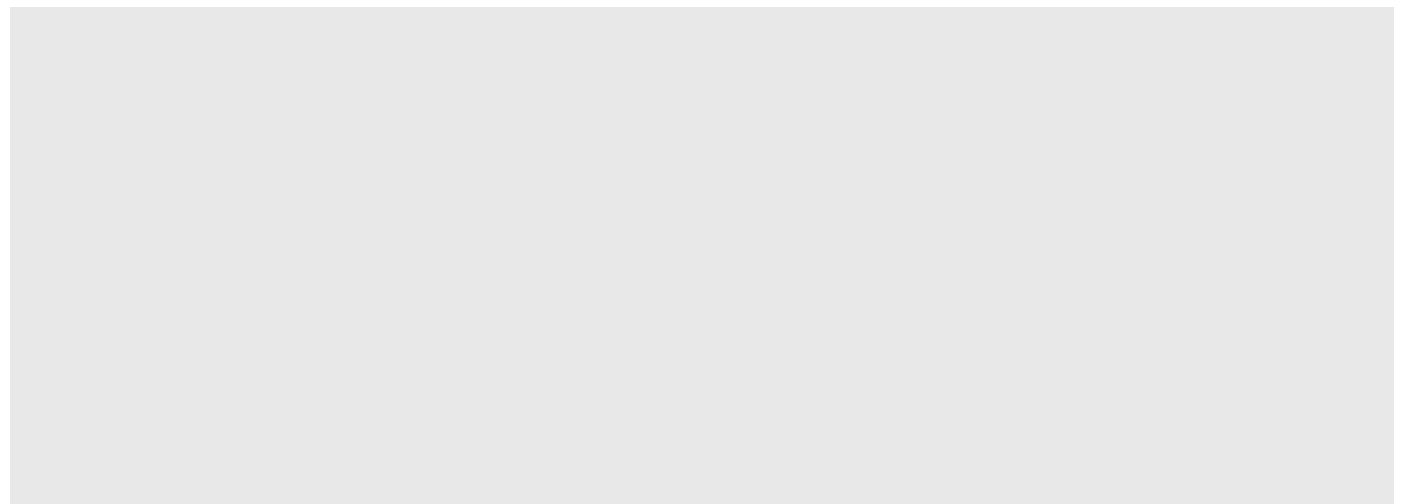
"The FBI is committed to sound analytic tradecraft and to investigating and preventing acts of violence and other crimes while upholding the constitutional rights of all Americans and will never conduct investigative activities or open an investigation based solely on First Amendment protected activity," the FBI said.

The Department of Justice declined to comment Friday and the FBI referred to their previous statement.



U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland. (Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)

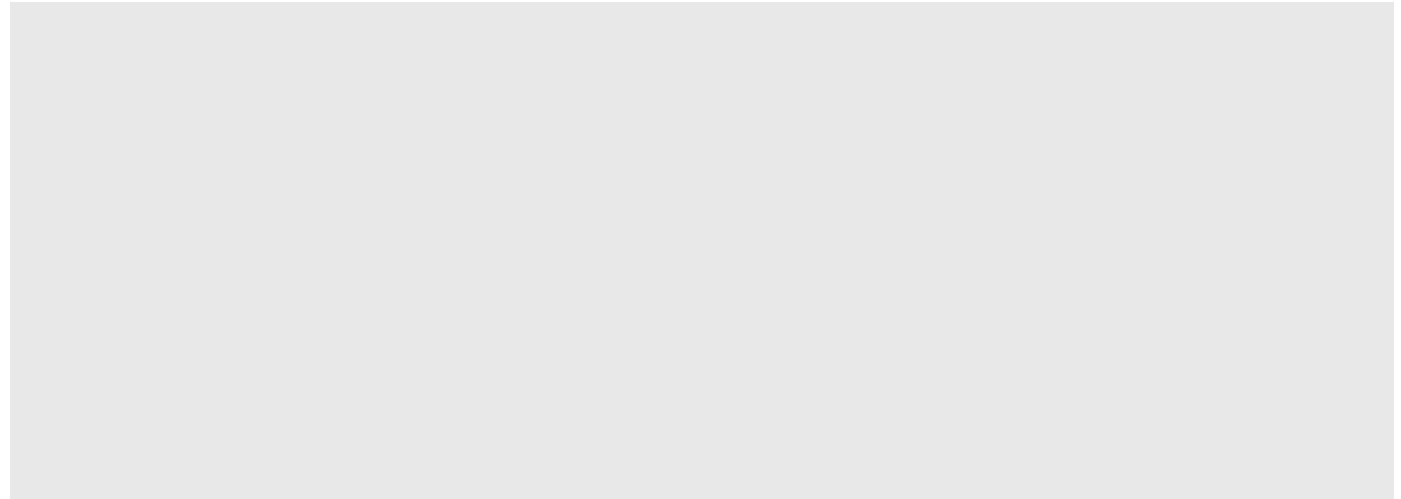
But the AGs argue that this action was only in response to "public outrage" over the memo and allege that "had the memorandum not been revealed to the public, it might well still be an intelligence product available to the Bureau."



The memorandum deploys "alarmingly detailed theological distinctions to distinguish between the Catholics whom the FBI deems acceptable, and those it does not," the AGs write.

"Among those beliefs which distinguish the bad Catholics from the good ones are a preference for 'the Traditional Latin Mass and pre-Vatican II teachings,' and adherence to [traditional Catholic teachings](#) on sex and marriage (which the memorandum glibly describes as 'anti-LGBTQ.'")

The AGs assert that the memo "even appears to accuse the Supreme Court and the Governor of Virginia of '[c]atalyzing' the bad Catholics through 'legislation or judicial decisions in areas such as abortion rights, immigration, affirmative action, and LGBTQ protections,' singling out the Supreme Court's recent decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* and Governor Youngkin's support for sensible abortion regulations as examples."



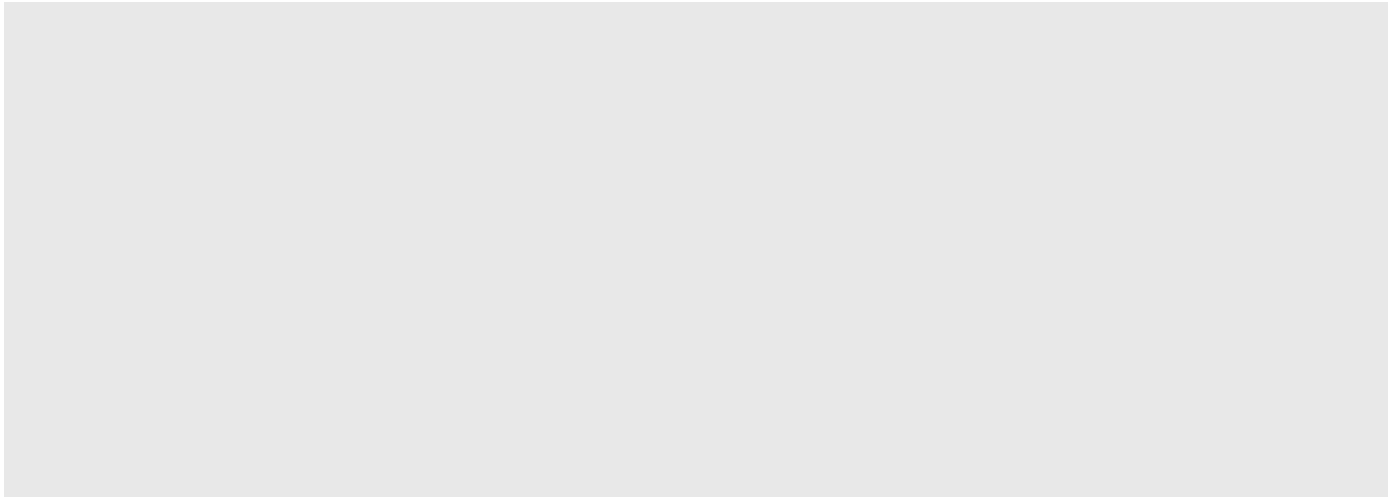
TOP DEMOCRAT ON HOUSE WEAPONIZATION SUBCOMMITTEE BLASTS GOP-CREATED PANEL: 'WEAPONIZATION OF CONGRESS'

The AGs state that after defining which Catholics are the dangerous ones, the memo proposes dealing with the bad Catholics through "the development of sources with access," including in "places of worship."



FBI Director Christopher Wray. (MANDEL NGAN/POOL/AFP via Getty Images)

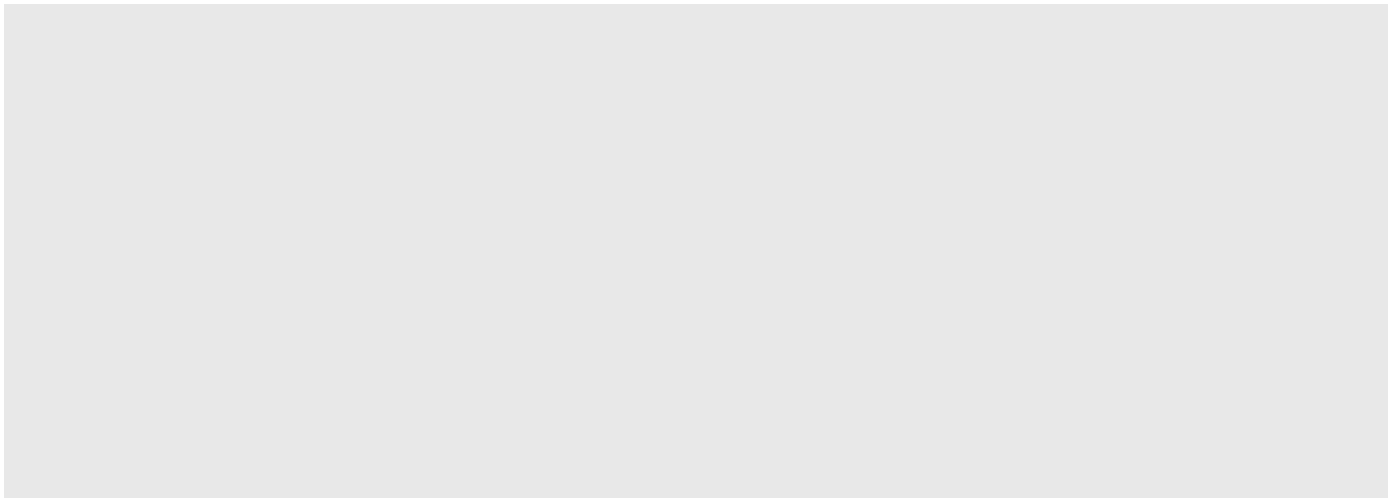
"In other words," the AGs write, "the memorandum proposes recruiting Catholics to enter a sacred house of worship, talk to their fellow Catholics, and report those conversations back to the FBI so that the federal government can keep tabs on the bad Catholics."



The memo cited a list of Catholic "hate groups" assembled by the Southern Poverty Law Center to allocate these "sources," according to the AGs.

WHITE HOUSE PLEDGES TO WORK IN 'GOOD FAITH' WITH GOP AS IT INVESTIGATES DOJ TARGETING OF PARENTS

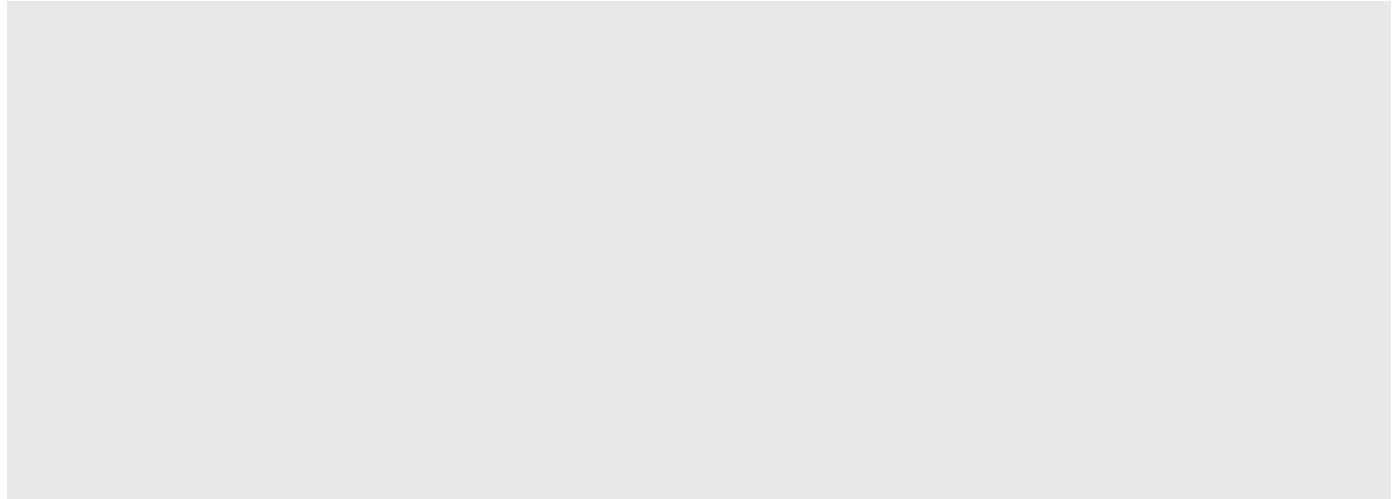
The AGs note that they are "particularly alarmed" by the memo's suggestion that FBI operatives should be developing sources with access, including in places of worship to identify the bad Catholics.



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"The FBI has been down this road before," they note, "having infiltrated countless mosques throughout the country in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The FBI disavowed this ignominious practice in 2008, and revised its internal guidelines in 2010 and 2013 to prevent its operatives from callously disregarding the religious liberty of American citizens."

"It would be very concerning indeed if the FBI had revived this practice against American Catholics or, worse, if it had never shut down the program in the first place," they write.



The AGs asked, among other things, that the agencies provide all communications related to the memo and a briefing, a full, unredacted version, and proof that the FBI is not taking steps to enforce it.

Brianna Herlihy is a politics writer for Fox News Digital.