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US VIOLENT EXTREMIST MOBILIZATION INDICATORS

The United States and other Western nations face a heightened threat from violent extremists motivated by a broad range of ideologies. Previous editions of this booklet have focused solely on the indicators of homegrown violent extremist mobilization to violence; this edition has been expanded to include indicators that apply to multiple ideologically-motivated US-based violent extremists, given the evolving complexity and variety of factors influencing the domestic threat landscape.^a

These indicators were developed and updated based on a review of information derived from dozens of FBI terrorism investigations, peer-reviewed academic studies, and analytic exchanges among Intelligence Community and law enforcement professionals. The indicators of violent extremist mobilization described in this booklet are observable behaviors that could help to determine whether individuals are preparing to engage in violent extremist activities.

The indicators are grouped according to the stages individuals undergo: mobilization to violence, engaging in preparation, and developing motivation. These indicators suggest how close an individual may be to mobilizing to violence and are ordered by the strength of the indicator within each category.

The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are committed to safeguarding the rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and applicable law. It is therefore important to emphasize that many of the mobilization indicators included in this booklet may also relate to constitutionally protected activities. It is most important to look critically and contextually at the specific actions of the individual and their intent. Law enforcement action should never be taken solely based on constitutionally protected activities; on the apparent or actual race, age, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity of the subject; or on any combination of these factors. Individuals are encouraged to contact law enforcement if—based on these indicators and the situational context—they suspect an individual is mobilizing to violence or engaging in violent extremist activities.

This resource is provided to inform law enforcement, terrorism prevention practitioners, other first responders, community leaders, as well as the general public about both threats of violence and contextual behaviors that suggest an individual is mobilizing to violence. While some violent extremists may make direct, indirect, or vague threats of violence, others may plot violent action while avoiding such overt threats to maintain operational security—underscoring the need to consider both threats of violence and contextual behaviors.

We have incorporated "unusual" into many of the indicators because we are looking for behavior that is different enough from the individual's normal behavior to cause concern. The indicators included in this booklet are intended to aid law enforcement and first responder investigative and detection efforts, not to be a substitute for their expertise and experience. In addition, we continue to see that members of the community—such as family members and peers—are often best positioned to witness signs of mobilization to violence. Such community members almost always are the first to detect hints that an individual may be considering violent action in the United States or overseas. This booklet is provided to aid interpretation of their observations.

This booklet was first published in 2015 and updated in 2017 and 2019.

^a For this booklet, ideologically-motivated US-based violent extremists consist of homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) and domestic violent extremists (DVEs). HVEs are defined by the FBI and DHS as a person of any citizenship who has lived and/or operated primarily in the United States or its territories who advocates, is engaged in, or is preparing to engage in ideologically motivated terrorist activities (including providing support to terrorism) in furtherance of political or social objectives promoted by a foreign terrorist organization, but is acting independently of direction by a foreign terrorist organization. HVEs are distinct from traditional domestic terrorists who engage in unlawful acts of violence to intimidate civilian populations or attempt to influence domestic policy without direction or influence from a foreign actor. DVEs are defined by the FBI and DHS as an individual based and operating primarily within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power who seeks to further political or social goals, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may not constitute extremism and may be constitutionally protected.

MOBILIZATION INDICATOR CRITERIA

This booklet describes each indicator in terms of three criteria: what behavior stage a person is in ("Behavior Stages"); who, in addition to law enforcement, might observe the behavior ("Observers"); and what type of behavior the indicator describes ("Indicator Types").

BEHAVIOR STAGES: These three categories of behavior represent the process an individual typically goes through on their way to carrying out an attack or traveling to join like-minded violent extremists—such as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO): MOBILIZATION to violence, engaging in PREPARATION and planning for an attack or for travel to join like-minded violent extremists or an FTO, and developing MOTIVATION for violent extremist activity. The behavior categories are listed in order of most to least concerning. Indicators are grouped within each category by the strength of the indicator, with those of most immediate concern at the top.

Mobilization Indicators: Physical or virtual actions suggesting an attack or violent extremist travel may be imminent (days/hours before an attack or violent extremist travel)

Preparation Indicators: Physical or virtual actions suggesting an attack or violent extremist travel may occur in the near term (weeks before an attack or violent extremist travel)

Motivation Indicators: Physical or virtual actions that build, solidify, or communicate violent ideological beliefs; these indicators do not necessarily suggest an impending attack or violent extremist travel

Some of the indicators may be lawful or constitutionally protected and should not serve as the sole basis for any investigative activity. Additional facts and circumstances that clearly support the determination that the behavior observed is not innocent but rather reasonably indicative of pre-operational planning associated with terrorism is necessary to constitute a basis for reporting.

OBSERVERS: Law enforcement may be in a position to observe all of these indicators. In addition, non-law-enforcement observers in five categories are most likely to see these activities firsthand and report them to law enforcement:

- Family Members and Peers who have direct, in-person relationships with the individual—may also include neighbors and casual acquaintances
- Social Media Users who passively observe the individual online, and who may have a direct relationship with the individual online
- Community Authority Figures and Members, such as corrections
 officers and other government regulators, religious leaders and
 congregants, passersby, teachers, or work supervisors and colleagues
- Commercial Sector Representatives, such as commercial company or store employees, job recruiters, or travel professionals
- Financial Sector Representatives, such as employees of banking or other investment entities

INDICATOR TYPES: We have identified six behavior types that characterize an individual's activities as they relate to each indicator:

- Financial: Moving or acquiring money or resources to prepare for or conduct violence
- Ideology: Developing or communicating the mentality or justification that could lead to the commission of a violent act
- Intent: Developing or communicating goals or plans to commit a violent act
- **Relationship:** Interacting with others, including family or other violent extremists
- Tactics: Acquiring or developing skills, knowledge, or materials to engage in violent extremist activities
- Travel: Transiting within the United States or abroad to prepare for or conduct violence

MOBILIZATION INDICATORS

Physical or virtual actions suggesting an attack or violent extremist travel may be imminent (days/hours before an attack or violent extremist travel)

1 TRAVELING, WITHIN THE UNITED STATES OR ABROAD, TO CARRY OUT OR PARTICIPATE IN VIOLENT EXTREMIST ACTIVITY

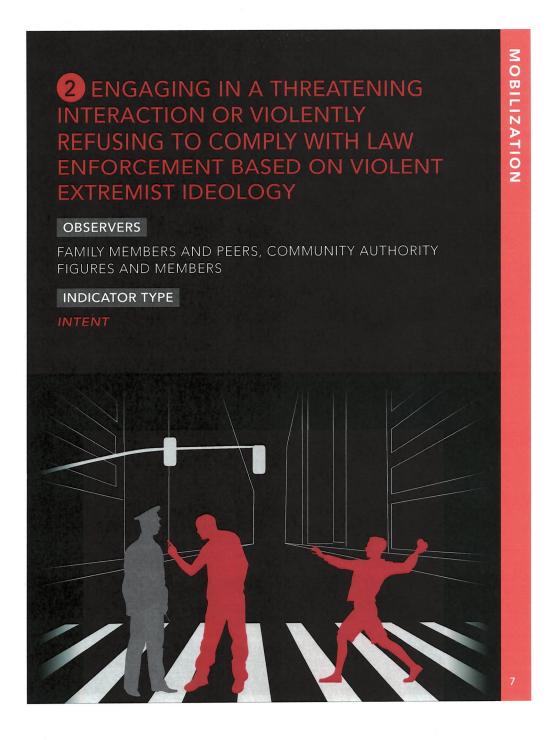
OBSERVERS

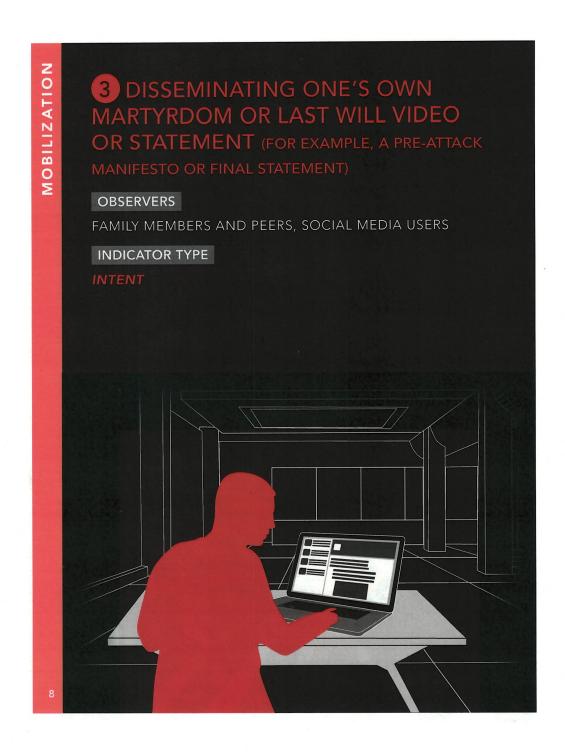
FAMILY MEMBERS AND PEERS, SOCIAL MEDIA USERS, COMMUNITY AUTHORITY FIGURES AND MEMBERS, COMMERCIAL SECTOR REPRESENTATIVES

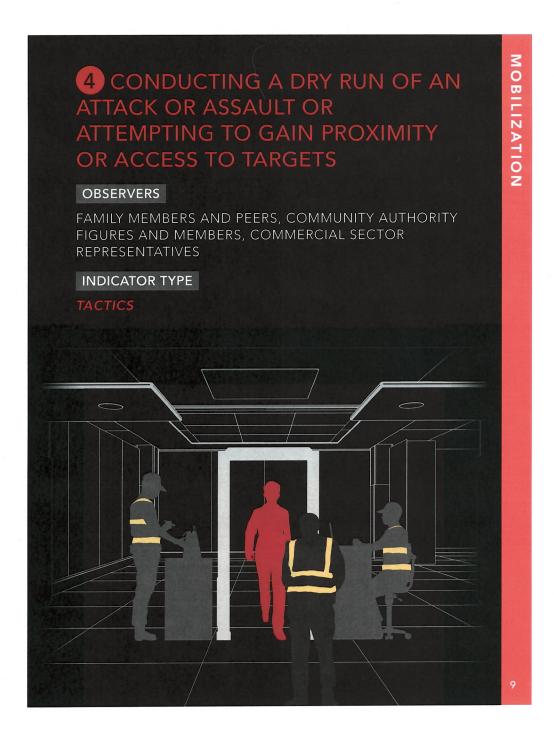
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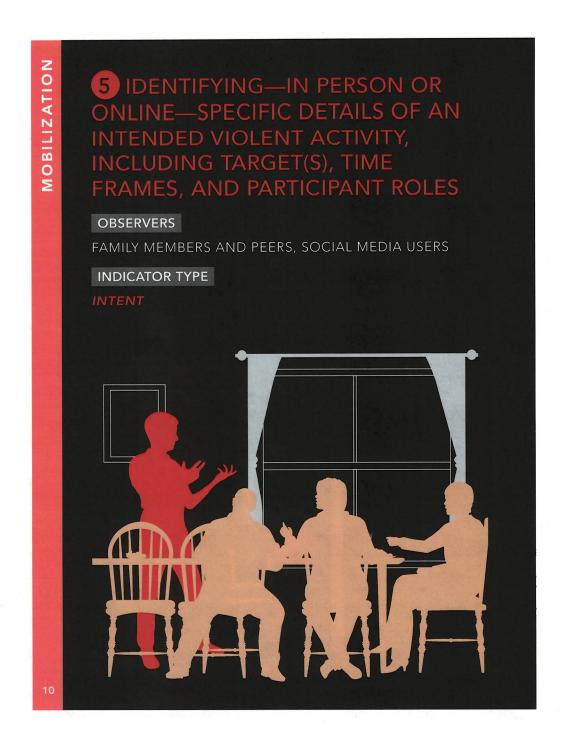
TRAVEL

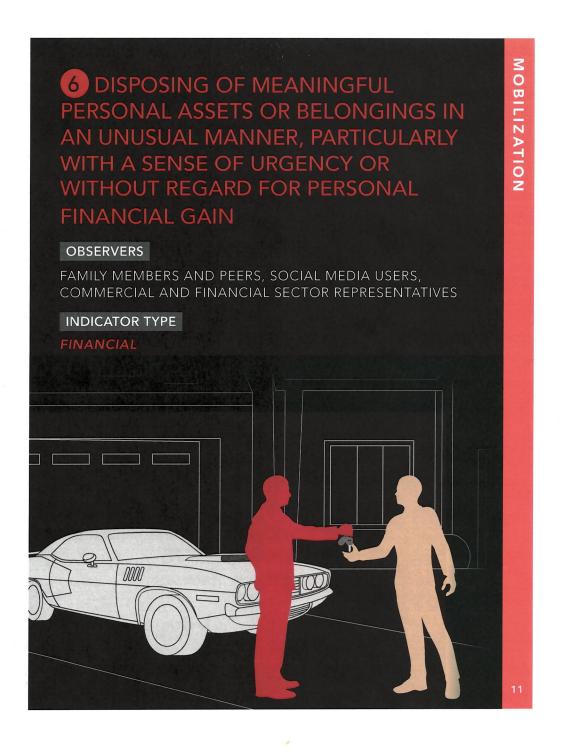


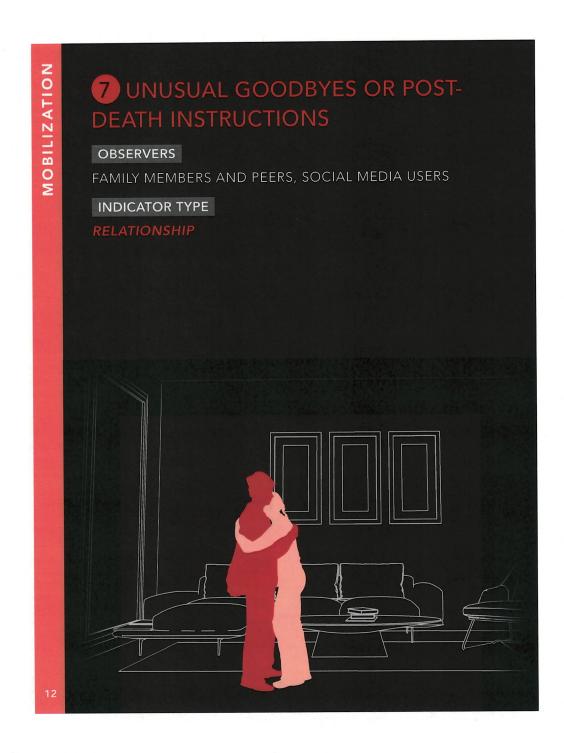












PREPARATION INDICATORS

Physical or virtual actions suggesting an attack or violent extremist travel may occur in the near term (weeks before an attack or violent extremist travel)

- Communicating intent to engage in violence or a direct threat with justification for action, particularly if presented as necessary or inevitable, in person or online
 - Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Intent

Unusual building or testing of explosives, especially if tailored to a specific target

Family members and peers, commercial sector representatives

Tactics

Planning or preparing to travel abroad to join violent extremist organizations, seek training, or engage in a conflict zone

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members, commercial sector representatives *Travel*

Planning or preparing to travel within the United States to participate in violent extremist activity

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members, commercial sector representatives

*Travel**

Seeking or claiming religious, political, or ideological justification or validation for a planned violent act

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Ideology

Unusual purchase of military-style tactical equipment (for example, body armor or personal protective equipment) in a manner that raises suspicion of planning violence

Family members and peers, social media users, commercial sector representatives

Tactics

Breaking away from a larger group or creating a more exclusive or operationally secure group to discuss or plan specific violent activity

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Relationship

15 Surveilling potential attack targets

Community authority figures and members, commercial sector representatives

Tactics

Increased use of physical concealment tactics (for example, countersurveillance techniques, disposable phone) in support of planning a specific act of violence

Family members and peers, commercial sector representatives

Tactics

Increased use of online concealment tactics (for example, deleting, hiding, or manipulating social media or other online accounts to misrepresent location or hide group membership, contacts, or activities) in support of planning a specific act of violence.

Family members and peers, social media users, commercial sector representatives

Tactics

Communicating directly with or seeking to develop a relationship with violent extremists, or being contacted directly by them, for suspected criminal purposes

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Relationship

19 Unusual efforts to obtain explosive precursors, especially illegally or surreptitiously

Family members and peers, social media users, commercial sector representatives

Tactics

Acquisition of weapons or ammunition for suspected criminal purposes

Family members and peers, social media users, commercial sector representatives

Tactics

Change in or initiation of physical or weapons training for suspected criminal purposes

Family members and peers, social media users, commercial sector representatives

Tactics

Planning or pursuing suspicious travel activity (for example, unusual purchase of one-way tickets, false excuses for international travel, fraudulent passport application) in a manner that raises suspicion of potential violence

Family members and peers, commercial sector representatives

Travel

Sending or receiving unexplained financial resources or equipment to/from violent extremists

Family members and peers, commercial and financial sector representatives

Financial

Creating, joining, or implying membership/association—in person or online—with violent extremists for the purpose of furthering violent activity

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Relationship

Conducting research for target or tactic selection for violent acts (for example, acquiring blueprints, maps, schematics, or technical specifications)

Family members and peers, community authority figures and members, commercial sector representatives

Tactics

Pursuing or exploiting jobs or personnel who provide sensitive access to enable violent acts (for example, critical infrastructure, the Intelligence Community, law enforcement, military)

Family members and peers, community authority figures and members, commercial sector representatives

Tactics

Attempting to seek technical expertise (for example, in aviation, biology, chemistry, electronics) to enable planned violence

Family members and peers, social media users, commercial sector representatives

Tactics

MOTIVATION INDICATORS

Physical or virtual actions that build, solidify, or communicate violent ideological beliefs; these indicators do not necessarily suggest an impending attack or violent extremist travel

Some of the indicators may be lawful or constitutionally protected and should not serve as the sole basis for any investigative activity. Additional facts and circumstances that clearly support the determination that the behavior observed is not innocent but rather reasonably indicative of pre-operational planning associated with terrorism is necessary to constitute a basis for reporting.

Professing intent to harm law enforcement if law enforcement takes action or statement of intent to harm others (typically ideological opponents) if confronted

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Intent

Expressing desire or willingness to die for a violent extremist ideology

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Intent

Threatening specific violence against a particular physical target, especially in response to current news reporting on political and legislative issues or other flashpoint events that speak to one's ideological concerns

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Intent

Threatening violence toward specific individuals, including civilian, government, law enforcement, or military personnel

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Intent

Producing, promoting, or extensively consuming violent extremist content online or in person, including violent extremist videos, narratives, media, and messaging for suspected criminal purposes

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Ideology

Posing with weapons and imagery associated with violent extremism in photos or videos, especially if paired with threats or expressed interest in carrying out violence against an ideological target for suspected criminal purposes

Family members and peers, social media users Ideology

Expressing acceptance of violence as a necessary means to achieve ideological goals (for example, communicating a desire for revenge against ideological opponents) and saying that nonviolent means are ineffective or unavailable

Family members and peers, social medial users, community authority figures and members

Intent

Attempting to radicalize others—especially family members and peers—to violence

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Relationship

Praising, or researching to emulate, past successful or attempted attacks or attackers

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Ideology

37 Increasing or extreme adherence to conspiracy theories as a justification of violence against ideological targets

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Ideology

Engaging in outbursts or fights with or condemning behavior of family, peers, community, or authority figures while advocating violent extremist ideology

Family members and peers, community authority figures and members

Relationship

- Adopting more than one violent extremist ideology
 Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members
 Ideology
- Rejecting nonviolent voices in favor of violent extremist ideologues

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Ideology

Changing vocabulary, style of speech, or behavior to reflect a hardened point of view or new sense of purpose associated with violent extremist causes, particularly after a catalyzing event

Family members and peers, social media users, community authority figures and members

Ideology

42 Isolating oneself from family and peers, particularly if citing violent extremist doctrine or ideology

Family members and peers, community authority figures and members

Relationship

RISK FACTORS

It is important to consider the totality of an individual's circumstances when observing potential indicators because some factors may increase the risk that the individual could mobilize to violence in a given situation. The following risk factors should be considered in conjunction with the indicators of mobilization to violence, as each risk factor may be insignificant on its own and no one factor appears to be more significant than another. Some of these risk factors may involve constitutionally protected activities. Risk factors may include:

- Family, significant other, and/or peers espousing or supporting a violent extremist ideology
- History of encouraging violence by dehumanizing people who are not in the same identity group or who are ideological opponents
- History of notable noncompliance with restrictions, boundaries, or laws
- History of stalking, harassing, threatening, or menacing behavior
- History of violence (not necessarily related to terrorism), unstable mental state resulting in threat to self or others, or past exposure to violence and/or a traumatic event
- Negative response to or failure to cope with existing, new, or changing personal circumstances, including personal relationships, family dynamics, employment, and/or substance abuse or dependence
- Presence of real or perceived injustice or a feeling of being wronged (grievances); may be broad or specific to a person, group, or event
- Previous travel or exposure to a conflict zone or an area of high political or social violence, including personal or noncombatant travel

INDICATOR INDEX, BY TYPE

Some of the indicators may be lawful or constitutionally protected and should not serve as the sole basis for any investigative activity. Additional facts and circumstances that clearly support the determination that the behavior observed is not innocent but rather reasonably indicative of pre-operational planning associated with terrorism is necessary to constitute a basis for reporting.

INDICATOR TYPE

FINANCIAL

Disposing of meaningful personal assets or belongings in an unusual manner, particularly with a sense of urgency or without regard for personal financial gain6 Sending or receiving unexplained financial resources or equipment **IDEOLOGY** Seeking or claiming religious, political, or ideological justification or validation for a planned violent act......12 Producing, promoting, or extensively consuming violent extremist content online or in person, including violent extremist videos, narratives, media, and messaging for suspected criminal purposes.. 32 Posing with weapons and imagery associated with violent extremism in photos or videos, especially if paired with threats or expressed interest in carrying out violence against an ideological target for Praising, or researching to emulate, past successful or attempted Increasing or extreme adherence to conspiracy theories as a Rejecting nonviolent voices in favor of violent extremist ideologues.. 40

INDICATOR TYPE

IDFOI	OGY	(continued)

Changing vocabulary, style of speech, or behavior to reflect a hardened point of view or new sense of purpose associated with violent extremist causes, particularly after a catalyzing event........ 41

INTENT

٠.	
	Engaging in a threatening interaction or violently refusing to comply with law enforcement based on violent extremist ideology
	Disseminating one's own martyrdom or last will video or statement (for example, a pre-attack manifesto or final statement)
	Identifying—in person or online—specific details of an intended violent activity, including target(s), time frames, and participant roles
	Communicating intent to engage in violence or a direct threat with justification for action, particularly if presented as necessary or inevitable, in person or online
Control Section Sectio	Professing intent to harm law enforcement if law enforcement takes action or statement of intent to harm others (typically ideological opponents) if confronted
	Expressing desire or willingness to die for a violent extremist ideology
	Threatening specific violence against a particular physical target, especially in response to current news reporting on political and legislative issues or other flashpoint events that speak to one's ideological concerns
	Threatening violence toward specific individuals, including civilian, government, law enforcement, or military personnel
	Expressing acceptance of violence as a necessary means to achieve ideological goals (for example, communicating a desire for revenge against ideological opponents) and saying that nonviolent means are ineffective or unavailable.

INDICATOR TYPE

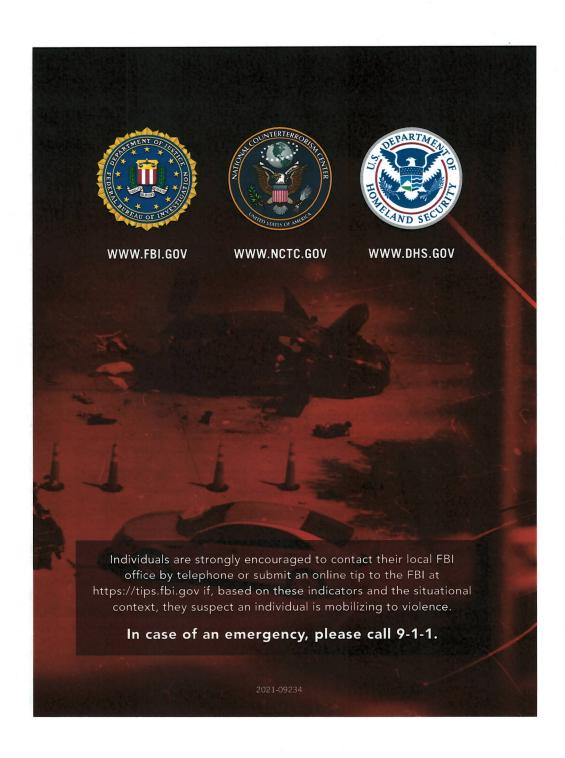
RELATIONSHIP					
• (Unusual goodbyes or post-death instructions				
	Breaking away from a larger group or creating a more exclusive or operationally secure group to discuss or plan specific violent activity14				
١ ١	Communicating directly with or seeking to develop a relationship with violent extremists, or being contacted directly by them, for suspected criminal purposes				
	Creating, joining, or implying membership/association—in person or online—with violent extremists for the purpose of furthering violent activity				
	Attempting to radicalize others—especially family members and peers—to violence				
1	Engaging in outbursts or fights with or condemning behavior of family, peers, community, or authority figures while advocating violent extremist ideology				
	Isolating oneself from family and peers, particularly if citing violent extremist doctrine or ideology42				
TA	CTICS				
	Conducting a dry run of an attack or assault or attempting to gain proximity or access to targets				
	Unusual building or testing of explosives, especially if tailored to a specific target9				
	Unusual purchase of military-style tactical equipment (for example, body armor or personal protective equipment) in a manner that raises suspicion of planning violence				
	Surveilling potential attack targets				
1	Increased use of physical concealment tactics (for example, countersurveillance techniques, disposable phone) in support of planning a specific act of violence				

INDICATOR TYPE

Τ	ACTICS (continued)
	Increased use of online concealment tactics (for example, deleting, hiding, or manipulating social media or other online accounts to misrepresent location or hide group membership, contacts, or activities) in support of planning a specific act of violence
	Unusual efforts to obtain explosives precursors, especially illegally o surreptitiously
	Acquisition of weapons or ammunition for suspected criminal purposes
	Change in or initiation of physical or weapons training for suspected criminal purposes
	Conducting research for target or tactic selection for violent acts (for example, acquiring blueprints, maps, schematics, or technical specifications)
	Pursuing or exploiting jobs or personnel who provide sensitive access to enable violent acts (for example, critical infrastructure, the Intelligence Community, law enforcement, military)
	Attempting to seek technical expertise (for example, in aviation, biology, chemistry, electronics) to enable planned violence 27
Т	RAVEL
	Traveling, within the United States or abroad, to carry out or participate in violent extremist activity1
	Planning or preparing to travel abroad to join violent extremist

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US VIOLENT EXTREMIST MOBILIZATION INDICATORS 2021







- Traveling, within the United States or abroad, to carry out or participate in violent extremist activity
- Engaging in a threatening interaction or violently refusing to comply with law enforcement based on violent extremist ideology
- Disseminating one's own martyrdom or last will video or statement (for example, a pre-attack manifesto or final statement)
- Conducting a dry run of an attack or assault or attempting to gain proximity or access to targets
- Identifying—in person or online—specific details of an intended violent activity, including target(s), time frames, and participant roles
- Disposing of meaningful personal assets or belongings in an unusual manner, particularly with a sense of urgency or without regard for personal financial gain
- Unusual goodbyes or post-death instructions
- Communicating intent to engage in violence or a direct threat with justification for action, particularly if presented as necessary or inevitable, in person or online
- Unusual building or testing of explosives, especially if tailored to a specific target
- Planning or preparing to travel abroad to join violent extremist organizations, seek training, or engage in a conflict zone
- Planning or preparing to travel within the United States to participate in violent

- extremist activity
- Seeking or claiming religious, political, or ideological justification or validation for a planned violent act
- 13. Unusual purchase of military-style tactical equipment (for example, body armor or personal protective equipment) in a manner that raises suspicion of planning violence
- Breaking away from a larger group or creating a more exclusive or operationally secure group to discuss or plan specific violent activity
- 15. Surveilling potential attack targets
- 16. Increased use of physical concealment tactics (for example, countersurveillance techniques, disposable phone) in support of planning a specific act of violence
- 17. Increased use of online concealment tactics (for example, deleting, hiding, or manipulating social media or other online accounts to misrepresent location or hide group membership, contacts, or activities) in support of planning a specific act of violence
- Communicating directly with or seeking to develop a relationship with violent extremists, or being contacted directly by them, for suspected criminal purposes
- Unusual efforts to obtain explosive precursors, especially illegally or surreptitiously
- Acquisition of weapons or ammunition for suspected criminal purposes
- Change in or initiation of physical or weapons training for suspected criminal purposes

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US VIOLENT EXTREMIST MOBILIZATION INDICATORS 2021







- 22. Planning or pursuing suspicious travel activity (for example, unusual purchase of one-way tickets, false excuses for international travel, fraudulent passport application) in a manner that raises suspicion of potential violence
- Sending or receiving unexplained financial resources or equipment to/from violent extremists
- Creating, joining, or implying membership/ association—in person or online—with violent extremists for the purpose of furthering violent activity
- Conducting research for target or tactic selection for violent acts (for example, acquiring blueprints, maps, schematics, or technical specifications)
- Pursuing or exploiting jobs or personnel who provide sensitive access to enable violent acts (for example, critical infrastructure, the Intelligence Community, law enforcement, military)
- Attempting to seek technical expertise (for example, in aviation, biology, chemistry, electronics) to enable planned violence
- Professing intent to harm law enforcement if law enforcement takes action or statement of intent to harm others (typically ideological opponents) if confronted
- 29. Expressing desire or willingness to die for a violent extremist ideology
- 30. Threatening specific violence against a particular physical target, especially in response to current news reporting on political and legislative issues or other flashpoint events that speak to one's ideological concerns
- Threatening violence toward specific individuals, including civilian, government, law enforcement, or military personnel

- 32. Producing, promoting, or extensively consuming violent extremist content online or in person, including violent extremist videos, narratives, media, and messaging for suspected criminal purposes
- 33. Posing with weapons and imagery associated with violent extremism in photos or videos, especially if paired with threats or expressed interest in carrying out violence against an ideological target for suspected criminal purposes
- 34. Expressing acceptance of violence as a necessary means to achieve ideological goals (for example, communicating a desire for revenge against ideological opponents) and saying that nonviolent means are ineffective or unavailable
- Attempting to radicalize others—especially family members and peers—to violence
- Praising, or researching to emulate, past successful or attempted attacks or attackers
- Increasing or extreme adherence to conspiracy theories as a justification of violence against ideological targets
- Engaging in outbursts or fights with or condemning behavior of family, peers, community, or authority figures while advocating violent extremist ideology
- Adopting more than one violent extremist ideology
- Rejecting nonviolent voices in favor of violent extremist ideologues
- 41. Changing vocabulary, style of speech, or behavior to reflect a hardened point of view or new sense of purpose associated with violent extremist causes, particularly after a catalyzing event
- Isolating oneself from family and peers, particularly if citing violent extremist doctrine or ideology