

Mixing Ideologies Requires Multipronged Terrorism Prevention Efforts

Some violent extremists in the United States exhibit ideological fluidity to justify acts of violence, often to address personal grievances, including anecdotally among youths. This trend includes violent extremists who adopt Sunni violent extremist ideology promoted by foreign terrorist organizations and other social and politically motivated violent extremist ideologies. Beyond the promotion of violence, these ideologies are sometimes contradictory in content but can provide violent extremists with new and flexible arguments or perspectives to interpret their surroundings and frame their worldview. Terrorism prevention efforts that focus on shared risk factors and drivers outside of ideology can help reach individuals regardless of ideological motivations.^a

Academic research shows that some violent extremists create their own ideologies or may adopt, switch between, or exploit multiple ideologies when they feel that their personal needs and interests are not being fulfilled by a single ideology. Online forums and social media sites provide ideal environments for this kind of emergent, user-generated ideology to gain popularity and spread among others who may share similar frustrations or grievances.

SCOPE: This product provides awareness to public safety stakeholders on the individuals who may mix multiple ideologies and aids in detection and prevention efforts in terrorism and other violent extremist activities.

IDEOLOGICAL FLUIDITY

Ideological fluidity refers to mixing ideologies and/or jumping from one ideology to another.

- **Ideology mixers** embrace multiple, sometimes contradictory ideologies that they perceive address personal grievances and justify violence.
- **Ideology hoppers** deliberately discard old beliefs in favor of new ones or abandon one ideological movement for another.

Ideological fluidity is characterized in different ways, to include:

- Mixing ideologies
- Ideology fluidity
- Salad bar ideology
- Ideological convergence
- Fused violent extremism
- Hybrid ideologies
- Mixed, unstable, or unclear ideology
- Fringe fluidity
- Ideology a la carte
- Choose-your-own-adventure violent extremism

NOTE: Some activities may be constitutionally protected and insignificant on their own but, when observed in combination with other suspicious behaviors, may constitute a basis for concern. Law enforcement action should not be based solely on the exercise of constitutionally protected activities or on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any combination of these factors.

^a For more information, see JCAT Toolbox, "Terrorism Prevention: Addressing Early Risk Factors to Build Resilience Against Violent Extremism," February 2022.

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- A violent extremist located in Illinois who adhered to white supremacy and Sunni violent extremist ideologies—when asked in March 2019 to explain an online post in which he suggested that he might bomb a synagogue—described himself as anti-Semitic and talked about the notion of “one struggle” among white supremacists and Sunni violent extremists against Jews. The individual’s comments included wanting to hurt African Americans to “secure my race.”
- In December 2018, a violent extremist was convicted of attempting to provide material support to ISIS and planning an attack on a Toledo-based synagogue. In discussing his attack plans, he expressed admiration for the racially or ethnically motivated violent extremist (RMVE) who espoused a belief in the superiority of the white race who attacked the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh in October 2018.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MOBILIZATION AND TARGET SELECTION:

- There is no evidence that ideological fluidity increases an individual’s likelihood of mobilizing to violence.
- Ideological fluidity probably influences a would-be attacker’s target selection and may complicate attack planning due to multiple or competing goals.

SHARED GRIEVANCE, TENDENCY FOR VIOLENCE, AND NEED TO BELONG PROBABLY DRIVE IDEOLOGICAL FLUIDITY

Violent extremist grievances across the ideological spectrum have similarities that enable fluidity, such as a belief in the social and moral breakdown of society, misogyny, anti-Semitism, antigovernment views, or accelerationism—which calls for using violence to destroy or collapse the capitalistic social order.

- For example, Sunni-inspired violent extremism and ethnically motivated violent extremism have several ideological commonalities—including clearly defined ingroups and outgroups, a goal of replacing the existing state structure with one built around racial or religious exclusivity, and a shared perspective that blames the Jewish population for perceived societal ills. This perception of a common enemy is emphasized in violent extremist propaganda and rhetoric.

CONSIDERATIONS

The following are ways public safety stakeholders can engage around ideologically fluidity:

Collaboration

- Partner with terrorism-prevention practitioners to promote public-awareness campaigns and community dialogues focused on risk factors for terrorism to dispel assumptions that vulnerable individuals can only be motivated by one violent extremist ideology. This type of outreach may also encourage bystanders, including peers and family members, to intervene when they believe an individual is in crisis and in need of help, or report concerns to law enforcement if they believe someone is mobilizing to violence.^b

^b Risk factors may be observable by first responders and community or family members. They may include a history of violence, loss of identity, search for belonging, or mental health stressors, such as post-traumatic stress disorder.



- Work with local service providers and NGOs to generate tailored interventions that provide counseling, health services, or mentoring for individuals who are at risk of radicalizing to violence. These tailored interventions should address grievances and foster a sense of belonging to reach individuals who resist ideology-based terrorism prevention efforts and encourage their disengagement from violent extremism.

Education and Information Sharing

- Build community and public safety personnel awareness of the potential for violent extremists to switch ideological affiliations to help identify emerging violent extremists and promote the development of terrorism prevention programs tailored to such individuals.
- Increase information sharing between law enforcement and the IC about this phenomenon to ensure typologies are continuously updated as new movements emerge and to facilitate better understanding of the factors that cause violent extremists to switch movements. State and local law enforcement may be positioned to identify changing ideologies in a violent extremist due to previous interactions.
- Increase awareness of the potential impact of the online environment in fostering ideological fluidity—including social media algorithms on radicalization, specifically with youths—to provide public safety stakeholders additional knowledge to successfully generate tailored interventions.

Tailored Approaches to Mitigate Potential Violence

- Prevention efforts focusing on one specific ideology may be inefficient to mitigate violent extremist threats given the personalized and dynamic nature of ideological fluidity. Tailored approaches that address the underlying grievances and drivers of radicalization and implementing programs borrowing best practices from other forms of violence prevention programs—such as anti-gang or anti-hate—may be effective at mitigating the threat of violence from ideologically fluid individuals. Additionally, local communities may not view terrorism as a priority and may instead invest their resources in overall violence prevention. Therefore, terrorism prevention programs framed as antiviolence would better align with existing local community efforts.
 - **Multidisciplinary threat assessment and threat management (TATM) teams** integrated with a law enforcement component can employ tailored resources and approaches to violence prevention efforts based on the specific behaviors of concern identified in an investigation. TATM teams consider a range of issues—including radicalization history, violence history, existing support systems, family dynamics, peer relationships, and mental health—to identify and implement effective strategies for disruption or long-term threat management.



- **Investigations** focused on detecting behaviors such as pre-attack research, planning, and preparation—rather than ideological motivations—can be more effective in preventing or disrupting violence.^c
- **Communication campaigns** that focus on broader violence prevention, as opposed to specific ideologies, could lead to increased bystander reporting from family members and friends who are closest to individuals planning or preparing to conduct a violent act. It is important to raise awareness among potential bystanders that an individual may still be committed to conducting an act of violence even if their ideology or stated grievance(s) change over time.
- **General violence prevention programs**—such as anti-gang, anti-hate, or anti-bias—have broad applicability to terrorism prevention initiatives because they address the personalized risk factors associated with radicalization to violence—such as unmet psychological needs, seeking a sense of identity or belonging, or development of an “us versus them” mentality—without catering to a specific cause or ideology.

RESOURCES

DHS

- **The Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3)** strengthens our country's ability to prevent targeted violence and terrorism nationwide through funding, training, and increased public awareness, and the establishment of partnerships across every level of government, the private sector, and in local communities. For inquiries, contact TerrorismPrevention@hq.dhs.gov or visit <https://www.dhs.gov/CP3>.
- **National Threat Evaluation and Reporting (NTER)** office equips federal, state, local, tribal, territorial (FSLTT), and private sector partners with tools and resources to identify, report, and, mitigate threats of terrorism and targeted violence through the **Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative (NSI)** and **Behavioral Threat Assessment Integration (BTAI)**. <https://www.dhs.gov/nter>
 - The **NSI** is a joint collaborative effort by DHS, FBI, state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement partners. It establishes standardized processes and policies that provide the capability for FSLTT, college campus police, and railroad law enforcement and homeland security agencies to share timely, relevant SAR through an information-sharing system while protecting individual privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties. <https://www.dhs.gov/nationwide-sar-initiative-nsi>

^c For a list of behavioral indicators leading to mobilization to violence, please reference the NCTC-, FBI-, and DHS-authored *US Violent Extremist Mobilization Indicators, 2021 Edition* booklet.



- NTER's **BTAI** line of effort assists homeland security partners with integrating a behavioral approach to targeted violence prevention, primarily through the **Master Trainer Program**—which certifies FSLTT partners in the instruction of behavioral threat assessment and management techniques and best practices.
- **US Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC)** conducts research, training, and consultation on threat assessment and the prevention of targeted violence. NTAC is comprised of a multidisciplinary team of social science researchers and regional program managers who support and empower our partners in law enforcement, schools, government, and other public and private sector organizations to combat the evolving threat of targeted violence impacting communities across the United States.
 - NTAC publishes operationally relevant research examining all forms of targeted violence and produces guides for establishing proactive, targeted violence prevention programs. All NTAC publications are available on the NTAC website at www.secretservice.gov/ntac.
 - NTAC staff provide training on threat assessment and the prevention of targeted violence, by request, to a variety of public safety professionals. NTAC trainings include a presentation of NTAC's research, relevant case examples, and an overview of the US Secret Service threat assessment model for targeted violence prevention. NTAC training events are geared toward each audience and are often delivered to state and local law enforcement, schools, universities, and other agencies and organizations with public safety responsibilities. Trainings may be delivered virtually or in person and are routinely scheduled for two to four hours.
 - NTAC is congressionally authorized to provide consultation on the development of threat assessment policies and protocols as well as on complex threat assessment cases.
- **If You See Something, Say Something**® is a program designed to help raise public awareness of the indicators of terrorism and terrorism-related crime that emphasizes the importance of reporting suspicious activity to proper state and local law enforcement officials. <https://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something>

FBI

- The Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU), **Behavioral Threat Assessment Center (BTAC)** is the primary national resource for TATM related to FBI-led terrorism investigations. BTAC conducts training and research and provides behaviorally based investigative and operational support including case consultations to law enforcement, including those serving on threat assessment and management teams working on terrorism and targeted violence. BTAC's services can be requested by law enforcement via a local BAU Threat Management Coordinator (TMC). <https://www2.fbi.gov/hq/isd/cirg/ncavc.htm#bau>



- **Terrorism Online Tips** provides options for the public to submit an anonymous tip to the FBI or other federal agencies, including DHS, the Federal Trade Commission, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3), the National Center for Mission & Exploited Children, and the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration. <https://tips.fbi.gov/> <https://www.tigta.gov>
 - **Internet Crime Complaint (IC3)** accepts online Internet crime complaints from either the victim or from a third party to the complainant. <https://www.ic3.gov/>

The **Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.)** program, administered by the Office of Justice Programs, is a school-based, law-enforcement-officer-instructed program that provides resiliency-building training to at-risk youth and their families to mitigate delinquency, violence, and gang activity. <https://www.great-online.org/>

NCTC

- (U) The **US Violent Extremist Mobilization Indicators Booklet (2021 Edition)** is an NCTC, DHS, and FBI tri-seal product that provides a list of observable behaviors that could help determine whether individuals are preparing to engage in violent extremist activities. For inquiries or more information, contact mib@nctc.gov or visit <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/nctcnewsroom/nctc-resources/item/2272-u-s-violent-extremist-mobilization-indicators-2021>





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