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Countering Violent Extremism: The Application of Risk Assessment Tools in the Criminal Justice and Rehabilitation Process

Literature Review

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ongoing risk of terrorism in the United States is a critical concern for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and other federal and state agencies, local law enforcement, and the American public. Although both domestic and internationally inspired extremism have been studied by a growing community of researchers over the past several years, this research has not been systematically applied to create tools designed to help professionals, such as local law enforcement and community practitioners, to identify early signs of radicalization, divert individuals away from violence, or evaluate their likelihood of successfully completing a diversion or rehabilitation program. The Countering Violent Extremism (CVE): Diversion Program—Assessment Tools to Support Secondary and Tertiary Intervention for Violent Extremism project sponsored by the DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) is designed to leverage existing knowledge and expert input from stakeholders and potential end-users to better understand the need for such tools and the path forward in developing an evidence-based tool for potential validation. Creating tools designed to identify early signs of radicalization and to assess individuals for successful completion of diversion and rehabilitation programs is an inherently complex and multifaceted process that has the potential for major positive impacts on security while also presenting a number of concerns. Because of these issues, the DHS S&T First Responders Group requested RTI International develop a summary on the state of the science of risk assessment tools, especially studies that highlight and examine risk assessments used in relation to violent extremism (VE), and to recommend the necessary steps to successfully integrate empirically valid risk assessment tools in a terrorism prevention context.

This literature review begins by providing an overview of the history of risk assessment as a science and introduces key terms and theories. The following section introduces risk assessment tools specifically developed for use with individuals vulnerable to engaging in violent extremism, or offenders at risk of recidivating to violent extremist crime. Next is an examination of criticisms and limitations of risk assessment tools and an in-depth analysis of why validating tools for this context is so difficult using the Classification of Violent Risk (COVR) tool as an example. Next is an overview of promising programs to reduce risk of engaging in violent extremism in the United States and Europe. We conclude by offering recommendations for the successful validation and integration of risk assessment tools for violent extremism for use in terrorism prevention contexts.

2. THE HISTORY OF RISK ASSESSMENT, ITS USAGE AND CHALLENGES

Risk assessment is a concept that has been used for decades in the criminal justice system. At the most basic level, risk assessment involves collecting data about an offender to assist in making some judgment about the likelihood of an outcome or behavior. Early risk assessment efforts were interested in assessing the risk of committing an offense (or reoffending) while also identifying what steps could be taken to rehabilitate prisoners and reintegrate them into society. In the late 1900s, the prevailing belief turned toward a climate calling for tougher punishment rather than rehabilitation (Hamilton, 2015). With steadily rising rates of incarceration, and a lack of funding and physical space to house prisoners, many jurisdictions have reverted to the rehabilitative models of the mid-1900s. Modern methods focus on managing the level of risk to the community and on reducing risk of recidivating through

interventions designed to support prisoners on a road to recovery.

Risk management theory has moved from a belief that risk resides within an individual, cannot be changed, and either

exists or does not, to a belief that risk is dependent on context, malleable and occurs along a continuum (Borum et al., 1999).¹

In the criminal justice field, modern risk assessment tools serve as decision support tools with a focus on informing treatment and measuring risk reduction, not simply as predictors of recidivism.

Risk assessment tools are frameworks for collecting data and have been used to assist with decision-making in all aspects of the criminal justice process. From pretrial decisions about which offenders can be released pending trial to which offenders are ready for release back into the community after completing a sentence, risk assessment is an ongoing process for criminal offenders. Depending on the phase (pretrial, sentencing, incarceration, release) and the nature of the crimes committed (or potential for future crimes), the tools used may be unique to a specific scenario or crime or may be calculated probabilities of generalized

¹ Traditional risk assessment tools often measured static risk factors, which are unchanging elements of the individual including past criminal history or nationality. More recent tools have moved toward the inclusion of dynamic factors—changeable, malleable characteristics—in risk assessments (DeMatteo et al., 2016). Examples of dynamic factors may be attitude-based (e.g., antigovernment, pro-criminal, “us versus them”), social (e.g., type of friends, number of close relationships) or behavioral (e.g., substance abuse, stockpiling weapons). Dynamic factors can change over time as a person’s belief system or behaviors evolve, but they can also be changed through interventional methods. The inclusion of dynamic risk factors and protective factors is the result of the adoption of a more therapeutic and protocol-based approach to risk assessment that includes plans for treatment and rehabilitation.

offending. Different types of tools are used for a variety of purposes, often in conjunction with one or more other risk assessments. The assessments are used to provide a risk level for specific outcomes within specific contexts. Some jurisdictions adopt existing tools, but many are now developing their own tool to maximize utility for the local population (e.g., Ohio Risk Assessment System).

Risk assessment tools provide a method for examining the likelihood of harm based on available information. In a criminal justice context, this is typically a measure of the likelihood of someone reoffending. The risk could be measured based on the likelihood of general offending (including parole violations or any other offense) or very specific types of offenses such as sexual violence. In the context of terrorism prevention, risk assessment is the process of identifying the level of risk for engaging in future violence based on a set of characteristics demonstrated by known extremist offenders. These characteristics, known as risk factors, have been attributed to a significant proportion of previous offenders and thus appear to be related, albeit not necessarily causally, to the outcome of interest. A risk factor is any attribute (e.g., belief, appearance, experience, environment) that increases the likelihood of the outcome being measured occurring. For example, smoking is a well-known risk factor for lung cancer; ergo, the presence of smoking behavior in an individual increases the likelihood of that person developing lung cancer. It does not mean the individual will develop lung cancer, because some smokers will not. However, when examining patients who develop lung cancer, a significant proportion will be smokers. Many risk factors that have been identified and are used in assessment tools for extremist violence are present in a large proportion of the general population (Smith, 2016); however, the pattern of several risk factors is less prevalent among non-offenders.

Risk factors should not be confused with indicators. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, there is a clear distinction between risk factors and indicators (National Institute of Justice, 2015; Smith, 2016). Risk factors increase the likelihood of a given outcome, while indicators help signal the presence of that outcome. For example, smoking is a risk factor for lung cancer because it increases the likelihood of the outcome (cancer) happening in the future. Coughing blood is an indicator of lung cancer because it signals that the cancer may currently be present. Indicators function similarly to risk factors in that their presence does not necessarily mean that the outcome is happening. The presence of

risk factors and indicators does not automatically mean that the outcome of interest is present (Kraemer et al., 1997).²

Variables that operate in the opposite direction as risk factors are known as protective factors, which insulate and buffer an individual's resilience to radicalization into violent extremist ideologies and organizations. Protective factors, according to Borum (2015, p. 66), are characteristics "that reflect a person's commitment to conventional norms against terrorism, and that involve activities incompatible with terrorism and militant extremist activity." Borum states that the field of violent extremism research has not yet adequately identified and validated an empirical list of protective factors that mitigate against engaging in extremist violence, although "rigorous research exists on risk and protective factors for other forms of violence" (Borum 2015, p .66). Smith (2016) agrees with Borum's suggestion that more work needs to be done to identify protective factors, although some existing assessment tools for violent extremism—namely the ERG22+ and VERA—do include suggested protective factors (Lloyd & Dean, 2015). Examples of potential protective factors that need to be validated further include being married, having stable employment and having no previous history of violence. The importance of understanding protective factors is recognized elsewhere in violent extremism studies literature by Hoffman (2006), Horgan (2009) and Jacobsen (2010). Although there has not been as much research into protective factors relevant to terrorism prevention, a few assessment tools have started to incorporate them.

2.1 Risk Factors and Indicators Specific to Violent Extremism

A significant amount of research and development of risk assessment tools has occurred in the criminal justice field. However, many of these tools focus on general reoffending. There are a number of tools that measure the risk of violence. Questions remain regarding whether these tools are relevant for assessing the risk of extremist behavior. Table 1 summarizes widely accepted risk factors for violent extremism identified by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) through a conference examining risk assessment research in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States (National Institute of Justice, 2015) and through an examination of NIJ-funded research (Smith, 2016). The NIJ conference focused on risk factors for radicalization, while the NIJ-funded research focused on risk factors for

² It is important to note, as Smith (2016) does, that it is unrealistic to expect that the presence of any risk factor—or even the combination of several risk factors—can or will predict "with any accuracy" whether an individual will engage in violent extremism. Although many factors and indicators may indeed be shared among individuals from different time periods and ideologies, radicalization is a complex process with myriad, uniquely evolving pathways to violence (Hamm & Spaaij 2015; Horgan et al., 2016; Klausen, 2016; LaFree, 2015; Smith, 2016).

violent action. Where risk factors alluded to the same concept, they were combined for ease of review. As shown in Table 1, there is a significant overlap. Furthermore, many risk factors for radicalization that were not identified in NIJ-funded research are risk factors associated with other models of extremist violence (Cook et al., 2013; Meloy & Gill, 2016; Pressman & Flockton, 2010).

Table 1. Potential Risk Factors for Radicalizing to Violent Extremism

Risk Factor	Radicalization	Violence
Experiencing identity conflict/being a loner	●	
Feeling there is a lack of meaning in life	●	
Wanting status	●	
Failing to achieve aspirations		●
Wanting to belong/trouble with platonic relationships	●	●
Trouble in romantic relationships		●
Desiring action or adventure/military experience	●	●
Having experienced trauma/abuse	●	●
Having mental health issues or being emotionally unstable/troubled	●	●
Being naïve or having little knowledge of religion and ideology	●	
Having strong religious beliefs/extremist ideology	●	●
Having grievances	●	
Feeling under threat	●	
Having an “us versus them” world view	●	
Justifying violence or illegal activity as a solution to problems	●	
Having engaged in previous criminal activity	●	●
Involvement with a gang or delinquent peers		●
Stressors (e.g., a family crisis, being fired from a job)	●	●
Societal discrimination or injustice	●	
Exposure to violent extremist groups or individuals	●	●
Exposure to violent extremist belief systems or narratives	●	●
Family members or friends in violent extremist network	●	●

Table 2 identifies indicators for the possible presence of radicalization and imminent or ongoing extremist violence. Again, there is a significant amount of overlap between indicators present in these NIJ-funded efforts and other models of violent extremist behavior.

Table 2. Potential Behavioral Indicators That an Individual is Radicalizing to Violent Extremism

Indicators	Radicalization	Violence
Seeking information on a violent extremist ideology	●	
Withdrawing from society or existing relationships	●	
Engaging in conflict with family/others (e.g., teachers, religious leaders)	●	●
Making dramatic lifestyle changes (e.g., unexpectedly quitting work, leaving home)	●	
Immersing oneself with violent extremist peers	●	
Joining or staying in a violent extremist organization	●	●
Making public statements about violent extremist beliefs	●	●
Expressing threats or the intent to engage in terrorist activity	●	●
Engaging in preparatory activities related to an attack (e.g., training, obtaining weapons and materials, conducting surveillance)	●	●
Others becoming aware of one's grievances		●

Although each model of extremist activity (radicalization or violence) contains a unique set of risk factors and indicators, the models themselves, and the risk assessments associated with each model, display a significant amount of overlap. Subsequent sections of this report discuss how and why the risk assessment tools exhibit slight variation in the risk factors and indicators used.

Although a risk factor increases the likelihood of a negative outcome, some risk assessment tools have started to incorporate protective factors, which have the opposite effect. Protective factors are characteristics of the individual or his or her environment that decrease the likelihood of a negative outcome. To date, there has not been as much research into protective factors relevant to violent extremism; however, a few assessment tools have started to incorporate them. Protective factors are believed to counter the effects of risk factors by providing the individual with the support and strength necessary to withstand stressors. Protective factors seen as countering risk factors for radicalization and extremist violence include high self-esteem, strong family and community ties, mental health treatment options, and exposure to nonviolent belief systems.

2.2 Methods for Assessing Risk

Risk assessment has been referred to as “a problem to be solved, rather than as a prediction to be rendered” (Borum, 2015, p. 64). In other words, risk assessments cannot predict future behavior, but can identify certain characteristics an individual possesses, according to his or her life history and current disposition, which may provide an indication of the likelihood to engage in the outcome of interest. Tools for assessing risk have

gradually evolved over the past 50 years, primarily in the criminal justice sector, and will continue to do so in the future. The criminal justice literature often refers to the four generations of risk assessment to highlight the differences among different methods of assessing risk. Although these iterations of risk assessment tools are often viewed as generations, showing incremental improvement with each subsequent generation, all methods are currently in use for different purposes.

First-generation risk assessment involved individuals, typically clinicians and physicians, making judgments of risk based on clinical interviews and qualitative information collection. The clinician estimates the risk based on informal, subjective methods. Using this information, the clinician develops a treatment plan for the offender. This approach usually leads to a yes/no type evaluation indicating whether the person is likely to engage in the behavior. One advantage of this approach lies in its flexibility to tailor specific evaluations to individual cases based on the given context of the situation. Unsurprisingly, these unstructured methods are prone to error and bias (Grove et al., 2000). This method has been criticized for its lack of “interrater reliability, low validity and failure to specify the decision-making process” (Monahan & Steadman 1994; in Dernevik et al., 2009, p. 304). Previous research has shown that predictions based on unstructured professional judgments are only slightly better than chance (Mossman, 1994). However, Fuller and Cowan (1999; in Dernevik et al., 2009) have shown that multidisciplinary teams’ rates of successful predictions of risk can be comparable with actuarial-based protocols over similar temporal periods. This method appears to be plagued by errors typically observed in human judgment, including incorrect beliefs about the validity of risk factors, suboptimal weighting of risk factors, and the inability to correctly factor the low base rate of violent behaviors into the assessment (Scurich, 2016).

Second-generation risk assessment tools use measurable and statistically significant predictors or risk factors to provide a quantitative estimate of the risk level. These tools, often referred to as actuarial risk assessments, were devised by maximizing the predictive value of a set of variables. That is, using existing databases of known offenders, developers employed statistical modeling to identify the variables that maximized the predictive validity of the tool. This method operates on a limited set of common risk factors, which aids in consistency in evaluation from one individual to another. In general, actuarial risk assessments have been shown to be more accurate than unstructured clinical judgment (Grove et al., 2000; Mossman, 1994). However, some (Hart, 1998a,b) have argued that actuarial methods do not effectively account for individual variation and minimize the role of professional judgment. Others have identified concerns over the generalizability of these

tools (Douglas & Reeves, 2009). Because they are based solely on the presence or absence of risk factors, these tools have been criticized for their lack of theory and rehabilitative utility. Specifically, because the risk factors are selected to maximize predictive validity, they do not incorporate a theoretical model to explain how and why the included risk factors lead to the undesirable outcome. Thus, the tools do not provide explanations for the behavior, nor do they provide a treatment plan to limit or reduce the calculated risk level. Part of the reason for this lack of rehabilitative utility is that actuarial risk assessment focuses primarily on unchanging, static risk factors (Hart, 1998a,b). Examples of static risk factors include race, gender, age at first arrest and previous arrest history. Although static risk factors can demonstrate relatively good predictive utility, they do not provide an opportunity for change, and thus the calculated risk level remains the same over time. Table 3 lists some of the most common second-generation assessment tools currently in use.

Table 3. Select Second-Generation Violence Risk Assessment Tools

Tool	Items	Intended Use
Classification of Violence Risk (COVR)	Varies	Predict the likelihood of violence in adult psychiatric inpatients upon release
Level of Service Inventory – Revised (LSI-R)	54	Predict general recidivism in adult offenders
Psychopathy Checklist – Revised	20	Diagnose psychopathy in adult forensic populations
Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (VRAG)	12	Predict likelihood of violence in mentally disordered adults with history of violence
Violence Risk Scale (VRS)	26	Predict likelihood of violence in adult psychiatry patients

The debate over whether actuarial or clinical assessments are more reliable in predicting violent behavior has led researchers and practitioners to adopt a hybrid approach that attempts to maximize the strengths of both while minimizing the weaknesses (Borum et al., 1999; Dolan & Doyle, 2000). To direct the focus of risk assessment back to treatment and clinical intervention, third-generation risk assessments incorporated the actuarial treatment of risk factors with a theoretical understanding of the underlying behavior (Campbell et al., 2009). In addition to the inclusion of the behavioral theory component, third-generation risk assessments began incorporating dynamic risk factors. Dynamic risk factors are variables or characteristics of the person and his or her environment that can change over time. These factors can change through biological, social, psychological and contextual means (Douglas & Skeem, 2005). Examples of dynamic risk factors include attitudes, relationships, beliefs, employment and substance abuse. These factors can be manipulated and changed over

time through interventions, education, training, counseling or the use of medication. Incorporating malleable characteristics as risk factors in a predictive model allows the risk level to change over time, reintroduces the clinician into the risk assessment process and provides some input for the rehabilitation process. This combination of statistically predictive, dynamic factors and clinical evaluation is often identified as structured professional judgment and is the preferred method of many existing psychological assessments. This type of assessment is lauded by many in the literature because of its flexibility for use with a variety of samples (Scurich, 2016), improved accuracy over unstructured clinical judgment (Douglas, 2009) and appreciation for the role of protective factors (Dolan & Doyle, 2000). Although they are an improvement over unstructured clinical judgment and actuarial assessments, structured professional judgment tools do have drawbacks, including the need for an experienced evaluator, inconsistent weighting of risk factors across evaluators and limited increase in validity compared to simple sum scores (Strub et al., 2014). Table 4 provides a summary of common third-generation violence risk assessment tools.

Newer, more complex assessment tools with criminal justice applications are being developed as fourth-generation tools. Fourth-generation risk assessments are specifically developed to guide the risk management process, assist with the selection of interventions and treatment plans, and track progress through rehabilitation. These tools include the measurement of a broader range of risk factors and are designed with a focus on identifying treatment needs (Andrews et al., 2006). Fourth-generation tools include both the risk assessment and a case management and treatment plan. These tools are designed to be used at multiple stages of the criminal justice process. Fourth-generation assessments inform pretrial diversion decisions, sentencing, incarceration status, release decisions and post-release tracking. Assessment is ongoing throughout the process to determine current risk level and changing rehabilitation needs. In addition, these tools incorporate “responsivity,” which serves as a measure of an individual’s readiness for change and ability to respond to rehabilitation efforts (Andrews et al., 1990; Baird et al., 2013). The term “responsivity” originates from the risk-need-responsivity model, the predominant assessment and rehabilitation process currently used in criminal justice and offender management contexts. Table 5 displays some common fourth-generation criminal risk assessment tools with a focus on case management.

Table 4. Select Third-Generation Violence Risk Assessment Tools

Tool	Items	Intended Use
Extremism Risk Guidance Factors (ERG 22+)	22	Assess risk and needs in convicted extremist offenders and other offenders for whom there are credible concerns about their potential to commit extremist offenses
Forensisches Operationalisiertes Therapie-Risiko-Evaluations-System (FOTRES)	Varies	Assess and manage violent recidivism risk for specific offense in adults
Historical, Clinical, Risk Management-20	20	Assess and manage violence risk within correctional, civil psychiatric and forensic psychiatric settings
Historisch, Klinisch, Toekomst-30 (HKT-30)	30	Predict likelihood of violent recidivism in mentally disordered adults
IAT-8	8	Assess whether intervention work is affecting the level of vulnerability to radicalization
Multi-Level Guidelines (MLG)	20	Assess and manage group-based violence
RADAR	15	Identify individuals who would benefit from services to help them disengage from violent extremism
Short-Term Assessment of Risk and Treatability (START)	20	Predict likelihood of violence, suicide, self-harm and self-neglect
Structured Assessment of Protective Factors for Violence Risk (SAPROF)	17	Supplement other assessments by providing measure of relevant protective factors
Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY)	30	Predict likelihood of violence in adolescents
Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol (TRAP-18)	18	Assess risk of individuals engaging in lone-actor terrorism to assist threat assessors with prioritizing cases for risk management
Violence Risk Screening-10 (V-RISK-10)	10	Quickly identify psychiatric patients for violence risk and identify those in need of further assessment
Violent Extremist Risk Assessment-2 (VERA-2)	31	Assess the likelihood of future violence by an identified offender who has been convicted of unlawful ideologically motivated violence

Table 5. Relevant Fourth-Generation Risk Assessment Tools

Tool	Items	Intended Use
Violence Risk Scale-2	26	Identify key treatment targets associated with a violent lifestyle
Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) – Risk of Violence Scale	Varies based on scale	Measure risk of recidivism (including violent recidivism) and needs in a variety of populations
LS/CMI	43	Assess general recidivism risk and identify rehabilitation needs
Post-Conviction Risk Assessment	56 (+80 item self-report)	Identify recidivism risk level and rehabilitation needs for offenders in the federal probation system
Violence Risk Scale (VRS)	26	Assess risk of violence and change resulting from treatment for offenders awaiting release
Returnee 45	45	Organize needs and risk behaviors of returning foreign terrorist fighters for further assessment by professionals

2.3 General Recidivism, Violent Behavior and Terrorism Prevention-Specific Tools

Much of the ongoing development of risk assessment tools has occurred in the criminal justice sector. As a result, the most developed, tested and researched instruments tend to focus on needs related to the assessment and management of most offenders in the criminal justice system. The most pressing risk needs for the entire population of offenders are related to the commission of additional crimes (while awaiting trial or following release) and the commission of violent acts (while awaiting trial, during incarceration and following release). These scales are identified and discussed above because they are informative to the development of tools to assess risk of violent extremist behavior. However, as several authors have warned, these tools are not ideal for the specific context of violent extremism (Dernevik et al., 2009; Pressman, 2009; Webster et al., 1997). Violent extremist behavior is characterized by a unique set of motivations, actions and rehabilitation needs (Pressman, 2009; Roberts & Horgan, 2008). Thus, a tool designed specifically for use with identified violent extremists is more appropriate. Monahan (2012) criticized the lack of valid risk factors identified by the research community and the inability to assess the risk of extremist violence rather than common violence. Recently, several tools to assess risk in terrorism prevention-specific contexts have been in development (highlighted in Table 4 and 5).

As noted by the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), (2017), some governments currently use violence risk assessment tools with terrorists and extremists both to

determine the appropriate prison setting, and to identify risks and needs to guide the direction of treatment. The VERA-2 is the most widely used and researched tool currently available for this population. These tools have shown promise, but require further development and testing. Assessments specific to violent extremism face many of the same requirements and challenges as tools used with general offenders. Specifically, they need to be grounded in theory and applicable within a useful model of offender management.

2.4 Risk-Need-Responsivity Model

The risk-need-responsivity model is currently the most widely accepted evidence-based model of offender risk assessment and rehabilitation. Andrews, Bonta and Hoge (1990) identified key elements of offender treatment programs that were effective. The risk-need-responsivity model is built on three primary principles the authors outlined that are used to guide assessment and rehabilitation to address offender risk and recidivism:

- The Risk principle states that the level of treatment provided for the offender should be commensurate with the level of risk posed by the offender. Low-risk offenders require a low level of treatment, while high-risk offenders would require a more intensive treatment plan. Importantly, as changes in risk are identified, the treatment plan should be adjusted accordingly to match the level of risk predicted for the offender.
- The Need principle states that treatment and rehabilitation plans should be based on the offender's criminogenic needs. Criminogenic needs are essentially dynamic risk factors. They are factors that have been linked to the outcome behavior(s) of interest, are malleable, and a reduction or removal of the need is accompanied by a change in the dynamic risk factor, and therefore, also the risk level.
- The Responsivity principle states that treatment and rehabilitation interventions should use cognitive social learning strategies that address the criminogenic needs by replacing risk-associated behaviors with more prosocial ones. Cognitive social learning posits that new behaviors can be learned through positive modeling, learner observation and imitation of others. In addition, the responsivity principle posits that the efficacy of rehabilitation and treatment will be enhanced if the interventions are matched to personal factors that improve learning. Specifically, tailoring rehabilitation programs to the learning style, cognitive ability, age, gender, race, etc., will improve the transfer of information and lead to better results.

This model is used in existing prison and parole systems to guide risk management programs for both general and violent offenders. The model offers general guidelines for structuring risk assessment and rehabilitation interventions, which allows for a tailored approach to meet the needs of the offender population of interest. The potential utility of a risk-need-responsivity model for reducing violent extremism risk has been alluded to by several experts, but remains untested (Dean, 2016; RAN, 2016).

3. ASSESSMENT TOOLS SPECIFIC TO TERRORISM PREVENTION

Borum (2015) argues that existing structured professional judgment tools for violence in general assume a linear cumulative risk model. In other words, more risk factors present equates to a higher risk of engaging in violence, which is not necessarily true for engaging in extremist violence. Pressman (2009) argued that existing risk assessment tools were an effective way to assess future violence, but were inadequate for assessing VE risk because they in no way account for the background and motivations of ideologically motivated individuals. For these reasons, researchers have been working to develop VE-specific assessment protocols that take advantage of the known strengths of general risk assessment tools, but prioritize extremist-specific characteristics over those of individuals likely to commit more general violent acts.

Although risk assessments that attempt to predict general violence are plentiful, the applicability of such instruments for use with violent extremists has been called into question. Specifically, the developers of the HCR-20, one of the most commonly used violence risk assessment tools, have been very clear that its use should be limited to historically violent individuals displaying characteristics of mental illness or personality disorder (Webster et al. 1997). Similarly, Dernevik et al. (2009) suggest that findings and tools developed using offenders with mental illness and generally violent behavior are not applicable to cases where the individual is politically or ideologically motivated.

Roberts and Horgan (2008) called for systematic research to identify the links between risk factors and terrorism as a prelude to the development of tailored risk assessment tools. They argued for the development of empirically valid risk assessment models for terrorism, identifying both the outcomes to be predicted and the risk and protective factors associated with the increase (or decrease) in the likelihood of those outcomes. Monahan (2012) examined several major risk factors for violence studied in the literature and compared the evidence surrounding these factors as they relate to terrorism. He concluded that little to no overlap exists in risk factors for common violence and risk factors for terrorism, and indicated that research had largely failed to identify any useful risk factors for terrorism. He did, however, identify four categories of variables that could prove to be valid risk factors for terrorism: (1) ideology, (2) affiliations, (3) grievances and (4) moral emotions. In a later summary of the findings related to these variables, Monahan and Skeem (2015) suggested a fifth category he termed "identities," which can be described as a feeling of oneness with a chosen group or cause. Each of these categories has received at least some support over the years.

Monahan (2012) has been critical of the lack of valid risk factors identified by the research community and the inability to assess the risk of extremist violence rather than common violence. One exception that he called out was the Violent Extremism Risk Assessment (VERA), developed to specifically assess the risk of violent extremist behavior in prisons (Pressman, 2009). The VERA-2 is the most widely used and researched tool currently available for this population. These tools have shown promise, but require further development and testing. Assessments specific to violent extremism face many of the same requirements and challenges as tools used with general offenders. Specifically, they need to be grounded in theory and applicable within a useful model of offender management.

3.1 The Violent Extremism Risk Assessment

The VERA was designed and developed to fill the need for a tool to assess the risk of violent political extremism. The VERA was modeled after other existing violence risk assessment tools, most notably the HCR-20 and the SAVRY, to be an empirically grounded structured professional judgment instrument. Using the thinking laid out by Roberts and Horgan (2008), the developers of the VERA sought to identify empirically valid risk factors for terrorism and political extremism. A list of factors relevant to political, religious and ideological extremism was compared to the most commonly used general violence risk assessments (HCR-20 and SAVRY) to identify overlap (Pressman, 2009). Most items used to assess the risk for common violence were unrelated to the risk factors for violent political extremism. These findings supported the development of a tool specifically designed to measure the risk of violent political extremism.

The VERA consisted of 28 items categorized into five sections: (1) Attitude Items, (2) Contextual Items, (3) Historical Items, (4) Protective Items and (5) Demographic Items. Attitude Items represent thoughts or beliefs that increase the likelihood of violent political extremism and terrorist behavior. Contextual Items examine the impact of the individuals' social environment and social links to known extremist groups. Historical Items refer to violent actions in the past or an indication of approval for violence. Protective Items are those aspects of a person's life that may prevent or lessen the likelihood of them participating in violent acts. For the VERA, these include a weakening of extremist ideas or increased social support. Finally, Demographic Items refer to sex, age and marital status, all of which have been shown to be risk factors for terrorism (Monahan, 2012).

In 2010, the VERA was modified based on feedback from users, and the VERA-2 was released (Pressman & Flockton, 2010). The VERA-2 contains indicators associated with 25 risk factors and 6 protective factors. The four main areas of risk factors were renamed to

represent updates and included: (1) Beliefs and Attitudes, (2) Context and Intent, (3) History and Capability, and (4) Commitment and Motivation. The protective items section expanded slightly from the original VERA, adding one indicator to cover experiences in deradicalization programs, and separating family and community support for nonviolence into two indicators.

Pressman and Flockton (2010) identify evidence to support the inclusion of each of the 31 indicators present on the VERA-2. In addition, many of the indicators closely align with the five categories of promising variables identified by Monahan and colleagues (2012, 2015). Specifically, Ideology (commitment to ideology justifying violence), Affiliations (personal contact with violent extremists), Grievances (perceived victim of injustice and grievances) and Moral Emotions (feelings of hate, frustration, persecution, alienation) all have items that directly identify the presence of these concepts.

The VERA-2 is generally used in post-conviction high-security settings with individuals convicted of extremist violence. Some have suggested that the VERA-2 could be of use in information-gathering investigations or in other correctional facilities; however, the developers stress that it is not a panacea for the prediction of radical violence and should be used only as a supplement to existing risk assessment strategies (Pressman & Flockton, 2012).

3.2 Multilevel Guidelines for the Assessment and Management of Group-Based Violence

Although the VERA-2 takes social and contextual aspects of the individual's environment into consideration, it is primarily an individual-level approach to assessing risk of violent extremism. That is, characteristics and behaviors that are associated with the individual form the basis for the assessment. The social psychological perspective of violence holds that group membership, group behavior and group-level factors are likely to play some role in an individual's decision to commit extremist violence (Cook et al., 2013; Pynchon & Borum, 1999). Pynchon and Borum (1999) suggest that an examination of the potential impact of group behavior and group membership on individual extremist behavior is necessary given our understanding of the influence that groups and group membership have on behavior in general. Additionally, Cook et al. (2013) identified the need to incorporate both individual and group risk factors into a comprehensive violence risk assessment approach. The result of this effort was the Multi-Level Guidelines (MLG), a set of structured professional judgment guidelines for assessing group-based violence (e.g., gangs, criminal networks) using both individual- and group-level factors.

The MLG is based on a model of violence risk factors identified in the group-based violence literature. The model consists of four domains of risk factors: (1) Individual, (2) Individual-Group, (3) Group and (4) Group-Societal. Individual risk factors are independent of group membership and focus largely on the history and previous behavior of the person being assessed. Individual-Group factors are based on the individual's membership in the group and aim to measure the attitudes of the individual and his or her role within the group. Group factors are characteristics of the group's culture. The fourth domain, Group-Societal factors, captures the interplay between the group and society, including the presence of other groups which may be impacting beliefs or behavior. These domains are presented as a nested model with each domain being a member of each subsequent domain (e.g., the individual is contained within the Individual-Group dynamic and so on). Using this model, Cook et al. (2013) identify risk factors for violence within each of the domains.

The MLG is composed of 20 risk factors spread across the four domains identified within the original model. Specifically, the MLG contains six individual, four individual-group, six group and four group-societal risk factors. Cook et al. (2015) compared and contrasted the content of the MLG with that of the VERA-2 and the HCR-20. For this review, the overlap of the MLG and VERA-2 are of the most interest. The items from both instruments were mapped onto the model of violence risk factors developed in conjunction with the MLG guidelines (Cook et al., 2013). Within the individual domain, the content of the two instruments clustered in the following areas: individual history of violence, adverse childhood experiences, problems fitting in with society, capacity for violent actions and antisocial orientation. The individual-group domain showed similarities between the instruments related to extremist orientation, dedication to the group/cause and negative attitudes toward others. Given that the MLG contains two additional domains that are based on group culture and group-society interactions, one would not expect much overlap in these domains. That expectation was confirmed.

3.3 Structured Guidelines for Assessing Risk in Extremist Offenders

As discussed above, around the same time the VERA was being developed, researchers in Europe were investigating how to identify extremist actors before they turned violent (Dernevik et al., 2009). In the United Kingdom, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) sought an empirically based, transparent method for assessing the risk of future extremist offenses among offenders to assist with identifying interventions and treatment needs (Lloyd & Dean, 2015). NOMS convened a panel of experts in the fields of risk assessment and terrorism to assist with the development of this new methodology.

The first steps toward the development of the Structured Risk Guidance (SRG) tool involved individual case review of offenders. The goal was to identify what needs within the individual offenders were being satisfied by their extremist behavior and to match these with factors identified in the terrorist/extremist literature. In addition (and likely because of the presence of one of the MLG developers on the advisory panel), NOMS elected to focus not only on the individual, but also on social support and the influence of groups over the individual. Ultimately, 21 factors were identified as common among the convicted extremists who were initially studied. The factors were distributed among four dimensions: (1) beliefs, (2) motivations, (3) intent and (4) capability.

The SRG was shared with users, and casework with known offenders continued. Based on user feedback and the additional casework knowledge, the SRG was revised and ultimately developed into the Extremism Risk Guidelines (ERG). The ERG retained many of the same risk factors from the original tool, with some minor changes. The ERG categorizes risk factors among three dimensions: (1) engagement (a combination of beliefs and motivations from the SRG), (2) intent and (3) capability. The ERG, developed using Ajzen and Fishbein's (2005) Theory of Reasoned Action to explain extremist offending using the belief-intent-action continuum, maintains clear delineation among those three dimensions. Engagement refers to contact, interaction or the development of beliefs consistent with an ideologically motivated group. Here the attitudes, behaviors and group norms necessary for the development of behavioral intent are cultivated. Intent provides a measure of the readiness level or potential to offend. This dimension includes factors examining both the individual's mental state and plans for action or outcomes. The third dimension, capability, contains risk factors that point to the person's knowledge, skills and abilities for committing extremist offenses and their past criminal history.

The ERG has developed over time into the ERG 22+. The number 22 refers to the number of risk factors spread across the three dimensions. The "+" is used to signify that the instrument is not simply a checklist of risk factors, but rather a process in which assessors take myriad factors into consideration. Guidance documents for the ERG 22+ instruct assessors to consider context and personal attributes of the offender in their assessment. In addition, other relevant factors may be identified as contributors or deterrents for extremism. The idea that aspects of the individual or his or her environment may increase or decrease the likelihood of extremist offenses is consistent with the concept of protective factors observed in the VERA-2.

The ERG 22+ and VERA-2 are similar in some aspects, but also display some key differences. The ERG 22+ was developed to assess the likelihood of an individual committing any criminal act on behalf of a group or cause promoting extremist views, whereas the VERA-2 focuses on extremist violence. Although there is some overlap in the dimensions assessed, the tools were developed for different uses, and thus, for example, the ERG 22+ contains no indicators that relate specifically to violence.

3.4 RADAR

The Australian Government also saw the need for a risk assessment tool to help combat the terrorist threat. However, unlike the VERA-2, the MLG and the ERG 22+, the Australians set out to develop a tool that would delineate the observable steps in the process of radicalization so that individuals could be directed to existing state programs to prevent them from committing extremist offenses. Much like the ERG 22+, RADAR is a protocol designed to systematically document all aspects of a person and his or her environment. All of this information is taken into account for decision-making purposes. The protocol consists of two assessments: a screening assessment and an in-depth assessment.

The screening assessment contains 15 indicators across three dimensions: (1) Ideology, (2) Social Relations and (3) Action Orientation. These dimensions correspond to the three segments of a person's life where they are likely to experience significant shifts during the radicalization process. Ideological shifts are changes to the beliefs and attitudes of individuals during radicalization. Social relations refer to the impact that others, including family, groups and close contacts, have during the radicalization process. Finally, Action Orientation is identified as taking an "us versus them" attitude, growing suspicious or hateful of others, and the increased commission of minor crimes with possible escalation over time. Each of these three dimensions is well documented and is represented by risk factors or indicators within each of the assessments tools discussed in this section. RADAR also implements a measure of intensity for each indicator varying from Notable (minor) to Concerning (moderate) to Attention (major) levels of intensity. The division of indicators into varying intensity levels allows assessors to factor in how far along the radicalization continuum the person may be. In addition to the 15 indicators, the screening assessment includes three protective factors (presence of influential/supportive family member, past example of societal engagement, generally not violent) for consideration.

If warranted, based on the results of the initial screening, individuals may undergo an in-depth risk analysis. The in-depth analysis contains 27 indicators arranged around the same three dimensions present in the screening tool. The in-depth analysis requires the gathering

of significant details surrounding each indicator to allow for a panel review. Subsequent phases of the protocol, namely the intervention and follow-up stages, incorporate measures of coping and identity to assess the ability of the individual to function post-radicalization and the level of disengagement from the ideology.

Research using the RADAR or direct comparisons to other existing instruments is not available in the published literature. As indicated above, significant overlap exists among the dimensions and indicators present in this and other tools. However, the RADAR differs in that it was specifically designed to identify those at risk for radicalization early in the process. The RADAR is used to identify high-risk individuals who would benefit from programs designed to prevent radicalization, as opposed to trying to predict the likelihood of low base rate violent actions.

3.5 Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol

Building on the foundational risk assessment literature and threat assessment approaches developed by the U.S. Secret Service, researchers have identified patterns of behavior temporally adjacent to acts of targeted violence (Meloy & O’Toole, 2011; Meloy et al., 2012, 2014, 2015). Specifically, behavioral patterns that typically immediately precede an act of targeted, nonrandom violence—what they refer to as “warning behaviors”—have been identified to allow law enforcement to better direct resources and attention toward actors who are further along the pathway to violence. These behaviors have been identified primarily through casework on lone actor offenders, including terrorists, school shooters, workplace shooters and others who have perpetrated violence against a specific target. The central thesis of this approach is that by identifying behavior patterns as they relate to the timeframe of an attack, law enforcement and mental health professionals will be better able to determine the appropriate level of monitoring versus active risk management needed. The developers also hypothesize that these warning behaviors, when supplemented by indicators of characteristics associated with lone actor terrorism in previous research, may be more useful for identifying lone actor terrorists than other approaches.

Rather than taking a dimensional approach as the previously discussed instruments have, the Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol (TRAP)-18 examines two broad categories of indicators: (1) warning behaviors and (2) distal characteristics. The TRAP-18 model identifies eight proximal types of behavior, observable in varying patterns, commonly observed immediately preceding the expression of targeted violence. The presence of these behaviors indicates a warning; consistent with common meteorological parlance, this means that the violent act may be imminent and the individual should be involved in active risk

management. In addition to the warning behaviors, the TRAP-18 is used to assess 10 distal, more dynamic characteristics identified in the terrorism literature. These characteristics are commonly observed in individuals with the potential for extremist action, but are not necessarily indicative of those who are about to commit violent acts. A brief description of the warning behaviors and distal characteristics is provided in Table 6.

Table 6. Warning Behaviors and Distal Characteristics Assessed Using the TRAP-18 Protocol

Behavior/Characteristic	Description
Warning Behaviors	
Pathway	Researching, planning or preparing for the violent act.
Fixation	Increasing interest (preoccupation) with a person, cause or target.
Identification	Developing a desire to be a warrior or commando, or emulate the behavior of others who have committed violent acts.
Novel Aggression	Initial violent action that appears unrelated to the target.
Energy Burst	Increasing activities related to the target, even if they seem harmless.
Leakage	Communicating intent to a third party.
Last Resort	Behavior exhibiting crucial need for violence or taking action.
Directly Communicated Threat	Communication of a direct threat to the target.
Distal Characteristics	
Personal Grievance and Moral Outrage	Loss of something important, identification with a group that has been violated/suffered.
Framed by Ideology	Presence of beliefs that justify intent to act, may be religious, political or single issue beliefs.
Failure to Affiliate	Failure to make contact or rejection from extremist group.
Dependence on Virtual Community	Active communication with others through virtual networks, including learning new techniques or posting opinions/rants.
Thwarting of Occupational Goals	Failure at academic or professional goals.
Changes in Thinking and Emotion	Development of more concrete beliefs with little questioning of extreme ideas. Belief in superiority of self or ideas.
Failure of sexual-intimate pair bonding	Failure to develop significant intimate relationships or sexualizing violence.
Mental Disorder	Past or present symptoms of major mental illness.
Greater Creativity and Innovation	Tactical thinking.
Criminal Violence	History of criminal violence, particularly predatory in nature.

The TRAP-18 developers have identified the tool as an investigative template and stress that it has not been tested well enough to be considered an assessment tool (Meloy & Gill, 2016). They also suggest that the TRAP-18 be used in conjunction with other tools (specifically the VERA-2 and MLG) to allow for improved accuracy through multiple methods (Meloy et al., 2015). Early research, however, has been promising. Application of the TRAP-18 to a set of 22 lone actor European terrorists showed indications of good interrater reliability and positive initial assessments of content validity (Meloy et al., 2015). Meloy and Gill (2016) conducted an initial assessment of the criterion validity of the TRAP-18 using data from 111 lone actor terrorists from the United States and Europe. In addition, a study by Meloy et al. (2014), using a data set of school shooters and other students of concern who did not commit violent acts, provided some support for the discriminant validity of the instrument's warning behaviors through its ability to discern school shooters from others. The developers have called for additional research into the limitations and utility of the TRAP-18 (Meloy & Gill, 2016).

3.6 IAT8

The United Kingdom's Channel program is designed to provide early-stage support for those identified as vulnerable to being radicalized or drawn into committing violent extremist acts. To support the existing components and projects within Channel, the UK developed the IAT8 to serve as an assessment framework or improvement metric to measure the ongoing vulnerability of individuals receiving services through Channel. The IAT8 is intended for ongoing measurement, primarily at the following four stages: (1) the start of support, (2) during support, (3) end of support and (4) post-support follow-up. Using these milestones as points of measurement, the individual's level of vulnerability can be assessed to provide evidence of the efficacy of the programming.

The IAT8 measures an individual's risk using vulnerability and protective factors. Vulnerability factors are influences believed to make the person more vulnerable to radicalization and include both push factors (within individual characteristics) and pull factors (external influences). Protective factors, as defined earlier, are also considered on the IAT8. Each of the eight dimensions is assigned both vulnerability and protection ratings on a 0-3 scale (not evident to strongly applies). Vulnerability indicates a situation where the factor is present and may lead to an increased likelihood of radicalization. Protection circumstances for each factor are indicative of positive influences or outcomes that are relevant to the factor (e.g., a therapeutic relationship with a professional that would result

in healthier attitudes or beliefs, a mentoring relationship, or starting a new activity that serves as a deterrent).

The IAT8 is largely used as a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of programming to reduce vulnerability to extremist ideologies. The repeated measures nature of the instrument lends itself to measurements of within-person changes in vulnerability over time as the person progresses through the relevant program. However, the factors assessed as part of the IAT8 are consistent with those in use on other tools currently available.

4. CRITICISMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE OF RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Numerous challenges exist to developing tools accurate and precise enough to practically and authoritatively measure the risk of an individual engaging in extremist violence. Despite similarities between convicted violent extremists identified in the literature (Borum, 2011, 2015; Dernevik et al., 2009; Gill et al., 2014; Grunewalde et al., 2013; Hamm & Spaaij, 2015; Horgan, 2008; Kruglanski et al., 2008; Roberts & Horgan, 2008; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Smith, 2016), most researchers and practitioners from private, academic and federal organizations support the assertion that there is no single profile for or pathway to violent extremism (Borum, 2011; Department of Defense, 2012; Gill et al., 2014; Hamm & Spaaij, 2015; Horgan, 2008; Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Van der Valk & Wagenaar, 2010). Borum et al. (1999, p. 328) argue that the profiles of those at risk for engaging in relatively rare types of violence will never be “sufficiently specific or sensitive” and there will be a large majority of individuals who fit these profiles, but who will never engage in violence. Gill et al. (2014, p. 433) supported this claim over a decade later stating, “even if such a profile were evident, an over-reliance on the use of such a profile would be unwarranted because many more people who do not engage in lone-actor terrorism would share these characteristics.” For assessment tools for violent extremism to have any authority, they must be empirically validated. None of the existing tools have been comprehensively validated, in part because extremist violence is a relatively rare occurrence and its perpetrators are often either killed in the act or arrested and unavailable for interview by researchers (Borum, 2015; Department of Defense, 2012; Hamm & Spaaij, 2015; Roberts & Horgan, 2008). Furthermore, motivations for engaging in violent extremism may be dependent on varying cultural and historical contexts, making further analysis of relevant risk factors associated with radicalization and violent extremism even more difficult to statistically analyze.

Despite their widespread use throughout the various levels and proceedings of the criminal justice system, a significant amount of debate exists regarding the use of risk assessments. Those in favor of their use argue that they can be used to assist the court with decisions about who should remain incarcerated or be released, and that they provide protections important for public safety (Starr, 2014). In addition, proponents claim the use of risk assessments benefits the offender by potentially allowing for shorter sentences, providing useful information used to identify treatments, and preventing offenders from reoffending by keeping them incarcerated until they are ready to be released (Douglas et al., 2016).

However, many practitioners and researchers argue against the use of risk assessments, or at the very least call for additional research and development to improve the tools.

4.1 Limitations of Group-level Characteristics Applied to Individuals

A common concern of risk assessment opponents is that decisions are being made about the risk an individual poses based on group-level characteristics. Specifically, the methods by which actuarial elements of these tools are developed are based on aggregate probability using historical data. Although most concede that group behavior has some predictive relevance, predictions of future individual-level behavior based on group-level data are seen as inappropriate for decision-making purposes (Hart et al., 2007). Some have argued that to make inferences about an individual based on his or her membership in a group would be illogical (Cook & Michie, 2010). The concern is that the predictive accuracy of actuarial tools is limited by reliance on group-level data. Proponents of risk assessment argue that although predictions will contain some error, and will never be perfect, they are still able to provide useful information for risk assessment and risk reduction (Faigman et al., 2014; Skeem & Monahan, 2011). From a statistical standpoint, it has been argued that concerns over the effect of group/individual prediction on predictive accuracy are non-issues that are common among many types of predictive instruments (Tonry, 2014). Specifically, Imrey and Dawid (2015) argued that precise estimation at the individual level is not required because the goal of risk assessment is to distinguish between high- and low-risk offenders, which has been routinely demonstrated by existing tools. Finally, it has been argued that even with slightly reduced predictive accuracy because of the existing level of analysis issue, risk assessments are less error prone than unaided human decision making (Skeem & Lowenkamp, 2016).

Recently, using group-level variables as predictors of risk has raised concerns over the possibility that certain groups, especially racial minorities, might be disproportionately negatively affected by their use (Tonry, 2013). These concerns are tied to the use of static risk factors that may directly (e.g., race) or indirectly (e.g., education, employment, previous arrest history) promote unfair stereotypes. Specifically, when race is used as a predictor of risk, certain racial subgroups are more likely than others to be categorized as high risk. Likewise, the use of variables that are highly correlated with race (e.g., age at first arrest) will lead to the same outcomes. Several explanations for this have been proposed in the literature including differential exposure to risk and social inequality (Hannah-Moffat, 2010 as cited in James, 2015). Risk assessments that systematically

negatively affect racial minorities will lead to unfair outcomes for the affected groups based on the potential for longer initial sentences, fewer opportunities for rehabilitation or diversion, and fewer chances for early release.

In defense of risk assessment practices, Austin (2004) pointed to the need for group-based prediction because of the inability to predict individual-level behavior in the context of so many situational and environmental factors. To assess the extent of the racial discrimination problem, Singh and Fazel (2010) searched for evidence of differential predictive ability of assessment tools based on race using a meta-analytic approach and were unable to confirm that such bias existed. However, they were careful to suggest that none of the studies in their analysis compared groups directly and that such analyses were warranted to be certain that no effect existed. Monahan and Skeem (2015) argue that additional investigation is warranted, but that removing contentious variables from risk prediction completely is an unwise move given their demonstrated predictive utility, and warn that their premature removal could create a bigger racial discrimination issue that is less transparent. Debate continues over the use of static risk factors because of their seemingly powerful predictive utility in light of potential discriminatory side effects (Douglas et al., 2017).

4.2 Inconsistent Delivery

Although much of the debate surrounding the legal and ethical use of risk assessment tools has centered around questions related to the variables used, researchers also warn that the methods by which they are implemented and the staff responsible for administration may also impact the predictive accuracy (Bonta et al., 2001). Risk assessment tools are developed and validated based on specific decision rules that guide how data are collected and what data are included. Variation from the validated protocol leads to degradation of the validity and accuracy of the tool. For example, researchers have shown that using untrained staff to administer risk assessments may cause the predictive ability of the tool to decrease significantly or even disappear (Flores et al., 2006; PEW, 2011). The same study determined that the number of years of experience for trained staff could also affect predictive accuracy.

In a study involving threat assessment professionals (N = 44), university students (N = 45) and laypersons (N = 45), Geurts (2017) found higher consensus on risk ratings among professionals than among the other two groups in response to three hypothetical cases. Furthermore, the professional group requested more relevant information in making their decision (Geurts, 2017). These findings suggest two important conclusions. The first is that there appears to be more consistent agreement on assessments among professionals.

Second, professionals are better at identifying critical characteristics and requesting additional clarification. This reflects the previous supposition that assessment tools benefit from a mixture of both actuarial and clinical approaches that leverage the skill and experience of trained professionals. In addition, the performance of assessment tools is greatly improved when used by trained staff who possess the acuity to properly evaluate, supplement and qualify the results of the assessment.

A lack of consistency in administration of risk assessment tools results in a lack of consistency with respect to the predicted outcomes. To ensure consistency, users need to be rigorously trained in the use of off-the-shelf tools that may be adopted, and training programs will need to be developed for any nonproprietary tools. In addition to the initial training efforts, administrators will require ongoing training in the use of the tool to avoid calibration drift (Casey et al., 2014). The cost of ongoing training can be prohibitive; however, the consequences of not doing so could be far greater. This has led some to suggest that more simplistic, easier to use tools may be preferable, but require further investigation (Hanson, 2009).

The method of administration refers not only to the abilities of the individuals using assessment tools, but also to decisions about how, when and with whom they are used. Development and training costs are a barrier to the development and implementation of use-specific tools (Lowenkamp et al., 2008; Mamalian, 2011). As a result, users often adopt one or more of the existing off-the-shelf solutions. The result may be the use of a tool that is not suitable for a particular context, which would lead to lower predictive utility. Regardless of whether a new tool is developed or an existing tool is adopted, risk assessments should be validated using the population of interest. In addition to the initial validation, tools should be revalidated over time to account for any changes in what is being measured or the population it is being used to measure (Casey et al., 2014). Specific challenges that affect efforts to validate a risk assessment specific to terrorism prevention are discussed in Section 6.

4.3 Legal and Cultural Concerns for Violent Extremism Assessment Tools

The United States is a pluralistic society comprising many cultures and subcultures, and each group and subgroup has experienced life through its own unique cultural lens. Accordingly, different cultures in the United States have varying attitudes and responses to government outreach, particularly in terms of law enforcement and the judicial system. Despite different experiences and outlooks, several values and practices transcend these

microcosms and generally define the American experience—namely rights afforded to citizens by the Bill of Rights.

When designing assessment tools and protocols for conducting assessments, it is important to balance individuals' first amendment freedoms with concerns for public safety (Council of Europe, 2015; Doosje et al., 2013; Horgan, 2009; Kruglanski et al., 2008; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Smith, 2016). Many domestic and international agencies have clauses in their policy guidelines specifically stating their commitment to upholding these freedoms. For example, guidelines created by the Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law for the European Committee on Crime Problems state that "Preventing and tackling radicalization and violent extremism shall always be based on the rule of law and shall respect human rights and fundamental freedoms" (Council of Europe, 2015, p. 4). The NYPD report "Radicalization in the West" states that "Protecting society against destruction, and if possible, diverting vulnerable young men from destructive and self-destructive paths....without trampling our freedoms [sic], requires greater understanding of the process that leads to terrorism" (Silber & Bhatt, 2007, p. 12). In the United States and indeed most culturally western democracies, individuals are free to have extreme and even radical views (FBI, 2016; Smith, 2016) so long as they are not participating in or inciting violence. In the 2016 report "Preventing Extremism in Schools," the FBI states "The difference between protected speech and illegal incitement can be a very fine line...The issue is not if the individual voiced his/her support, but rather has advocated imminent violence in support of an extremist organization and that violence is likely to occur as a result" (FBI, 2016, p. 13). Similarly in the UK, Lloyd and Dean (2015, p. 41) argue that "individuals are free to hold any beliefs and to express dissent, but where there are democratic means to accommodate this they should not resort to breaking the law or to the use of violence." In other words, unless an individual has broken the law or there is compelling evidence that he or she will break the law, law enforcement is limited in its responses, and many community- and faith-based groups and advocates could object to the administration or prescription of any formal assessment for violent extremism. Interviews conducted by RTI in 2016 revealed that many stakeholders in the Arab American and Muslim American communities question the involvement of law enforcement in the precriminal phase of radicalization. Others stated a concern for being targeted by the FBI for investigation because of simply practicing their religion or attending mosque too frequently (RTI International, 2016).

Culturally, Americans have very different responses to the government, particularly law enforcement. This is not to suggest that each individual member of a community shares the same opinions and experiences of the community at large, though. Nevertheless, it is

important to consider how the design and application of an assessment tool for extremist violence will be accepted by the communities in which it is deployed. Particular consideration should be paid to avoiding any chance of further alienating a community or individual or playing into an individual's reasons for becoming radicalized. For example, Victoroff (2005, p. 20; in Kleinmann, 2012, p. 285) notes that many terrorists "cite injustices of their treatment by governments that rob them of their identity, dignity, security and freedoms as their motive for joining a terrorist group." Smith and colleagues (2006, p. 112) point out that the infamous 1993 Waco incident inspired John Pitner to establish "a group that would protect people from government infringement on their rights and basic freedoms" in Washington state. Later several members of this group were arrested on firearms and explosive charges, underscoring the notion that some individuals who have not personally been wronged, but fear the potential of being oppressed by the government, can become radicalized and take steps toward contentious protest.

Three groups of people are generally protected by the law when working with potential violent extremists: lawyers, health care providers and clergy. Any other individual or agency who attempts to "off-ramp" or deradicalize a potential terrorist is not necessarily protected from prosecution, a concern repeated by various terrorism prevention stakeholders (RTI International, 2016). It is important to clearly provide protections for all those involved in preventing radicalization to violent extremism because they are more likely to come forward to law enforcement should they become concerned about an individual. A Department of Defense report on predicting violent behavior published in 2012 indicates that in the aftermath of violent extremism attacks, "relevant information might have been known to co-workers, family members, or neighbors...in some cases information was known to medical or law enforcement personnel" (Department of Defense, 2012, p. 7). The report continues to suggest that law enforcement officers, teachers and medical providers often do not fully understand the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act and other privacy laws, leading to lack of information sharing between interested parties. For assessments to be conducted and prevention, rehabilitation or reintegration programs to be designed, clear and open channels of communication must be created and supported through legal protections for those involved.

4.4 Historical Overreliance on Static Risk Factors

Lastly, in the tradition of the risk-need-responsivity model, it has been argued that a reliance on static risk factors to maximize predictive utility leads to counterproductive outcomes by limiting treatment opportunities for high-risk individuals (Bonta, 2002).

General models of criminal offending posit that risk can be managed through the identification and treatment of criminogenic needs. Bonta (2002) argues that limiting the reliance on data-driven actuarial assessment and incorporating theory- and case management-based tools is more consistent with those models and is likely to lead to better results. The challenge for development and use of a terrorism prevention-specific tool lies in identifying theory-relevant criminogenic needs (dynamic factors) and identifying or developing community-based programs to address those needs. Section 6 discusses the availability of rehabilitative programs for violent extremist offenders.

5. CHALLENGES TO VALIDATING RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Practitioners and academics strongly agree that for assessment tools to be effectively implemented into the field, they must first be properly validated for both accuracy and precision (Roberts & Horgan, 2008). Validation refers to the quality of predictive capabilities of the instrument. In other words, there is strong statistical and empirical confidence that the tool is correctly assessing what it is designed to (e.g., risk to commit extremist violence) and that it is correctly doing so more than it is not (i.e., a very low degree of either false positives or false negatives). Proper validation of an assessment instrument involves collecting data from a known population and applying the tool to those cases to determine how effectively it performs. The process requires a set of known cases for testing and typically involves a measurement of the risk of a future outcome followed by a follow-up period to determine if that outcome occurred. In general, the more cases available for testing, the more evidence can be gathered to support the validity argument. Most assessments of general violence are validated using a set of known violent and nonviolent offenders. Because of the large number of offenders available, validation studies can typically include thousands of offenders who can be assessed and followed to determine whether they commit a violent offense in the future. Given the nature of violent extremist offenses, this is not always possible or prudent. Some argue that it is unrealistic to expect that assessment tools will ever be sophisticated or reliable enough to confidently predict when or if an individual will commit an act of violent extremism (Smith, 2016); moreover, it would be irresponsible and unconstitutional to arrest or continually detain an individual based solely on an assessment score. Therefore, it is incorrect to use a tool in a predictive manner; rather, these tools serve to aid in the decision-making process when either attempting to divert or off-ramp an individual from the path of violent extremism or release him or her into the community.

The main criticism of current tools for violent extremism in the field is the lack of published, empirical evidence supporting their validity (Cook et al., 2014; Monahan, 2012). This is not, however, necessarily the result of lack of effort or lack of interest. Risk assessment tools, by nature, are very difficult to validate, and many of the limiting factors of general risk assessment tools are exacerbated when dealing with such a rare and sensitive issue as violent extremism. Some limitations identified by Roberts and Horgan (2008) include difficulty focusing on the wide range of behaviors under the umbrella of terrorism, the infrequent nature of attacks, low base rates of violent offenders from whom to sample, and reliance on risk factors that have yet to be fully validated. Because of these limitations, and

others, many barriers exist to effective assessment tool validation for a violent extremist context, which are discussed in the following section.

5.1 Access to Data

The effectiveness of any risk assessment tool is dependent on the types of information available to the evaluation team. In a post-criminal context, the evaluation team may have access to a wealth of information, such as mental health screenings, interviews, arrest records and observations from prison staff. However, once the individual is released, contact significantly decreases, and, in many instances, in-person follow-up is not done as frequently as desired given the overwhelming workload of probation and parole. This renders direct observation and assessment of the individual difficult if not impossible. In a precriminal context, the evaluation team may be equipped with even less information. Not only might arrest and mental health records not be made available (or exist), Roberts and Horgan (2008) point out that some jurisdictions may not allow law enforcement interviews with individuals who are not under or pending arrest. Furthermore, many perpetrators are often either killed in the act or arrested, rendering them unavailable for interview by researchers (Borum, 2015; Department of Defense, 2012; Hamm & Spaaij, 2015; Roberts & Horgan, 2008). These limitations leave the evaluation team few options if the individual does not consent to be interviewed for assessment—a reality that faces many evaluation teams. The remaining options are to interview their family and associates or access information from a database. Although attempts have been made to develop databases for this type of effort, in many cases, these data are either incomplete, inaccurate or restricted to only certain personnel (Smith, 2016).

5.1.1 Low Base Rates

Because terrorism is extremely rare, especially when compared to other forms of violent crime (Monahan, 2012), there are simply very few terrorists in general. There are fewer still who are caught, convicted and released after having served time. This makes validation incredibly difficult because of the lack of statistical power of such a small sample size from which to derive any empirically meaningful conclusion. To mitigate sample size limitations, some studies must resort to using incomplete data to have a large enough sample to conduct statistical analyses (Jensen & LaFree, 2016; Smith, 2016). Unfortunately, this causes inconsistencies in the data and groups offenders from a variety of backgrounds and causes into the same model. This is problematic because different terrorist organizations have their own idiosyncratic reasons for existing and mobilizing for their causes. Individuals who radicalize and join violent extremist organizations have been shown to do so for a

variety of reasons, including the unique ideology they embrace, the time period in which they radicalize and myriad personal factors affecting the individual's own life history (Hamm & Spaaj, 2015; Horgan et al., 2016; Klausen, 2016, LaFree, 2015; Smith, 2016).

A longstanding challenge in assessing terrorism-related research and programs is that success is, by definition, a nonevent (i.e., the non-occurrence of a terrorist attack). Fink and colleagues (2013, p. 2) refer to this dilemma as "measuring the negative." Measuring the negative is extremely difficult, and researchers and practitioners are acutely aware of this challenge. Similarly, the outcome of interest—a terrorist event—is rare, creating a lack of data from which to identify trends among the acts themselves and the perpetrators. This creates a difficulty in "drawing a line of causality between the desired outcomes that we observe (nonradicalization or nonviolence) and a specific Prevention [sic] initiative" (Romaniuk & Fink, 2012, p. 10). Low base rates feed into the previously discussed issues of data quality because, to make up for the low number of cases, evaluators must resort to using imperfect data sources.

5.1.2 Risk Factors Have Yet to Be Completely Validated

One prevailing issue facing risk assessment tools in general is the dilemma regarding what types of behaviors and outcomes they should attempt to predict. Simply attempting to determine if an individual will commit an extremist act is unlikely to be a successful endeavor. Roberts and Horgan (2008, p. 4) point out, "The successful terrorist event will only happen because it is sustained and enabled through a series of informal but related activities." In other words, the actual extremist event (e.g., a bombing) is the culmination of several smaller activities and beliefs that could be observed and assessed, including stockpiling materials, learning or asking questions about manufacturing techniques, inflammatory rhetoric including threats, and planning logistics. These activities represent risk factors or indicators that could lead to extremist violence.

Many risk assessment tools overlap in terms of risk factors, including, notably, the ERG 22+, VERA 2 and HCR-20. Until very recently, however, several risk factors had not been empirically validated. Four studies sponsored through NIJ-funded research have made some significant progress in this regard. Research conducted through the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (Jensen & LaFree, 2016) and the University of Arkansas (Smith et al., 2016) included a nonviolent control group in their analyses and assessed risk factors for both lone actors and group actors, while studies conducted at Indiana State University (Spajj & Hamm, 2015) and the University of Massachusetts Lowell (Horgan et al., 2016) only investigated lone actors and

did not include a nonviolent comparison group. All four studies incorporated a variety of extremist ideologies. Although these studies suffer limitations because of completeness of data, potentially overlapping individuals, differing criteria of analysis and subjective opinions between the different research teams (Smith, 2016), they are the first steps toward validating risk factors that are commonly included in risk assessments for violent extremism.

5.2 Defining the Target Behavior

A more basic issue that must be addressed involves the standardization of definitions and concepts within the larger violent extremism literature. The lack of any universally accepted definition of terrorism creates confusion that affects both theory development and measurement (Freilich & LaFree, 2016). Data sources used for research group analyses are often flawed based on inconsistent coding schemes, the use of variable and incomplete sources, and lack of clarity regarding the handling of missing data. Control group studies are plagued by the use of inconsistent comparison groups, including non-extremist common violence offenders, nonviolent extremist offenders, violent offenders from other extremist groups and the general population. Smith (2016, p. 8) points out that determining the appropriate comparison may depend on the purpose of the analysis being conducted:

For example, when the goal of an analysis is to inform practitioners responsible for assessing whether an individual may pose a threat of engaging in extremist violence in order to advise criminal justice agencies on appropriate follow-up actions (e.g., pursuing further investigation, engaging in specific tailored interventions, rehabilitating or releasing individuals who have been incarcerated), arguably it would be most appropriate to compare individuals who have engaged or attempted to engage in extremist violence with other extremists who have come to law enforcement or public attention but who have not engaged or attempted to engage in extremist violence. If, on the other hand, the goal of an analysis is to inform community members and practitioners interested in understanding characteristics and experiences that may make an individual more vulnerable to radicalization to violent extremism to develop general prevention and/or early intervention efforts, it may be more appropriate to compare individuals who have engaged or attempted to engage in extremist activity with members of the larger

population of non-extremists. Effort needs to be taken to identify appropriate data coding structures and control groups for research.³

Violence risk assessment tools also face the challenge of identifying exactly what they are designed to measure. Roberts and Horgan (2008) stress the importance of what they refer to as “hazard identification.” As we have seen in the development of psychological assessments that measure everything from general violence to very specific violent acts (e.g., sexual assault, bullying, spousal or child abuse), the identification of the outcome or hazard is critical to identifying valid risk factors and ensuring proper use of tools across contexts.

5.3 Case Study: Validating the Classification of Violent Risk

Although some tools have undergone a degree of validation, many evaluation studies have either been conducted by their own authors, such as the TRAP-18 (Meloy & Gill, 2016), or in limited contexts, such as the VERA and VERA-2, which have been commonly used on individuals currently incarcerated (Pressman & Flockton, 2012; Smith, 2016). None of the existing violent extremism assessment tools have undergone the degree of validation that assessment tools in other disciplines have, and it is worth noting that the creators of the TRAP-18 classify the tool as an investigative template because it has not been validated enough to be used as a true assessment tool (Meloy & Gill, 2016). For example, Monahan (2012) compares the actual process of validating the COVR (of which he is a co-owner) to the hypothetical validation of a risk assessment tool for violent extremism in detail and concludes, “In no real-world national security context can an instrument to assess the risk of terrorism be prospectively validated in the same manner that risk assessment instruments for common violence are prospectively validated” (Monahan, 2012, p. 192). The COVR was validated using two independent samples of acute mental hospital patients totaling 700 individuals. Then a stratified random sample of 177 patients classified by the COVR as either “high risk” or “low risk” were followed for 4 months after discharge. Follow-up data (through interviews with the patient and family members and hospital records)

³ Despite similarities between convicted violent extremists identified in the literature (Borum 2011, 2015; Dernevik et al., 2009; Gill et al., 2014; Grunewalde et al., 2013; Hamm & Spaaij, 2015; Horgan, 2008; Kruglanski et al., 2008; Roberts & Horgan, 2008; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Smith, 2016), most researchers and practitioners from private, academic and federal organizations support the assertion that there is no single profile for or pathway to violent extremism (Borum, 2011; Department of Defense, 2012; Gill et al., 2014; Hamm & Spaaij, 2015; Horgan, 2008; Fishman, 2006; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Van der Valk & Wagenaar, 2010). Context-specific tools would mitigate these limitations, but would also be more expensive to develop, would require an extensive amount of time and ongoing validation, and acquiring the requisite number of cases for validation could prove to be impossible.

were collected for 157 (87%) of the 177 randomly sampled patients. The results of the evaluation showed that nearly 1 in 10 of the patients who were classified as low risk recidivated, whereas half of the patients classified as high risk committed a violent act following discharge.

Transferring a similar validation design to a tool designed for violent extremism elucidates several disparities between the two contexts, namely, the difference in frequency of occurrence between general violence and extremist violence. It would be exceedingly difficult to find a significant number of individuals who have committed an act of terrorism who are also nearly all about to be released into the community in a similar time frame and to also locate, interview or obtain records for a majority of these individuals post-release. It is for these reasons that Monahan (2012) argues that prospective validation of a risk assessment tool for violent extremism is nearly impossible. He instead recommends analyzing the individual risk factors that comprise the assessment tool using an evaluative technique referred to as known group validation. This method is an intragroup comparison, wherein the evaluator measures the prevalence of a given risk factor among a group of known offenders, then compares the prevalence of this same factor in a group of people from the same population who are not offenders. If the prevalence of the factor differs significantly, we can assume that the given factor correlates with the outcome of committing an act of violent extremism. This, however, only fulfils half of the requirements for being a valid risk factor as argued by Kraemer and colleagues (1997), who state that the risk factor must precede the action and be positively correlated with the observed outcome. This would still need to be determined, because if the risk factor manifests in the individual only after he or she has become a terrorist, then it would not be considered a risk factor (Monahan, 2012). Therefore, even though known-group validation methods may be able to provide validation for some aspects of tools, there remain challenges in assessing validity completely.

6. PROGRAMS TO REDUCE RISK

As discussed above, multiple challenges are involved in assessing the level of risk posed by an individual who has engaged in extremist activity. Assuming, however, that these challenges are addressed and a validated risk assessment process is developed, the next question becomes how this risk can be reduced. Despite the fact that this issue is currently receiving increased attention in the United States because of concerns about (1) the return of foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq as the territory controlled by the Islamic State shrinks and (2) the eventual release of individuals convicted of terrorism-related crimes from U.S. prisons, few programs focused on reducing the risk posed by extremist offenders have been developed in the United States (Berkell, 2017; Hughes, 2017; Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2017). After discussing the general goals of these types of programs and describing two nascent efforts in the United States, this section provides an overview of several more mature programs in Europe and lessons learned that can inform the development of future programs in the United States.

6.1 General Goals

One of the key distinctions made in the terrorism literature when discussing how individuals leave terrorists groups or cease terrorist activity is that between disengagement and deradicalization (Bjorgo & Horgan, 2009; Horgan, 2008). Specifically, whereas disengagement is generally viewed as involving the abandonment of extremist activity, deradicalization is viewed as involving the abandonment or rejection of extremist beliefs and ideology. Although further research is needed to understand how these two processes relate to each other—and to recidivism—many of the programs discussed below focus on promoting disengagement *and* deradicalization, and thus include efforts aimed at supporting individuals in changing both their behaviors and their beliefs.

Further, in addition to helping offenders to move away from extremism, many of these programs focus on supporting these individuals as they move toward their eventual reintegration into society. As seen below, several programs include various lines of effort aimed at rehabilitating participants and improving their ability to function in mainstream society. These activities range from addressing offenders' psychological issues to providing them with basic skills through training programs.

6.2 Current Efforts in the United States

Two efforts to reduce the risk posed by extremist offenders in the United States have been the recent focus of research or media attention. One, ExitUSA, aims to support individuals in

leaving right-wing violent extremist groups. The other, the Terrorism Disengagement and Deradicalization Program, seeks to promote the disengagement, deradicalization and rehabilitation of individuals convicted of terrorism-related offenses.

Inspired in part by similar programs developed in Europe, ExitUSA is a voluntary program developed by the nonprofit organization Life After Hate with the goal of helping extremists to abandon the white power movement, racism and violence (<https://www.lifeafterhate.org/programs>). Founded and run by former white power violent extremists, ExitUSA offers tailored one-on-one counselling to individuals to support their disengagement and deradicalization processes (Lenz, 2016). The program also supports community practitioners (e.g., counselors, social workers) and families who are attempting to help individuals who want to leave violent extremism behind. No evaluation of the ExitUSA program has been conducted to date.

Unlike ExitUSA, which is run by a nonprofit and supports individuals who have not necessarily been convicted of their offenses, the Terrorism Disengagement and Deradicalization Program announced by U.S. District Judge Michael Davis in Minnesota in 2016 is government-run and designed to assess and promote the rehabilitation of convicted extremist offenders (Berkell, 2017; Ibrahim & Yuen, 2016; Koerner, 2017). Although details on the assessment and rehabilitation efforts associated with this program are few, it was designed by Daniel Koehler, who serves as the director of the German Institute on Radicalization and De-Radicalization Studies and who has been affiliated with the Exit Deutschland and Hayat programs in Germany (see below). The program, which is being implemented by the U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services Office in Minnesota, has largely involved individuals convicted of supporting the Islamic State and al-Shabaab. Like ExitUSA, it is a relatively new program and has not yet been evaluated.

6.3 Current Efforts in Europe

Over the past few decades, governments and nonprofit organizations in various countries around the world have developed and implemented programs focused on reducing the risk posed by extremist offenders. Collectively, these programs have targeted offenders with differing ideologies (e.g., Islamist extremist, right-wing extremist) and individuals who have and have not been convicted of terrorist offenses. These different programs have been implemented inside and outside of prisons and have included various lines of effort focused on the disengagement, deradicalization or rehabilitation of their participants.

Although arguably it may be possible to learn something from every program that has been developed, given that the United States and European countries share similarities in terms

of both the nature of the extremist threat they face and the legal and cultural contexts in which this threat occurs, lessons learned from European programs may be particularly applicable to the U.S. context. (Lessons from programs implemented in Canada, Australia and New Zealand may also be quite relevant, but information on such programs was not available.) As such, the rest of this section focuses on European programs aimed at reducing the risk posed by extremist offenders and some of the lessons learned that have been gleaned through implementing them. Table 7 provides an overview of 12 of these programs, focusing on the implementing organization(s), the target populations and their goals. Although several of these programs also include activities targeted toward individuals who have not engaged in extremist offenses (e.g., more general outreach and education efforts aimed at the general public or practitioners), only those activities targeted toward extremist offenders are included below.

As can be seen in Table 7, many of the programs developed and implemented in Europe include efforts focused on supporting participants in addressing thought patterns and emotions related to extremist offending, developing more prosocial and adaptive ways of dealing with challenges and conflict, and reconnecting with positive social influences. In addition, the majority of programs provide more concrete assistance aimed at reintegrating participants into mainstream society, such as help in seeking employment, education or housing. Interestingly, several of these programs also offer support to participants' families, who may experience their own challenges related to their extremist family members and, in some programs, are viewed as central to whether participants are able to move away from extremism and toward more productive lives (Koehler, 2015). Finally, a few, although by no means all, programs (e.g., Exit Deutschland, the Unity Initiative) directly address participants' extremist ideologies.

6.4 Lessons Learned

In an ideal world, the implementation and impacts of all of the programs discussed above would be rigorously evaluated, and, based on the findings of these evaluations, it would become clearer what works and does not work in reducing the risk posed by extremist offenders. In reality, findings from such evaluations are generally not available (Horgan & Braddock, 2009; Mastroe & Szmania, 2016; Neumann, 2010; RAN, 2016b; Veldhuis, 2015). Further, the findings that are available tend to focus primarily on data related to the number of program participants, the number of individuals who completed the program or the number of individuals who subsequently reengaged in extremist offending (i.e., the recidivism rate) (Mastroe & Szmania, 2016).

Table 7. European Programs Designed to Reduce the Risk Posed by Extremist Offenders

Program (Location)	Implementer	Target Population	Goals
Programs Run Outside of Prison			
Danish or Aarhus Model (Denmark from 2007 on) (Bertelsen, 2015; Christensen, 2015; RAN, ^a 2016a, 2017a, 2017c)	Government (national police; social and psychiatric services; Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET))	Right-wing, left-wing and religious extremists; returning foreign fighters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Addressing physical and mental health issues ▪ Mentoring participants in how to address challenges posed by leaving extremism and everyday life ▪ Helping individuals to develop non-extremist social networks ▪ Developing parents' network to support individuals in abandoning violent extremism ▪ Helping participants to secure housing (if necessary) and employment ▪ Providing job training and education for individuals released as part of effort ▪ Providing assistance finding employment ▪ Offering monetary assistance ▪ Providing support for individuals' families (e.g., educational support)
Early Release Scheme (N. Ireland from 1998 through early 2000s) (Democratic Progress Institute, 2013; Horgan & Braddock, 2009)	Government (U.K. and Irish); nonprofits (e.g., N. Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders)	Loyalist and Republican extremists who qualified for early release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Addressing individuals' extremist ideology ▪ Helping individuals to acknowledge harm they have done to victims ▪ Providing therapy to address psychological issues, addiction or family issues ▪ Counseling families of extremist individuals ▪ Helping individuals find a safe environment away from group (through police protection, etc.) ▪ Providing assistance with job training and education
Exit Deutschland (Germany from 2000 on) (Butt & Tuck, 2014; Christensen, 2015; Exit-Germany, 2014; RAN, 2017a)	Nonprofit (ZDK Society Democratic Culture)	Right-wing extremists voluntarily seeking to leave movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Addressing individuals' extremist ideology ▪ Helping individuals to acknowledge harm they have done to victims ▪ Providing therapy to address psychological issues, addiction or family issues ▪ Counseling families of extremist individuals ▪ Helping individuals find a safe environment away from group (through police protection, etc.) ▪ Providing assistance with job training and education

(continued)

Table 7. European Programs Designed to Reduce the Risk Posed by Extremist Offenders (continued)

Program (Location)	Implementer	Target Population	Goals
EXIT Fryshuset (Sweden from 1998 on) (Butt & Tuck, 2014; Christensen, 2015; Ramalingam & Tuck, 2014; RAN, 2017a)	Nonprofit (Youth Centre Fryshuset)	Right-wing extremists voluntarily seeking to leave movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developing confidential relationships between participants and <i>former</i> violent extremists who can provide guidance ▪ Providing counselling (with psychologist or psychiatrist if needed) ▪ Providing training in social skills and conflict management ▪ Helping individuals to reestablish contact with former friends and family ▪ Supporting family members of individual leaving group ▪ Providing safe housing ▪ Supporting participants in finding a new jobs and establishing new lives
Hayat (Germany from 2012 on) (RAN, 2017a)	Nonprofit (ZDK Society Democratic Culture)	Islamist extremists voluntarily seeking to leave movement; returning foreign fighters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Addressing individuals' extremist ideologies ▪ Providing counseling to participants ▪ Counseling families of extremist individuals ▪ Serving as bridge between participants, their families and social service, employment, educational, or law enforcement organizations
Inclusion (The Netherlands; unclear when started) (RAN, 2017b)	Government (Dutch Probation Service)	Islamist extremists on parole or probation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Addressing psychological issues and extremist worldview through cognitive behavioral exercises ▪ Supporting reconciliation with family members or other positive influences ▪ Developing tailored plans for participants' future ▪ Assisting individuals in finding job, schooling, housing and debt relief

(continued)

Table 7. European Programs Designed to Reduce the Risk Posed by Extremist Offenders (continued)

Program (Location)	Implementer	Target Population	Goals
Jump (Germany from 2010 on) (RAN, 2017a)	Nonprofit (Christliches Jugenddorfwerk (CJD))	Right-wing extremists voluntarily seeking to leave movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflecting on experiences inside and outside of group and moral dilemmas ▪ Identifying and handling triggers that may lead to rejoining group ▪ Developing sustainable courses of action to avoid rejoining group ▪ Helping to secure housing, education or employment
Success Together (U.K., 2014 – 2015) (RAN, 2017a)	Nonprofit (Account Trust)	Tamil extremists who support separatist agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing culturally appropriate cognitive therapy in native language ▪ Developing narratives to counter extremist separatist agenda ▪ Providing training and employment opportunities
The Unity Initiative (U.K. from 2010 on) (RAN, 2017a)	Nonprofit (The Unity Initiative)	Islamist extremists convicted of Terrorist Act offenses; returning foreign fighters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developing tailored one-on-one interventions ▪ Working to change the worldviews and ideologies of participants
Prison-Based Programs			
Back on Track (Denmark from 2011 on) (Butt & Tuck, 2014; RAN, 2017a)	Government (Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration; Danish Prison and Probation Service)	Inmates convicted of extremism-related crimes; inmates assessed as vulnerable to extremism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing mentoring in how to handle everyday situations, problems and conflicts ▪ Engaging inmates' families and social networks to support former inmates when they reenter society ▪ Providing support finding new job and establishing new life after release
Healthy Identities (U.K. from 2010 on) (Dean, 2012; NOMS, 2013)	Government (National Offender Management Service)	Inmates convicted of extremism-related crimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing one-on-one tailored sessions focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Empowering individuals to take responsibility for themselves, how they live and their personal commitments – Developing positive identities and self-images – Reducing “us versus them” thinking and identification with violent extremist groups – Enabling participants to express, tolerate and cope with powerful emotions without denigrating or harming others – Addressing attitudes and beliefs that support extremist offending – Developing individuals' support networks and preparing them for future intervention work

(continued)

Table 7. European Programs Designed to Reduce the Risk Posed by Extremist Offenders (continued)

Program (Location)	Implementer	Target Population	Goals
Violence Prevention Network (Germany from 2001 on) (RAN, 2016a, 2017b)	Government-funded (Federal Agency for Civil Education, part of the Federal Ministry of the Interior); run by nonprofit	Inmates convicted of crimes related to right-wing extremism and, more recently, religious extremism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing 23-week education program with small group of prisoners focused on: ▪ Understanding motivations that led to extremist activity ▪ Identifying alternative responses and ways to handle conflict ▪ Reintegrating them into democratic culture ▪ Providing dedicated support from mentors once individuals have been released ▪ Offering support for individuals' families before and after release ▪ Helping individuals find housing and employment

^a RAN is the acronym of the Radicalization Awareness Network, an organization that brings together European practitioners who work on radicalization prevention efforts.

Thus, for example, Exit Deutschland reports that since 2000, more than 500 individuals have completed the program and that these participants have a recidivism rate of approximately three percent (<http://www.exit-deutschland.de/english/>). Although certainly necessary and helpful, data such as these do not provide much insight into what specific aspects of the program are the most and least successful and, more generally, what accounts for this positive outcome.

Several possible reasons exist for the current lack of data regarding the implementation and outcomes of programs developed to reduce the risk posed by extremist offenders. First, some of the programs may be too new to evaluate thoroughly as is certainly the case for programs like the Terrorism Disengagement and Deradicalization Program in Minnesota, which started in 2016. Second, in some cases, evaluations may have been completed, but findings are not publicly available because of concerns related to national security, participant privacy, public relations, etc. Third, the evaluation of some programs may be ongoing, with researchers not yet able to share results. Fourth, there may be no funding to conduct rigorous evaluations of the programs given fiscal restraints or lack of will. Regardless of whether any or all of these reasons can explain the current scarcity of publicly available evaluation findings, it is clear that conducting evaluations of these programs and sharing the findings of these evaluations is essential to improving programs moving forward.

In the interim, several organizations have compiled lists of lessons learned in developing and implementing programs aimed at reducing the risk posed by extremist offenders. A brief summary of these lessons is presented below.

Formalize the program (Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2012; Radicalization Awareness Network, 2016a, 2017a; Veldhuis, 2015)—Outlining the goals of a program, its stakeholders' responsibilities and how the program should be implemented helps to ensure that it functions as smoothly as possible. This process also supports future evaluations of the program because it suggests metrics that can be used to assess its implementation and impacts. Finally, addressing any legal issues and funding needs up front may improve the program's sustainability over the long run (Butt & Tuck, 2014; Ramalingham & Tuck, 2014). At the same time, just because a program is formalized does not mean that it cannot change and evolve.

Adapt the program to the local context and conditions (Butt & Tuck, 2014; Christensen, 2015; Holmer & Shtuni, 2017; Neumann, 2010; Radicalization Awareness Network, 2017a)—A program that works in one cultural, political, social or historical context

may not necessarily work in the same manner in a different one. Thus, it is unrealistic to expect that any program can be imported wholesale from one context to another. To give just one example, although they have similar goals and target populations, the Exit programs in Sweden and Germany differ in terms of the focus they put on directly addressing individuals' extremist ideologies (Christensen, 2015).

Tailor the program to individual participants (Butt & Tuck, 2014;

Christensen, 2015; Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2012; Holmer & Shtuni, 2017; Radicalization Awareness Network, 2016a, 2017a; Veldhuis, 2015)—Research has shown that the processes of disengaging from terrorism and reengaging with society vary by individual (Altier et al., 2017; Barrelle, 2015). As such, a program

developed to support extremist offenders in these processes is likely to be more successful if it takes this variation into account. Gathering extensive information about participants' backgrounds, experiences and characteristics, and engaging in a robust risk assessment process, can facilitate developing this type of tailored program.

Ensure program staff has diverse areas of expertise (Butt & Tuck,

2014; Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2012; Radicalization Awareness Network, 2016a, 2017a, 2017b; Ramalingham & Tuck, 2014)—Given the diverse backgrounds, experiences, characteristics and needs of extremist offenders, it makes sense to ensure that program staff have expertise in a range of areas, which could include psychology/psychiatry, social work,

terrorism studies, religious studies and others. Although it may not be the case that a program can employ individuals with backgrounds in all of these areas, having experts available to consult with the program as needed could be helpful. Further, ensuring that all

**Special Considerations for
Prison-Based Programs**

- Consider whether inmates going through the program are segregated from or integrated into the general prison population (Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2012; Radicalization Awareness Network, 2017b; Veldhuis, 2015).
- Prison officers need to understand the program, even if they are not responsible for its delivery (Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2012).
- Ensure there is some provision for aftercare, whether through programs run outside of prison or connections with other social service organizations, once a participant leaves prison (Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2012).

**Special Considerations for Programs Focused
on Returning Foreign Fighters (Returnees)**

- Be honest with returnees and their families about what they will face upon returning (e.g., monitoring, prosecution, imprisonment) (Radicalization Awareness Network, 2017b).
- Engage with returnees immediately upon their return and throughout the legal process (Radicalization Awareness Network, 2016a, 2017b).
- Consider developing programs specifically focused on female and child returnees (Holmer & Shtuni, 2017; Radicalization Awareness Network, 2017b).
- Understand that returnees may have mental health issues related to their exposure to and participation in war and violence (Holmer & Shtuni, 2017; Radicalization Awareness Network, 2017b).

staff members receive the appropriate training and organizational support needed to deal with their stressful and challenging positions is essential.

Establish trust between program implementers and participants (Butt & Tuck, 2014; Radicalization Awareness Network, 2016a, 2017a)—The process of trying to reintegrate into mainstream society after belonging to an extremist group or engaging in extremist offending is not an easy one, and it is likely to be even more challenging if program participants do not trust the people who are trying to help them. For this reason, it is important that program implementers try to establish relationships with participants that are both respectful and productive. One way some programs try to address this need is by involving former extremists, who often have a better understanding of the processes participants are going through and, thus, more credibility. Another is by ensuring participant confidentiality.

Include multiple lines of effort in the program (Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2012; Holmer & Shtuni, 2017; Neumann, 2010; Radicalization Awareness Network, 2016a, 2017a, 2017b)—Although there is no set list of activities that should be included in every program, and, as discussed above, the actual implementation of a program may vary by participant, incorporating activities that address various aspects of participants' disengagement, deradicalization and reintegration processes is generally viewed as increasing the chances that a program will be successful. These lines of effort may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Addressing participants' ideologies or religious beliefs;
- Addressing participants' mental health needs;
- Helping participants to develop social and cognitive skills;
- Helping participants to develop positive social networks;
- Supporting participants' family members and involving them in the reintegration process;
- Providing participants education and training in vocational skills;
- Assisting participants in obtaining employment, (safe) housing and other resources; and
- Facilitating connections between participants and other social services.

Communicate clearly with external stakeholders and the general public (Butt & Tuck, 2014; Holmer & Shtuni, 2017; Radicalization Awareness Network, 2017a, 2017b; Veldhuis, 2015)—Because the ultimate goal of many programs is the successful reintegration of their participants back into the community, it is important to take into account stakeholders outside of the program, including local authorities in the areas where program participants live and the general public. Specifically, these groups may have

concerns about safety that need to be addressed, and some may feel general discomfort with, if not outright hostility toward, the idea that extremist offenders are receiving services to support their return to mainstream society. Developing and implementing a robust and transparent communication strategy may help to alleviate some, although likely not all, of these issues.

Evaluate the implementation and impacts of the program (Radicalization Awareness Network, 2016a, 2016b; Ramalingham & Tuck, 2014; Veldhuis, 2015)—As discussed above, evaluating current programs that have been developed to reduce the risks posed by extremist offenders is essential in ensuring both these and future programs work as well as possible:

[Programs], both new and existing, should be subjected to critical, independent and real-time evaluation so their goals, underlying assumptions about how to achieve them, organizational implementation, and degree of success can be assessed. This is crucial to designing and implementing more effective initiatives and thus to minimizing the [likelihood] of terrorist recidivism (Radicalization Awareness Network, 2016a, p. 8).

Although the United States is behind European countries in developing programs focused on reducing the risk posed by extremist offenders, it now has the opportunity bring these lessons to bear moving forward.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were taken directly from the literature and serve to highlight research and developmental needs for assessment tools related to terrorism prevention and programs to reduce the risk of violent extremist action. It is important to note that there is no “silver bullet” for assessing whether an individual will resort to violence. Furthermore, tools designed to assess the likelihood that an individual will adopt extremist beliefs may not necessarily be appropriate to determine a probability of engaging in extremist violence. Therefore, more than one tool may be needed to properly identify concerns and develop a plan for reducing unwanted behavior. Lastly, it is important to recognize that successful assessment tools from other fields, such as the Psychopathy Checklist, have taken decades to develop and validate. Tools for assessing the risk of violent extremism have been under development for some time, but additional research is needed to assess the validity and utility of existing tools.

7.1 Validation of Existing Instruments

As discussed above, there is currently a small set of risk assessment tools and protocols that have been developed to assess the risk that an individual will engage in extremist offenses (Lloyd & Dean, 2015), extremist violence (Pressman, 2009), group-based violence (Cook et al., 2015) or lone actor terrorism (Meloy et al., 2015). Recently, a new tool was released to assess the risk of returning foreign fighters committing future acts of domestic terrorism (Radicalization Awareness Network, 2016). Although there is considerable overlap in these instruments with respect to the types of risk factors and indicators measured, further research is needed to validate each tool and to assess its limitations based on the context and population to which it is applied. To the extent possible, we recommend collaboration with and among the developers of these tools to ensure transparency of the research and to assess the generalizability of the tools across contexts.

7.2 Identify Primary Assessment Tool Needs

The violent extremism literature suffers from a significant amount of variation in the way concepts and targets are defined (Kruglanski et al. 2008; Roberts & Horgan 2008). The development of a violent extremism assessment tool requires careful consideration regarding what the outcome of concern is and the purposes of the tool. The history of violence risk assessment includes attempts to measure the likelihood of general violence, sexual assault, spousal violence, child abuse, targeted violence, treatment needs, radicalization, stalking behavior and so on. For a tool to be effective, it must be designed for

a specific end use. We recommend careful planning to identify the outcomes of concern (specific terrorist threat, mass murder, targeted violence, etc.), the types of decisions to be made based on the tool (resource allocation, assessing treatment needs, monitoring, etc.) and the context in which the tool would be used (public policing, incarcerated offenders, etc.). Furthermore, an assessment tool alone is not able to store historical information about a subject. Agencies and organizations performing risk assessments require a comprehensive system designed to collect, curate, recall and disseminate information collected by first responders, other agencies and by other interviewers.

7.3 Assess the Utility of Relevant Risk/Protective Factors

Tool development begins with the identification of risk factors that demonstrate a statistical and theoretical link to the risk behavior of interest. Previous work has focused on identifying potential risk factors and amassing them into large behavioral checklists. To our knowledge, there have been no attempts to validate existing risk factor checklists against existing data from known offenders. As discussed above, a manageable set of dynamic risk factors, complemented by case management tools that provide insight into the criminogenic needs of the offender and allow for long-term tracking of the rehabilitative process represent the next wave of risk assessment. Risk factor identification should skew toward more dynamic traits and temporally relevant behavior patterns as opposed to focusing primarily on static, historical factors. Protective factors and the offender's responsivity to treatment methods should also be considered.

7.4 Consider the Importance of Structured Rehabilitation Programs

Next generation risk assessment tools use evidence-based dynamic risk factors to predict risk and guide treatment to reduce said risk. The utility of dynamic factors lies in their ability to change over time through education, therapeutic treatment and rehabilitation. In the absence of effective treatment, assessed risk is unlikely to decrease. Current rehabilitation programs for extremist offenders has largely been untested. Evaluations that have been conducted are of minimal utility and often suffer from methodological challenges. The efficacy of existing programs should be considered in light of the lessons learned presented in this report. Efforts should be made to bring together experts in terrorism prevention, violent offender rehabilitation, recidivism, psychology and law enforcement to develop a roadmap toward the creation of rehabilitative programs for violent extremist offenders. Given the infrequency with which such offenders are identified and referred to treatment, and the specialized treatment needs, initial efforts will likely require a distributed

expertise model rather than attempting to develop a community-based approach within a single location.

7.5 Educate Stakeholders

A potential starting point to validating a tool would be to: establish a ubiquitous lexicon of clear nomenclature including definitions of terms such as radicalization and extremism; create a logical coding scheme for analyzing and discussing behaviors and characteristics; establish pathways for researchers and evaluators to access databases and records necessary to conduct the evaluation; and, perhaps most importantly, educate stakeholders on the limitations and uses of assessment tools. For example, stakeholders need to have realistic expectations of the outcomes and use of these tools—namely that they are to be used as part of the decision-making process, not as definitive predictors of future behavior. Any tool would need to be accompanied by a robust and proactive public relations campaign to secure buy-in from stakeholders in the community they would potentially be serving. One way to do this would be to involve the community during the design phases, so issues can be addressed and treated as efficiently as possible.

8. CONCLUSION

The emergence of domestic radicalization and violent extremism in the United States is an urgent policy concern for the DHS, law enforcement agencies and the public at large. This is a rapidly emerging and dynamic threat with low prevalence rates within the American context, but has potentially catastrophic impact when radicalization results in violent action. The U.S. government has identified a need to divert individuals from the path of violent extremism. To meet that need, it is critical that frontline professionals who may encounter individuals who are vulnerable to or at risk of radicalization have standardized and validated tools to identify the likelihood that an individual may be radicalizing to violent extremism, and his or her suitability for placement into prevention, diversion or rehabilitation programs. By understanding the current state of the science for violence risk assessment tools in general and violent extremism–related risk assessment tools specifically, we are now in a much better position to classify available tools and identify the next steps necessary to provide the best path forward toward achieving these goals. In just one decade, the CVE community has made significant progress in developing multiple tools that assess the risk of an individual engaging in extremist offenses, extremist violence, group-based violence or lone actor terrorism. Based on this strong foundation, RTI recommends outlining action items in the development of a research agenda that seeks to validate existing instruments in relevant applied settings with appropriate populations. Additional research needs to: develop standardized terminology and delineate applications for the various tools; identify relevant risk and protective factors; and better understand pathways to extremism and violence in general. In addition, further research is needed to understand the need for structured rehabilitation programs and the efficacy of existing methods and programs. In building on this current knowledge base, the CVE research community can continue to not only advance its understanding of violent extremist behavior, but also create relevant and applicable tools for government agencies, local law enforcement and community practitioners responsible for ensuring the safety and security of our communities.

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