

Violent Extremists and Terrorists Exploit Civil Unrest and Public Assemblies in the United States

Domestic violent extremists¹ will continue to exploit lawful public assemblies, including protests, rallies, and demonstrations, during periods of civil unrest in the United States. The goal of these individuals is often to incite violence or conduct attacks in furtherance of their agendas. In addition, messaging by international terrorists intends to influence the United States and other Western countries. While most violence during public assemblies has been criminal and not associated with terrorism, the activities of criminal actors may be indistinguishable from terrorism, potentially hindering investigations and findings.

- In June 2020, al-Qa'ida used an image of George Floyd's last moments, and a painting by a famous street artist, to deliver an unsolicited message of support to protesters on US streets, in its English-language issue of the *One Ummah* online magazine.
- In May 2020, a violent extremist shot and killed a Federal Protective Service officer and wounded another outside of a courthouse in Oakland, California. Subsequently, the assailant shot and killed a sheriff's deputy and wounded a second at the adherent's home. Authorities found ammunition, firearms, and bombmaking equipment in the assailants' vehicle. Social media messages show that the assailant planned to exploit nearby protests.

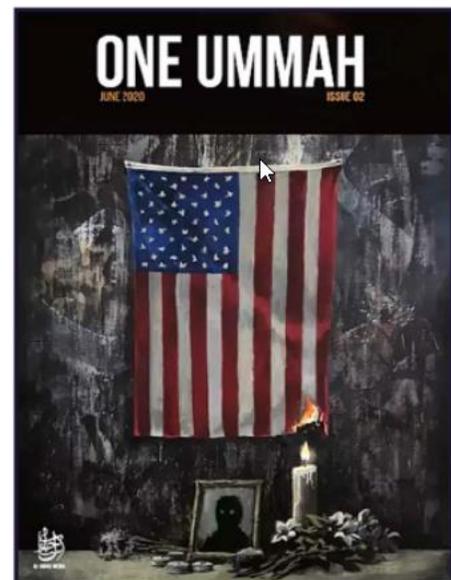
OTHER FOREIGN INFLUENCE: In July 2016, following a police-involved shooting during a traffic stop in Falcon Heights, Minnesota, a suspected Russian-controlled social media group; "Don't Shoot," began advertising a protest against police violence.

IMPORTANT: If you witness or have witnessed violence, we urge you to submit any information, photos, or videos of relevance at [fbi.gov/violence](https://www.fbi.gov/violence) or contact **1-800-CALL-FBI (800-225-5324)**

SCOPE: In response to partner requests, this product raises awareness of opportunistic threat actors influencing, inciting violence, and potentially conducting attacks during public assemblies and periods of civil unrest.

LAW ENFORCEMENT: Threat actors may target officers responding to a public assembly:

- Review social media presence and remove data that may make one susceptible to targeting
- Review official public-facing websites and remove potentially problematic information
- Ensure organizational knowledge and understanding of the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act



¹ Defined as individuals based and operating entirely within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power who seek to further political or social goals, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may not constitute extremism, and may be constitutionally protected.



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CONSIDERATIONS: The Constitution guarantees the right to peaceful public assembly and free speech. Awareness by public safety personnel of the complexities of public assemblies, and the added threats when nefarious actors exploit them, can improve preparedness and response. Public assemblies often require comprehensive planning, cooperation and information sharing for an effective event. They may be driven by world events; may draw large numbers of participants, spectators and opposition; may be spontaneous or unplanned; and may consist of mobile groups following random routes. When nefarious actors exploit an otherwise lawful public assembly, it may have cascading effects well beyond the assembly's immediate location, including interrupting neighboring critical infrastructure, and everyday life.

RESOURCES:

- **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIRST AMMENDMENT PROTECTED EVENTS FOR STATE AND LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES** <https://www.it.ojp.gov/GIST/35/Recommendations-for-First-Amendment-Protected-Events-for-State-and-Local-Law-Enforcement-Agencies>
- **DHS CENTER FOR DOMESTIC PREPAREDNESS** provides advanced, all-hazards training to federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, private sector and foreign emergency responders.
- **DHS TRIPwire or TECHNICAL RESOURCE FOR INCIDENT PREVENTION** <https://tripwire.dhs.gov>
- **FBI EGUARDIAN** is a single repository of suspicious activity information that is accessible to thousands of law enforcement personnel and analysts directly supporting law enforcement. www.fbi.gov/resources/law-enforcement/eguardian
- **FBI FIELD OFFICES** <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices>
- **FBI STRATEGIC INFORMATION AND OPERATIONS CENTER (SIOC)** <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cirg/sioc>
- **JOINT TERRORISM TASK FORCE:** Cells of highly trained and locally based, investigators, analysts, linguists, SWAT experts, and other specialists from dozens of US law enforcement and intelligence agencies. <http://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field>
- **STATE AND MAJOR URBAN AREA FUSION CENTERS** empower frontline law enforcement, public safety, fire service, emergency response, public health, and private-sector security personnel to lawfully gather and share threat-related information. <https://www.dhs.gov/fusion-center-locations-and-contact-information>
- **TIPS** can also be reported via <https://tips.fbi.gov>





PRODUCT FEEDBACK FORM

(U) JCAT MISSION: To improve information sharing and enhance public safety. In coordination with the FBI and DHS, collaborate with other members of the IC to research, produce, and disseminate counterterrorism (CT) intelligence products for federal, state, local, tribal and territorial government agencies and the private sector. Advocate for the CT intelligence requirements and needs of these partners throughout the IC.

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ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS, OR QUESTIONS.

WHAT TOPICS DO YOU RECOMMEND?

