



National Threat Evaluation and Reporting

Q U A R T E R L Y B U L L E T I N



Quarter 4 – 2021

Research in Focus



The National Threat Evaluation and Reporting (NTER) Program's mission is to strengthen information sharing and enhance our Homeland Security partners' ability to identify and prevent targeted violence and mass attacks, regardless of ideology.^a Our quarterly bulletin is designed to help inform our customers of research developments and resources and to examine Homeland threats through a threat assessment and management perspective.

Hot Topics



Violent Extremist Movement Challenges Traditional Threat Assessment

In a Joint Intelligence Assessment, [Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021](#), the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) assessed that violent extremist groups radicalize and mobilize attackers online, which makes detection and disruption increasingly difficult.^b This analysis, along with a report from the Southern Poverty Law Center, [How an Encrypted Messaging Platform is Changing Extremist Movements](#), highlight that, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, violent extremists have come to rely less on in-person groups and more on diffuse, leaderless digital networks.^c This shift in the threat landscape portends a new challenge for behavioral threat assessment focusing on individuals' pathway to violence. New methodologies in threat assessment are required to incorporate how groups move toward the pathway to violence; also, new strategies are needed to better understand how adversaries prepare and plan their attacks.

Hate Crime Offenders' Motivation Toward Violence

The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism (START) completed a study, [A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders](#), in October that examines the characteristics, motivations, and behaviors of a sample of individuals who committed hate crimes in the United States from 1990 to 2018.^d The overarching goal of this project is to advance knowledge of the pathways to bias crime by moving past static typologies and embrace social science methods designed to handle complexity.^e You can learn more about these offenders' characteristics and motivations at [START | Motivations and Characteristics Of Hate Crime Offenders](#).

Disclaimer: The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Intelligence and Analysis endorses the views of our federal partners referenced in this document; however, DHS does not endorse the views of other private institutions referenced in this document.

Psychology Behind Targeted Violence

Incidents of targeted violence continue to pose a challenge to our nation's Homeland Security. Based on the United States Secret Service (USSS) Annual Report on Mass Attacks in Public Spaces released in 2020, motives for violence are often multifaceted. While many attackers experienced mental health symptoms, the research suggests there is no direct causation between mental health and violence. Among the 34 mass attacks that occurred in 2019, mental illness was identified as an associated factor in only seven incidents. Other attackers are often driven by their own grievances and ideological beliefs—further fueled by a violent tendency to proceed with an attack. Therefore, a threat assessment should incorporate the totality of circumstances including, but not limited to, recent employment history, prior criminal charges, stressors within five years (e.g. financial stability), and observable behavior changes. For a comprehensive list of the totality of circumstances, please see [United States Secret Service | Mass Attacks in Public Spaces - 2019](#).

Preventing School Violence

The USSS National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) report on [Averting Targeted School Violence](#) released in March, states violence prevention is a shared responsibility, and all individuals have a role to play. The findings in this report support a growing body of research indicating targeted school violence is preventable when bystanders report their concerns to professionals who can assess and respond to the situation. According to Stueve et al in [Rethinking the Bystander Role in School Violence Prevention](#), bystanders are referred to as “students who witness fights or other acts of physical aggression, in addition to parents, teachers, and other school staff as well as youth and those who have information about potential violence and those who witness its occurrence.” The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) suggests schools have a protocol and establish a multidisciplinary Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) team to respond when a threat has been identified.^f See its recommendations in [Responding to Students Who Threaten Violence: Helping Handout for the School](#).

Resources

Below are additional resources to increase awareness and understanding of current trends in threat assessment and targeted violence.



- [DHS | National Terrorism Advisory System Bulletin](#)
The Secretary of Homeland Security updated and extended the National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) Bulletin through 13 August 2021 due to a heightened threat environment across the United States. You can read more about the current threat environment and subscribe to NTAS Advisories via e-mail to receive updates.
- [Homeland Security | Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting \(SAR\) Initiative \(NSI\)](#)
The NSI is a joint collaborative effort by the US Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement partners. The initiative provides a tool for identifying and reporting suspicious activity in jurisdictions across the country. Visit the NSI website for additional resources, as well as online SAR training available for law enforcement and hometown security partners to help prevent terrorism and other criminal activity.

- [FBI | What We Investigate | Terrorism](#)

Violent extremists based in the United States have different motivations that could lead them to commit crimes and acts of violence. Learn about the definition of domestic terrorism and the behaviors that could indicate someone is mobilizing to violence by reading the Homegrown Violent Extremist Indicators Booklet on the website.

- [DOD| Center for Development of Security Excellence \(CDSE\)](#)

The CDSE is within the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA) under the Department of Defense (DOD). It provides security training, education, and certification products and services to a broad audience supporting the protection of national security. Visit the website for access to a variety of threat-related trainings and toolkits.

Threat Assessment Spotlight

North Carolina Behavioral Threat Assessment (BeTA) Unit

The North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation (NC SBI) created the Behavioral Threat Assessment (BeTA) Unit to take a proactive approach in preventing violence in their communities. Over the past year, the SBI BeTA Unit has expanded from one full-time agent to seven full-time agents and a supervisor. They have developed expertise in threat assessment to provide trainings across the state to multiple disciplines, including law enforcement, mental health experts, and educators. The BeTA Unit is embarking on an exciting collaboration with the Center for Safer Schools (CFSS). In working with the CFSS, the BeTA Unit can provide guidance for threat assessment trainings in schools and serve as a statewide resource through their local law enforcement agency. Their goal is to bridge the gap between law enforcement and schools on a statewide level. For further information, please e-mail ncbeta@ncsbi.gov.



Program Updates

- The NTER Master Trainer Program (MTP) is now accepting applications for future cohorts. For more information and to apply, please e-mail NTER.MTP@hq.dhs.gov.
- The Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative (NSI) is delighted to announce that the [Online SAR Training for Law Enforcement and Hometown Security Partners](#) has been updated to register the quantity of multiple users participating in the virtual training.



Who to Contact

To learn more about the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative (NSI), Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management Team, or the National Threat Evaluation and Reporting (NTER) Program, please contact NTER@hq.dhs.gov .



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- ^a Targeted violence is defined as an unlawful act of violence dangerous to human life or potentially destructive of critical infrastructure or key resources, in which actors or groups intentionally target a discernible population of individuals or venue in a manner based on: an apparent terrorist motive indicated by the population or venue targeted, or by the particular means of violence employed; the significance of actual or potential impacts to the Nation's economic security, public health, or public safety, or to the minimal operations of the economy and government; or the severity and magnitude of the violence, or harm and impact of either, upon the capabilities of state and local governments to effectively respond without federal assistance.
- ^b Domestic Violent Extremist (DVE) is defined as an individual based and operating primarily within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power who seeks to further political or social goals, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics does not constitute extremism and may be constitutionally protected. DVEs can fit within one or multiple categories of ideological motivation and can span a broad range of groups or movements.
- ^c The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) is an American nonprofit legal advocacy organization specializing in civil rights and public interest litigation. It is a US organization that monitors the activities of domestic hate groups and other extremists.
- ^d Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism (START) is a university-based research, education, and training center comprised of an international network of scholars committed to the scientific study of terrorism, responses to terrorism, and related phenomena. START supports the Department of Homeland Security Emeritus Center of Excellence.
- ^e Bias crime is defined by the US Department of Justice as a crime motivated by bias against race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability at the federal level.
- ^f National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is a professional association representing more than 25,000 school psychologists, graduate students, and related professionals throughout the United States and an additional 25 countries worldwide.