

Possible Indicators of Criminal Offenders Mobilizing to Violent Extremism

A review of cases during the past several years indicates that some criminal offenders may be susceptible to radicalization and mobilization to the full spectrum of violent extremism possibly because of shared drivers and/or motivations between violent extremism and criminal activity.^a Law enforcement, prison and probation officers, and other security stakeholders should be familiar with indicators that people convicted of criminal offenses—those currently incarcerated or recently released—may condone, support, facilitate, exhibit or use violence to further violent extremism.

NOTE: An individual's criminal history by itself may not indicate potential mobilization to violence but is one of many factors that should be considered.

INDICATORS: Possible observable indicators from the Homegrown Violent Extremists Mobilization Indicators Handbook (2019 Edition) that may signify that criminal actors are radicalizing and mobilizing to violence include:^b

- Sharing information related to violent extremist activities on social media to radicalize or mobilize others.
- Providing money, electronic equipment, or survival gear to violent extremist individuals or groups.
- Approving of violence as a necessary means to achieve ideological goals.
- Creating or joining exclusive groups that encourage or incite violence to rectify perceived grievances (social, political, ideological).

SCOPE: This product highlights potential indicators for law enforcement, prison and probation officers and other security stakeholders of criminal actors who may be escalating to engage in violent extremist activities.

Promises of Redemption Could Motivate Criminals to Turn Towards Terrorism:

People may use violent extremist ideology to justify criminal activities or condone past criminal acts. Terrorist messaging has taken advantage of this by presenting terrorism as a means to redeem past sins.



Rumiyah, Issue 11, Al Hayat Media Center| 2017| pp. 44-52.

An issue of an ISIS magazine *Dabiq* featured an obituary of a criminal-turned terrorist who was memorialized despite being “indulgent in disobedience and sins.” At the same time, the obituary praised him, highlighting “...he wasn’t afraid of confrontation, nor would he run from a fight.” According to the obituary, ISIS said that his contributions to the “Islamist” cause annulled the corruption from his past, atoning for past sins.

^a Similar drivers for engaging in violent extremism and criminal activity may include seeking identity, power, adventure, and a sense of belonging.

^b Many of the activities described herein may involve constitutionally protected activities and may be insignificant on their own. No action should be taken solely based on the exercise of constitutionally protected rights.

NOTICE: This is a Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team (JCAT) publication. JCAT is a collaboration by the NCTC, DHS and FBI to improve information sharing among federal, state, local, tribal, territorial governments and private sector partners, in the interest of enhancing public safety. This product is **NOT** in response to a specific threat against the United States. It provides general awareness of, considerations for, and additional resources related to terrorist tactics, techniques and procedures, whether domestic or overseas. Consider the enclosed information within existing laws, regulations, authorities, agreements, policies or procedures. For additional information, contact us at JCAT@NCTC.GOV.



Possible Indicators of Criminal Offenders Mobilizing to Violent Extremism *(continued)*

- Condoning violence against nonsupporters of their ideology.
- Espousing hate speech to justify group actions and activities.
- Radicalizing others, including family members, friends, and peers.
- Repeated efforts to establish relationships with known violent extremists during a short period of time.
- Expressing views that intimidation, coercion, or violence against persons or the government is justifiable because they believe that:
 - Certain races, religions, ethnicities, genders, and/or sexual orientations are unacceptable.
 - There is an existential threat to their beliefs.
 - The government is trying to destroy their beliefs.
- Disregarding US laws or regulations when they are in conflict with their beliefs.

CONSIDERATIONS: The following are recommendations to better equip first responders and their organizations.

- Establish familiarity with terrorist groups, their branding, publications, and terminology.
- Regularly review products on terrorist trends and CT resources found on US Government information-sharing portals such as Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN), Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal (LEEP), and Regional Information Sharing Systems Network (RISSNET).
- Enhance information sharing and cooperation to help identify emerging terrorist trends. This could be done by establishing forums among community leaders, parole and probation officers, law enforcement, and with the public.
- Collaborate with federal, state, and local corrections personnel and supervised-release officials on indicators of radicalization and mobilization to violence and associated reporting mechanisms.
- Educate reintegration and reentry program personnel, such as probation and parole officers, about how individuals radicalize and on the indicators of mobilization to violence to prevent former prisoners from falling victim to terrorist narratives.
- Understand the institutional barriers (cultural, mindset, and interoperability) that exist between criminal versus terrorism investigations through cross-training opportunities and cross-case information sharing.

TERRORIST SYMBOLS:

Training on the identification of terrorist-related imagery, publications, and terminology, such as ISIS's magazine *Dabiq*, may provide opportunities for law enforcement to disrupt terrorist activities.



Center for National Security at Fordham Law |
ISIS and the Crime-Terror Nexus in America: A
Counterpoint to Europe | December 2020



Possible Indicators of Criminal Offenders Mobilizing to Violent Extremism *(continued)*

THE CRIMINAL-TERRORISM NEXUS UP CLOSE: Federal and state law enforcement analysis and academic studies during the past decade have shown that some individuals with a criminal history have mobilized to violent extremist activity.^c However, more research is needed in order to determine why certain people continue on this path.

- The FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU) Lone Offender Terrorism Report found that a high percentage of lone offender terrorists had criminal backgrounds. According to the report's findings, 70 percent of adult lone offenders had been arrested at least once for criminal activity before their attack and 52 percent had been arrested more than once.
- In December 2020, a federal grand jury indicted six men who held/adhered to a Domestic Violent Extremist ideology on a charge of conspiracy to kidnap the Governor of Michigan. Prior to mobilizing, these people had extensive criminal histories including disorderly conduct, burglary, malicious destruction of property, and possession of a firearm while committing a felony. They wanted to create a society that adhered to the US Bill of Rights and where they could be self sufficient, and discussed ways of achieving this goal from peaceful endeavors to violent actions. The men decided to use violence after the Governor of Michigan instituted statewide policies that they perceived violated the US Constitution.
- A 2020 academic study found that 32 percent of America's ISIS defendants in the US court/legal system had criminal records, suggesting criminal activity as one of the mobilizing factors. Each ISIS defendant with a criminal history had on average three arrests.
- A study conducted by the West Virginia Fusion Center in 2019 that found that 71 percent of those with state-level charges of terrorism in 2019 had criminal backgrounds.
- In June 2019, the US District Court in Chicago, Illinois found two US persons guilty of conspiring to provide material support and resources to terrorists. The men provided cell phones to an informant who said he would use them to create detonators for ISIS attacks. One of the men had an extensive criminal background that included theft, robbery, drug possession, domestic battery, criminal trespassing, property damage, and resisting arrest.

^c Social-science studies have shown a correlation between a criminal past and possible political violence in the future. One study involving almost 1,500 terrorists discovered those having a prior criminal history was a reliable predictor for engaging in violent extremist behavior. It also found that those who engaged in criminal behavior before their adoption of violent extremist beliefs were significantly more likely to attempt or commit acts of violence post radicalization.



Possible Indicators of Criminal Offenders Mobilizing to Violent Extremism *(continued)*

RESOURCES

FBI LONE OFFENDER TERRORISM REPORT: <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/ms-13-s-highest-ranking-leaders-charged-terrorism-offenses-united-states>

HOMEOWN VIOLENT EXTREMIST MOBILIZATION INDICATORS FOR PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL - 2019 EDITION (22 JANUARY 2019) identifies behaviors that indicate an individual or group may be preparing to engage in violent extremist activities and is available on the Office of the Director of National Intelligence website. <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/nctc-newsroom/nctc-resources/item/1945-homegrown-violent-extremist-mobilization-indicators-2019>

NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM CENTER (NCTC): INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM GUIDE
<https://www.dni.gov/nctc/index.html>

SECOND CHANCE ACT (SCA) program gives funding to state, local, and tribal governments and non-profit organizations to address each prisoner's unique needs post-release, such as family: reunification, job placement, and substance abuse treatment through the Department of Justice. <https://nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/projects/second-chance-act/>

STATE AND LOCAL ANTI-TERRORISM TRAINING PROGRAM (SLATT): <https://www.slatt.org/>

TERRORISM ONLINE TIPS: Educate public-safety personnel on emerging online trends and how to counter terrorist messaging aimed at criminals. <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.

NAME and ORG:

DISCIPLINE: LE FIRE EMS HEALTH ANALYSIS PRIVATE SECTOR DATE:

PRODUCT TITLE:



ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS, OR QUESTIONS.

WHAT TOPICS DO YOU RECOMMEND?

