Youth Violence Prevention in the United States

Examining International Terrorists, Domestic Terrorists, School Shooters, and Gang Members

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Contents

Key Takeaways

Youths who become international terrorists, domestic terrorists, school shooters, and gang members share similar factors that play a role in their pathways to violence. Focusing on similarities among the four categories of violence may inform prevention efforts across the board, enabling practitioners to tailor initiatives from a common framework.

- **Personal-level risk factors**—including psychological issues, demographic backgrounds, and personal history—and **group-level factors**—including group dynamics of social networks—were seen in all four forms of violence. These two levels also offer the best opportunities for prevention efforts, since they were seen in all forms of violence and are smaller in scope than the other levels.

- **Community-level factors**, which include social environments that create alienation or marginalization, also impacted all four forms of violence. However, for school shooters, only online communities were relevant, not traditional geographic communities.

- **Sociopolitical-level factors**, which include collective grievances, foreign policy, external events, and media, were seen in all four types of violence but would be more challenging to address than other levels, since they would require societal changes.

- **Ideological-level factors** include the appeal of a justifying narrative and charismatic ideologues. Ideology—which can be a factor in all but gang violence—is usually not the primary driving factor but rather one that ties together other factors. Although there are opportunities to address this factor, addressing it alone would not be enough to prevent violence.

Factors Present in Different Forms of Violence

	Personal	*Group*	*Community*	*Sociopolitical*	*Ideological*
Terrorism	X	X	X	X	X
Domestic Terrorism	X	X	X	X	X
School Violence	X	X	X	X	X
Gangs	X	X	X	X	

Bystanders—such as family members or friends—often observe concerning behaviors that may indicate mobilization to all four forms of violence examined in this piece. Bystanders can work with local authorities to intervene directly or help connect the person of concern to an appropriate "off-ramp." However, they may be hesitant to report their concerns to law enforcement for fear of getting themselves or their loved ones in trouble.

The same factors that can lead an individual toward violence instead could be protective by creating a safety net for individuals and helping to build their resilience.

There are three main components to violence prevention: **early education**, **early intervention**, and **off-ramping efforts**. Given the diversity of factors that lead to violence, the potential solutions are equally diverse and multidisciplinary, another reason why combining prevention efforts to address multiple types of violence would be beneficial.

- Early education programs should be expanded to increase awareness of and inoculate against pathways to violence for school-aged children and their educators.

- Early intervention helps redirect someone headed down the pathway to violence before a crime is committed. Interventions are most effective before someone is committed to violent action.

- Off-ramping typically comprises community-led interventions to steer individuals away from violence and reintegrate them into society.[1] They are the last opportunity to get someone to leave the path of radicalization without involving law enforcement.

Methodology

This report builds on the National Counterterrorism Center's (NCTC) 2012 study of terrorism radicalization and mobilization and expands it to include other forms of violence. Many thanks to all the analysts who authored the original NCTC piece from which the framework and many key findings—especially on international terrorism—are borrowed.

This report builds on research done in a variety of fields, including criminology, neuroscience, political science, psychology, and social work. The authors are grateful to all the researchers who have looked at parts of this problem previously and shared their findings publicly. This report also draws on information collected on individuals who have been detected, disrupted, or committed an act of violence.

All the case studies noted under domestic terrorism involve persons who were charged with violent crimes, such as murder or various hate crime charges. Although the U.S. Code contains definitions of both international and domestic terrorism, the most commonly charged crimes relate primarily to international terrorism.[2]

This report focuses on preventing the radicalization to violence, not on holding radical beliefs or espousing radical rhetoric, which are constitutionally protected.

This report focuses exclusively on youth, which is why workplace violence and mass-casualty attacks by lone adult actors are not included.

Dedication

The authors are aware of the horrific impact that international terrorism, domestic terrorism, gangs, and school violence have had on victims, survivors, families, and communities. Behind every statistic presented in the report are thousands of individuals with personal stories of grief, bravery, and resilience. We extend our deepest sympathies to those who have suffered because of these types of violence. We also extend our sincerest appreciation to the first responders who have responded to the kinds of cases discussed in this paper.

Introduction

The story is too familiar to American audiences these days. Journalists report breaking news about a violent action that cost several people their lives. As the media explain what they think motivated the attacker to commit the act of violence, they find several key things that they opine contributed to the individual's path to violence. Perhaps they find a history of psychological issues or trauma; online or real-world friends may have encouraged violence; the individual may have felt that his identity group was being unfairly treated, targeted or discriminated against; some cultural or sociopolitical factor may be behind the attacker's reason for violence, or perhaps the attacker held some distorted version of a belief system. We have all heard this story many times in the past few decades.

As you read that, what type of attack were you picturing? Some individual inspired by the Islamic State (also referred to as ISIS but will be referred as the Islamic State in this report) to attack a workplace? An anti-Semite attacking a synagogue? An aggrieved student attacking his teachers and classmates in a school? Or a gang member shooting his perceived rivals in a nightclub? It could have been written about any of them.

These different categories of mass violence often are treated as unique problems, with prevention efforts addressing only one category of violence. Any and all efforts to constructively lead individuals inclined to violence in a non-violent direction are commendable, but there are too few efforts and segregating them based on the manifestation of violence can be unnecessary.

Individuals proceed along the path to violence when they experience problems with which they are unable to cope—whether in their lives, in society, or something else entirely—and become convinced that non-violent solutions will not rectify their grievances. The pathway toward violence is complex and dynamic, and understanding it is critical to designing effective violence prevention programs.

Similar factors affect people who travel along the path toward violence that hold true regardless of the category of violence. Looking at the similarities in mobilization factors for Salafi-jihadist terrorism, domestic terrorism, school shooters, and gangs can help to identify prevention opportunities that can address multiple types of violence instead of treating each as a separate phenomenon.

In this report, we examine five levels of factors that can make a youth vulnerable to the pathway to violence: personal, group, community, sociopolitical, and ideological. Although the first four factors are common in all four of the types of violence, ideology was prevalent in some but not all forms of mass violence. The report gives supporting evidence and examples of each type of violence and relevant examples. It is important to note that each individual will have his or her own unique combination of factors and will not necessarily have all of the factors common to that category of violence.

Five Levels of Factors for Four Types of Violence

	Personal	Group	Community	Sociopolitical	Ideological
Terrorism	X	X	X	X	X
Domestic Terrorism	X	X	X	X	X
School Violence	X	X	X	X	X
Gangs	X	X	X	X	

Given the diversity of factors that lead to violence, the potential solutions are equally diverse and multidisciplinary. Different forms of prevention will resonate differently depending on the mix of motivational factors present in each case. The different forms, however, can be generalized to work with vulnerable individuals regardless of the category of violence that is alluring to them.

Definitions

Community: Communities share a common identity, even if their members do not know each other personally. This can include a residential area—usually a neighborhood, small town, or city—where individuals share an environment. Communities also exist online and can be as influential on individuals as those in which they physically live.

Disengagement: The process by which an individual ceases violent extremist behavior and moves away from opportunities to participate in or support violence.

Disruption: An action by an outside force (rather than an individual willingly disengaging) that stops someone from pursuing or engaging in violent activities. An example of a disruption is an arrest by law enforcement.

Domestic terrorism: Activities that involve acts dangerous to human life and that violate the criminal laws of the United States or of any state; are intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States.[3]

Gang: A durable and street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity.[4]

Group: A collection of individuals who have regular contact, interact, and work together—in person or virtually—to achieve common goals.

Homegrown violent extremists (HVEs): Individuals inspired—as opposed to directed—by foreign terrorist organizations and radicalized in the countries in which they are born, raised, or reside.[5]

Ideology: The framework used to interpret the world and life events as well as a set of values, beliefs, and goals for a movement or social entity

International terrorism: Perpetrated by individuals and/or groups inspired by or associated with designated foreign terrorist organizations or nations (state-sponsored).[6]

Mobilization to violence: The process by which individuals prepare for or engage in violence or material support for violence in support of their beliefs.

Radicalization: The process by which individuals come to believe that their engagement in, or facilitation of, non-state violence is necessary and justified.

Scoping the Problem

International Terrorism

In the years since 9/11, the U.S. counterterrorism (CT) community and its foreign and domestic partners have made significant advances in countering terrorist groups. Robust intelligence collection, analysis, and information sharing have enabled targeted military action and law enforcement arrests. Nonetheless, international terrorist organizations—particularly the Islamic State and al Qaeda—remain intent on carrying out and inspiring attacks in the United States, as exemplified by the more than 2,000 FBI international terrorist cases nationwide.[7]

- The FBI has open terrorism cases in all 50 states.[8] FBI Director Christopher Wray described the cases: "This is in big cities and small towns. It's a real problem."[9]

- Since 2001, 408 Americans and people residing in the United States have been charged with jihadist terrorism or related crimes, according to a New America study published in 2018.[10]

- The United States experienced at least three attacks by homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) in 2018 and five in 2017, according to Russell Travers, the Deputy Director of the National Counterterrorism Center.[11]

Domestic Terrorism

Domestic terrorists commit crimes in the name of ideologies related to abortion views, anarchism, animal rights, anti-government ideals, black separatism, environmental rights, and white supremacy. Since 9/11, domestic terrorism has been responsible for 44 percent of terrorism deaths in the United States.[12] The FBI has more than 1,000 open cases on domestic terrorists and domestic terrorism is a top concern for law enforcement officers.[13],[14] In addition to an upsurge in violent domestic terrorism, the last two decades have seen a sharp increase in the economic costs that domestic groups cause by destroying property, disrupting business, and perpetrating financial crimes.[15]

- Since 9/11, individuals motivated by far-right ideology or belonging to organizations with such motivations have killed 73 people in the United States, according to a study by New America.[16] Black Nationalist or separatist ideologies motivated attacks resulting in eight deaths, according to the same study.[17] By comparison, Salafi-jihadist terrorism killed 104 people in the United States in the same timeframe.[18]

- Since 2001, domestic terrorists have killed 50 law enforcement officials.[19],[20] One domestic terrorist group that has killed law enforcement officers is the loosely affiliated Sovereign Citizens movement, whose adherents believe that the existing government is illegitimate. Law enforcement officers identified Sovereign Citizens as the top concern for law enforcement, according to a 2014 survey conducted by National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START).[21]

- Domestic terrorists conducted the second deadliest terrorist attack on U.S. soil, the Oklahoma City bombing. Timothy McVeigh killed 168 people, including 19 children, and injured 500 more when he bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995.[22] McVeigh and his co-conspirator, Terry Nichols, were associated with the extreme right-wing and militant Patriot Movement.[23]

- Many domestic terrorists do not intend to physically harm people, but rather they extract economic costs by relying on tactics such as arson, destruction of property, theft, trespassing, and burdening U.S. courts with retaliatory legal filings, according to a Congressional Research Service report.[24]

DOMESTIC TERRORISM: CLARIFICATION ON NAMING

There is no official roster of groups operating within the United States that the FBI or other federal agencies label as domestic terrorist organizations. The FBI's practical, shorthand definition of domestic terrorism is "Americans attacking Americans based on U.S.-based extremist ideologies."[25] The terms "right-wing extremists" and "left-wing extremists" do not correspond to political parties in the United States.[26]

- "Right-wing terrorism" commonly refers to the use or threat of violence by sub-national or non-state entities whose goals may include racial, ethnic, or religious supremacy; opposition to government authority; and the end of practices such as abortion, according to a CSIS brief on domestic terrorism.[27]

- "Left-wing terrorism" commonly refers to the use or threat of violence by sub-national or non-state entities that oppose capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism; focus on environmental or animal rights issues; espouse pro-communist or pro-socialist beliefs; or support a decentralized sociopolitical system like anarchism, according to the same CSIS study.[28]

School Shooters

Adolescent violence—including homicides—have decreased since l993, but that hopeful trend has been obscured in the nationwide wave of concern about school shootings. The FBI notes that this form of violence is statistically quite rare, directly affecting very few of the tens of millions of students in America.[29] Since 1999, 141 students and school staff have died in campus assaults; another 287 were injured, according to a Washington Post study of school shooters.[30] Although not directly injured in an attack, another

215,000 students have experienced gun violence in their schools.[31] These attacks not only directly impact the lives of the students who experience attacks; fear of an attack impacts students' abilities to focus on their school work.

- According to a 2016 Center for Disease Control (CDC) report, 5.6 percent of students reported that they did not go to school on one or more days in the previous 30 days because they felt unsafe.[32] The CDC also reported that 6.9 percent of all high school students were threatened or injured with a weapon on school property.[33]
- There were 17 school shootings in 2018, according to the Washington Post, the highest number since 1999.[34]

Gangs

Street gangs have been around since at least the early part of the nineteenth century, though some historians say they have existed longer.[35] Annual estimates of gang violence have steadily been increasing since 2003, with gang violence responsible for the majority of homicides and violent crimes in jurisdictions that have gangs.[36]

- In 2012—the year the National Gang Center's National Youth Gang Survey was defunded—about 30 percent of U.S. jurisdictions reported having experienced a gang problem. There were more than 30,000 gangs and about 850,000 gang members in 3,100 jurisdictions, primarily in larger cities (41.6 percent) and suburban counties (25.8 percent).[37,38]
- Gang homicides accounted for 13 percent of all homicides annually between 2007 and 2012. In Chicago and Los Angeles, gang-related homicides accounted for nearly 50 percent of all homicides annually.[39]
- According to the FBI's 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment, gangs were responsible for 48 percent of violent crime in most jurisdictions where gangs were present.[40]

Street gangs in the United States continue to evolve not only in sophistication and organization but also in the types of crimes they commit. Gangs have started shifting into "non-traditional" gang-related crimes like prostitution, human trafficking, and alien smuggling as well as white-collar types of offenses.[41] U.S.-based gangs also have developed relationships with international gangs and organizations. [42] As gangs continue to evolve and expand their territory throughout the United States, it is critical that the United States understand the threat at hand and develop policies to prevent individuals from joining violent groups.

Understanding the Factors

No single explanation captures the complexity of the process that leads an individual to violence. This report considers five factors that can influence an individual to choose a path of violence. The existence of these factors on their own does not mean that an individual will choose to be violent; rather it indicates potential vulnerability. People can have multiple factors but not opt for violence.

- **Personal-level factors** include psychology, demographic backgrounds, and personal history.
- **Group-level factors** include group dynamics of social networks, such as family and peer groups.
- **Community-level factors** include social environments that create alienation or marginalization and diaspora relationships with home countries.
- **Sociopolitical-level factors** include collective grievances, foreign policy, and external events. They comprise a wide range of factors that can affect the attitudes and behaviors of large populations within and across nations including grievances, current conflicts, global incidents, demographic changes, and the availability of interactive social media.
- **Ideological-level factors** include the appeal of a justifying narrative and charismatic ideologues.

Personal Factors

Personal-level factors include psychology, demographic backgrounds, and personal history.

- *Psychology* can include personal needs like achievement, affiliation, moral integrity, sense of personal significance, sense of power and meaning.
- *Demographic backgrounds* shape personal context because an individual's support network, education, age, and socioeconomic class can influence how he or she will experience and interpret events.
- *Personal history* can drive individuals to seek vengeance. Trauma is a common—but not universal—factor affecting someone's decision to commit violence.[43] People who experience trauma lack the essential skills of sophisticated reasoning, perspective-taking, and emotional stabilization to regulate fear and aggressive impulses, according to The University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism

and Responses to Terrorism (START). This may result in a pattern of aggressive overreaction, often with escalating levels of violence.[44]

INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

For people who join terrorist groups, personal-level risk factors are consistently seen as drivers toward the acceptance of and mobilization to violence.

- Psychology. Searches for meaning, belonging, moral integrity, identity, and adventure appear to be crucial motivators for many Americans (and other Westerners) who join terrorist groups.[45]

- Demographic backgrounds. Individuals in the United States who have joined terrorist groups differ widely in race, age, education, social class, and family background, suggesting that they are unlikely to be motivated by a universal demographic factor. Instead, each of these demographics can influence how the individual will experience and interpret events.

- Personal history. The importance of personal grievance as a motive for terrorism goes back at least as far as the Russian terrorists of the late 1800s.[46] Personal victimization is a much-cited path to terrorism internationally, such as Chechen Black Widows seeking revenge against Russians for raping them or killing their family members and Tamil Tigers who are survivors of Sinhalese atrocities.[47]

MENTAL HEALTH AND TERRORISM

Mental health issues were found most commonly in lone-mass murderers (who kill four or more people in a 24-hour period without a motivating ideology), lone-actor terrorists, and solo-actor terrorists (who conducted an act of terrorism by themselves but were directed and controlled by a larger terrorist organization), according to an article by Emily Corner, Paul Gill, and Oliver Mason in Studies in Conflict & Terrorism. They were less common in lone-dyads (a group of two terrorists) and terrorist group members.[48]

- According to an FBI review of 63 active shooters from 2000–2013, 62 percent of active shooters studied had mental health stressors, which are defined as struggling with depression, anxiety, and paranoia in daily lives.[49]

- The FBI could only verify a documented mental illness diagnosis by a mental health professional in 25 percent of the cases, though it is possible that others had mental illnesses but never sought treatment for them.[50,51]
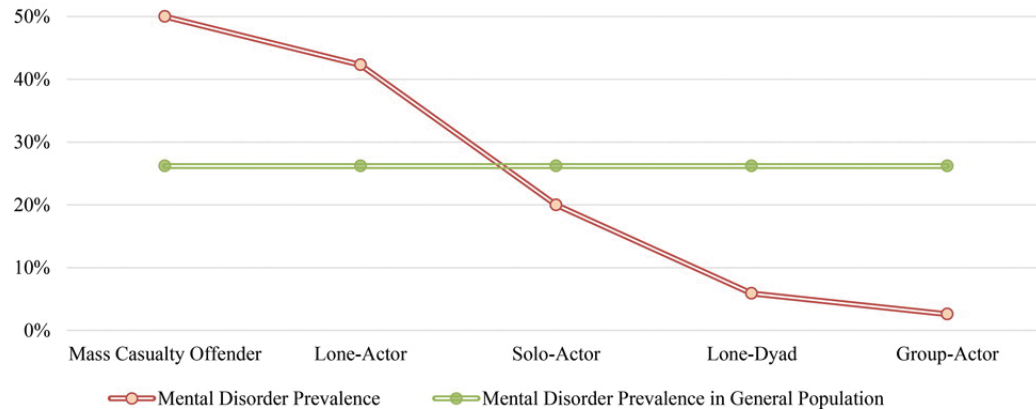
Mental Disorder Prevalence across Actors

Chart from: Emily Corner, Paul Gill & Oliver Mason, "Mental Health Disorders and the Terrorist: A Research Note Probing Selection Effects and Disorder Prevalence," Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 39:6, 560–568, January 14, 2016, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1120099.

DEMOGRAPHICS

There is no one profile for international terrorists in the United States. They are old and young, rich and poor, male and female, and come from every type of ethnic background. The vast majority—84 percent—are U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents.[53,54] Thirty-six percent were married, and many had children.[55] According to a study conducted by the George Washington University's Program on Extremism in 2014 and 2015, approximately 40 percent of those arrested for supporting the Islamic State were converts to Islam, which suggests converts are overrepresented given that only 23 percent of the American Muslim population are converts.[56]

Examples:

Ariel Bradley, who joined the Islamic State and lives in Syria, exemplifies radicalization in search of belonging. Born in 1985, she was raised as a fundamentalist, evangelical Christian in Tennessee. She ran away from home when she was 15 or 16. One of her friends described her as "definitely always looking for love, always looking for that sense of belonging," according to a BuzzFeed profile of Ariel.[57] Her friends noted that she changed her identity and ideology to match her boyfriends, defining herself by these relationships.[58] Another friend said, "Be it religion, be it a man, be it a marriage, be it a child, be it ISIS, Ariel was always looking for something to define herself, an identity to cling to." [59]

American citizen and convicted terrorist Abdirizak Warsame, who recruited 10 Somali-American men who conspired to join the Islamic State, emphasized his search for meaning when he discussed his radicalization in a media interview. Warsame grew up in a rough neighborhood in Minnesota. His mother, who did not like his tough group of friends, encouraged him to go to the mosque, where worship was conducted in Somali. When he looked for an English-speaking imam online, he came across now-deceased American

Citizen and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) leader Anwar al-Awlaki's videos and watched them constantly. He said, "The reason I wanted to go to Syria was I felt like it was my duty." He went on to explain that "it kind of takes control of you." "And you think you're doing something for a greater cause. And you think you're doing it for good."[60]

DOMESTIC TERRORISM

Reviewing the radicalization and mobilization of domestic terrorists reveals that they too have displayed psychology, demographic background, and personal history factors. Although the personal-level factors are similar to the international terrorism personal factors, the individuals identify with different ideologies.

- *Psychology:* Some people who join domestic terrorist groups have been diagnosed with mental illnesses. Others are seeking comradery and meaning.[61,62]

- *Personal history:* Sociologist Pete Simi, who has conducted 17 years of fieldwork with far-right extremists, noted that the most common background characteristic is a family disruption, including parental abandonment, divorce, substance abuse, or parental incarceration.[63] In a separate study of 44 far right extremists, 45 percent experienced physical abuse, 23 percent had been sexually abused, and 48 percent reported childhood neglect. In addition to maltreatment, participants also reported a variety of chaotic living conditions such as parental incarceration (30 percent), parental abandonment (32 percent) and family substance abuse (48 percent).[64]

- *Demographic backgrounds:* Peter Bergen, an expert on domestic terrorism radicalization at New America, noted that domestic terrorist recruits are "often people whose lives aren't going well." [65]

FAR-RIGHT VERSUS FAR-LEFT DEMOGRAPHICS[1]

Far-right extremists in the United States tend to be older, have lower rates of college experience, and higher rates of pre-radicalization crime than their far-left and Islamist counterparts, according to START's Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) database.[66]

Far-left extremists tend to be young and well educated and are more likely to be female than their far-right or Islamist counterparts, according to the previously mentioned PIRUS database,[67] but far-left extremists can come from any race, religion, or gender identity.

Examples:

Joshua Stafford—a self-described anarchist found guilty of conspiring to use a weapon of mass destruction to destroy a bridge in Ohio—suffers from schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder. He was first hospitalized for psychiatric issues when he was five years old, according to a psychiatrist who testified at his trial.[68] Stafford was a part of a group of five men who had grown frustrated with the peaceful protests espoused by the leaders of the

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1. No predictive paradigm in behavioral science is perfect, especially "profiling." There are always exceptions to the statistics.

Occupy movement in Cleveland. [69] Stafford expected that the bombing would be perceived as an act of terrorism, as he joked with his co-conspirators that if they were caught, they would be "sittin' in the Caribbean sippin' on martinis' in Guantanamo Bay."[70]

Tony McAleer, who once was deeply involved in White Aryan Resistance, now helps lead Life After Hate, a non-profit focused on helping people leave hate groups. When discussing his pathway to violence, he notes that although his childhood home was not violent, his absent father and turmoil between his parents left him "angry and confused." He also noted being bullied by teachers and students.[71] He describes the situation: "Trauma leaves us with a belief system that forms part of our identity. I call it toxic shame. We pick up the belief that we aren't lovable enough, smart enough, that we're powerless and weak. We go out into the world and we live our lives in reaction to that." [72] He notes that domestic terrorist groups and hate groups offer belonging and meaning.[73]

SCHOOL SHOOTERS

School shooters have demonstrated all three types of personal-level factors: psychology, personal history, and demographic backgrounds. There are three types of school shooters: psychopathic, psychotic, and traumatized, according to psychologist and school shooting expert Dr. Peter Langman.[74] Anger and revenge are the most prominent themes for school shooters' motivations, according to an article in Psychology Today that aggregated data about school shooters from the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.[75]

- **Psychology:** Psychotic shooters suffered from schizophrenia or related disorders and suffered from hallucinations, false perceptions, delusions, or false beliefs.[76] More than half of the school shooters displayed symptoms of schizophrenia or schizotypal personality disorder, according to Dr. Peter Langman.[77] Psychopathic shooters are egocentric, lack empathy, may enjoy having power over others, and have no regard for social norms.[78] Psychopathic shooters targeted people with the power who made the shooter feel small, especially authority figures and females.[79]

- **Personal history:** Traumatized shooters endured chronic physical, emotional, and sometimes sexual abuse and grew up in violent, severely dysfunctional homes.[80]

- **Demographic backgrounds:** Medical problems that challenge one's masculinity have been found in many shooters.[81]

BULLYING AND SCHOOL SHOOTERS:
The relationship between bullying and school shootings is complicated, with shooters being both victim and bully. Out of 48 school shooters studied in Dr. Peter Langman's book *School Shooters: Understanding High School, College, and Adult Perpetrators*, only one shooter targeted a student who bullied him.[82]

- School shooters may have been bullied or harassed, with estimates ranging from 40 to 75 percent of the shooters having been bullied.[83,84] This is a higher rate than the country's average, 28 percent.[85] Traumatized shooters were the most likely to be victims of bullying.[86]

- School shooters may also have been bullies, with 54 percent of shooters teasing, harassing, stalking, threatening, and intimidating others.[87] This is a higher than average rate, with approximately 30 percent of young people admitting to bullying others in surveys.[88] Psychopathic shooters were the most common bullies of the different types of shooters.[89]

DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS
High school aged shooters are typically—but not exclusively—male, teenage, white, from a rural or suburban setting, and attend the school they attacked.[90,91,92,93,94] That profile, however, does not hold for college or adult shooters.[95]

Example:

Thirteen-year-old Nathaniel Brazill—who shot and killed his favorite teacher—had a family history of alcoholism, domestic violence, physical abuse, changing caregivers, and a distant relationship with his father.[96]

GANGS
Sociologists have many competing theories on why someone joins a gang but there are several personal factors that make someone more vulnerable to joining one.

- *Psychology:* A yearning for respect is a much-cited reason for joining a gang.[97,98] Low self-esteem has been revealed to be a risk factor for gang membership. Individuals who are struggling in school or feel that there are no or few pathways to conventional success may seek out gang membership to find support and feel good about themselves.[99] Gang membership also provides an outlet for adventure by providing activities and peers.[100]

- *Personal history:* For gang members, personal history often manifests in a search for belonging and security, including financial security.[101,102,103] Most gang members have experienced victimization of some sort, with many experiencing sexual, emotional, and physical abuse from family members.[104,105] Family members of gang associates were also more likely to have engaged in violent, deviant, or criminal behavior.[106]

- *Demographic background:* Youths are more at risk of joining a gang if they attend a school with a high delinquency rate, change schools frequently, and have low educational aspirations or a low commitment to their education.[107,108]

GANG MEMBERSHIP DEMOGRAPHICS
The most common age for adolescents to join a gang is between 13 and 15, according to the CDC, although different sources provide different age ranges for gang members.[109] Law enforcement agencies have been reporting an increase in adult (18 and over) member activity in recent years.[110] Gangs typically comprise males, though females also join. The

most recent statistics from the National Gang Center show that 46 percent of gang members are Hispanic/Latino; 35 percent, African American/black; 11 percent, white; and 7 percent are from other races or ethnicities. [111] Gangs typically are made up of a single ethnic or racial group.[112]

Example:

Deandre, or "Dre," joined the gang Black P Stones when he was 14 years old, shortly after leaving his great-grandparents' home. In an interview, he noted his reason for joining the gang: "to make [his] name well known and do something. Just make [his] name known somewhere."[113]

Group Factors

People are cognitively hard-wired to want to belong to an "in-group" in all stages of life but more so in adolescence, according to neuroscience research.[114]

- Neuroscience has shown that people derive their self-image from the groups to which they belong.[115]

- Group membership also activates brain regions involved in reward valuation.[116]

- Adolescents may be particularly sensitive to socioemotional stimuli, according to an article in Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience.[117]

Four types of affiliations may be relevant to group factors that make someone vulnerable to the pathway to violence: family, romantic partners, friends, and fellow members of "virtual communities." For each type of affiliation, two issues may be salient: how close the relationship is and whether the other person condones violence.[118]

- From a psychological perspective, online relationships are as real as offline ones, according to Dr. Kate Barrelle from Australian National University.[119]

As individuals become more accepting of violence, they surround themselves with radical peers and detach from their previous lives.[120]

INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

Peer pressure or wanting to belong to a group can make some people vulnerable to radicalization by international terrorist groups. These groups can be in-person or online peer networks.

- Violent extremists tend to recruit from within their peer networks and families.[121] Seventy percent of al Qaeda members joined with their friends, according to a 2008 article by Dr. Marc Sageman.[122] Although calls for leaderless jihad and a rise in online radicalization have almost certainly altered that statistic, peer recruiting continues to play an important role in terrorism radicalization.

- As a Kings College London study found, the internet "creates a new social environment in which otherwise unacceptable views and behavior are normalized. Surrounded by other radicals, the internet becomes a virtual 'echo chamber' in which the most extreme ideas and suggestions receive the most encouragement and support."[123]

In 2015, the FBI arrested six Somali-American friends, including two brothers, who planned to join the Islamic State. This group of family and friends engaged in "peer-to-peer" recruiting. They were aided by another friend who traveled to Syria the prior year. According to U.S. Attorney Andrew Luger, "What this case shows is that the person radicalizing your son, your brother, your friend, may not be a stranger. It may be their best friend, right here in town."[124]

Now-deceased American citizen Samir Khan's radicalization highlights how a virtual group can be a radicalization factor. Khan—who eventually became a propagandist for al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and editor of its English-language Inspire magazine—was a lonely and troubled young man who found a community of like-minded individuals online.[125] He alienated nearly everyone at his local mosque.[126] In the echo chamber of his extremist online groups, he was encouraged and respected, which led to his joining AQAP.

DOMESTIC TERRORISM

Like international terrorism, group membership—in person or online—can play a role in making someone vulnerable to radicalization to domestic terrorism. Individuals with either radical peers or radical family members were significantly more likely to be engaged in violent political extremism, according to a statistical review of almost 1,500 individuals in the United States with extremist's beliefs.[127]

- According to the North American Animal Liberation Press Office's website's frequently asked questions on how to join the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), "Historically, those wishing to participate in direct action have gotten together with others they could trust of like mind and just started doing actions. ALF cells operate independently, and typically are begun locally by like-minded individuals who get together and decide to take action against animal abusers."[128]

- Internet radicalization played a role in 72.5 percent of the far-right extremists and 78.6 percent of the far-left extremists whose data is included in the University of Maryland's Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) database.[129] As the Anti-Defamation League explains, domestic terrorists use the Internet to become "friends" with people who seem to display similar views. As the targeted recruits see their new friends' posts, they grow more exposed to terrorist propaganda, think it is the norm, and see that other people agree with it. They come to feel that they are a part of a community with these extremist friends online and feel like these new online friends are real friends.[130]

Example:

From 1996 to 2001, a group of friends calling themselves "The Family" set at least 15 fires across the West in the name of the Earth Liberation Front and the Animal Liberation Front, resulting in $45 million worth of damages. For The Family—who all were adults—activism had become their social life.[131]

SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

Although many school shooters acted alone, group factors contributed to the motivation of some shooters, especially the secondary school shooters. Some shooters conspired and

committed the attack with peers. Peers explicitly encouraged others to conduct an attack. Although not as directly peer supported, some shooters also may have taken silence as concurrence when they raised the idea of shooting their school with peers and their friends did not object to the idea.[132]

Example:

Evan Ramsey—who killed two people and wounded another two in an attack on his Alaska high school in 1997—was encouraged to conduct the attack by two of his friends. Ramsey had a traumatic childhood, including abuse and neglect in his familial and foster homes.[133] He intended to bring a gun to school, scare people, and commit suicide. He originally did not plan to shoot anyone else. His friends—James Randall and Matthew Charles—repeatedly urged him to attack others, taught him how to use a shotgun, and convinced him to kill the principal.[134]

GANGS

There are many sociological theories to explain motivations for joining a gang. Social learning theory hypothesizes that people learn behavior from "role models" or people they respect, including family members, peers, or community members. Research often supports the claim that when individuals hang out with peers who reinforce criminal behavior and have weak relationships to those who promote conventional or socially acceptable behavior, the individual is more likely to replicate the negative behavior of their peers.[135]

- Gang involvement of siblings, parents, and older relatives significantly predicts gang membership, even when controlling for other salient risk factors, according to an academic study of gang membership. [136]

- Gangs also can act as a family substitute, with members protecting and caring for one another.[137] Research on gangs as a family substitute, however, has had mixed results.[138]

Gang-involved youth use social networking sites to brag, insult, and make threats—a concept known as "Internet banging." In high-stress violent neighborhoods, gang members' use of the Internet has been shown to fuel conflict between individuals and peer groups and provoke violence in the community, and it has resulted in serious injury and homicide.[139] There also has been some evidence of gangs recruiting online.[140]

FEMALE GANG MEMBERS AND SEXUAL INTERACTIONS

For female gang members, the price of membership may entail sexual relations with male members. Even in gangs where women seem to have more independence, there remain high levels of male competition for sexual access to women.[141]

Young males join gangs at the age when they are starting to compete for women, which gang recruiters use as leverage. According to an article in The Journal of Sex Research, during recruitment, individuals are explicitly told they will have more contact with women by joining the gang. [142]

According to an interview with a gang member named Jessica, when she joined the Chicago gang Black Disciples she was looking to belong. She said, "I joined a gang to be loved, and I had to find out the hard way that the streets don't love you."[143]

Community Factors

Communities are shared environments, such as residential areas or online networks, that can influence individuals. The characteristics of some communities increase the vulnerability of individuals and groups to violent extremism, especially if they create alienation or feelings of marginalization. When grievances—both real and perceived— are combined with insularity, isolation, and a lack of trust in societal and political institutions, they can create the conditions that encourage groups to accept violent behavior. It is imperative, though, to avoid stigmatizing individuals based on their belonging to a community that may have produced violently radicalized individuals.

- Perceived cultural discrimination, religious involvement, and cultural identity have been shown to increase dogmatism, which in turn increases radicalization, according to a study published in Terrorism and Political Violence.[144]

- Individuals may experience real or perceived grievances—both personal and political —that may help fuel their movement toward terrorism or act as a triggering event to accelerate this mobilization.[145]

- Grievances may be particularly potent risk factors for violence in "honor cultures," in which aggression is used to restore threatened manhood.[146] Psychologists from the University of South Florida have conducted tests to determine both male and female opinions of manhood. They found that "manhood" is perceived as a more socially than biologically bequeathed status and that men must prove that they deserve it with action, especially public action.[147]

INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM
For people susceptible to joining an international terrorist organization, community factors may contribute to their radicalization. Feeling that one's community has been treated unfairly, discriminated against, or targeted by others may lead individuals to seek violent revenge against their perceived oppressors.[148]

- In a review of radicalization factors in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, researchers identified an "us versus them" worldview and societal discrimination or injustice among the factors increasing the likelihood of joining an international terrorist organization.[149]

- In a 2017 internet poll of 207 participants representative of U.S. Muslims, the few individuals surveyed who had radical opinions were more likely to feel disconnected and depressed.[150] Although holding radical opinions does not mean someone will join a terrorist group, this survey shows a correlation between disconnection and radical thought.

Alex Hernandez—who pled guilty to planning an attack against the President of the United States—told a cooperating witness while they were both in prison for unrelated charges that he was upset about the way "his people" were being treated, that he wanted to become a mujahedeen, he had the ability to obtain weapons upon release from prison, and he wanted to kill the president in a lone-wolf style attack.[151,152]

Convicted terrorist Zacharia Abdurahman described a community factor that helped lead to his radicalization. He claims to have felt that he was singled out for being a Muslim and an outsider, despite being born in the United States. He said a group of strangers spat on him at a fast food restaurant.[153] This factor primed him for Islamic State's messaging.

DOMESTIC TERRORISM

In-person and online communities have been associated with people who conduct domestic terrorist attacks.

- The existence of a hate group in a county is significantly related to the occurrence of far-right ideologically motivated violence, according to a criminal justice study.[154]

- Anonymous interaction with online extremist content, frequently without any real-world connection to hate groups or far-right extremism, is becoming an established pattern for those on the alt-right who have gone on to commit acts violence, according to a study by the Southern Poverty Law Center. [155]

Examples:

A study of 13 far-right shooters who collectively killed 43 people and injured 67 found that they all shared a history of consuming and participating in the far-right online ecosystem, posting misogynistic and racist content online.[156]

SCHOOL SHOOTERS

Residential community-level factors do not appear to be significant for school shooters; however, online communities can be. People who express a deep interest in school shootings form a global online subculture, some of whom are aspiring shooters.[157]

- The nonprofit Center for Investigative Reporting found 173 groups on Steam—one of the world's biggest online gaming communities—that glorify school shootings. There are discussions there about whom school shooters should target during future rampages.

Example:

William Edward Atchison—while also having personal and ideological factors—prolifically posted online about his white supremacist beliefs and desire to be a school shooter before he killed two students and himself.[158] He used screen names like "Future Mass Shooter" and "Adam Lanza." After asking a gaming forum where he could get "a cheap assault rifle" for a mass shooting, he was interviewed by the FBI.[159]

GANGS

Gangs are territorial in nature.[160] The gang's "turf" is the area where most of their activities are concentrated. A group's territory can have symbolic, social, and economic purposes. Often a turf is clearly identifiable by graffiti and many members and their families reside

within the parameters. There is, however, some dispute about how clearly identifiable the area is surrounding what is known as "home base," which is often less clearly recognizable. Group members are responsible for defending the territory and taking care of those who reside in it.[161]

GANGS AND SECURITY

Gang members report that they perceive gang membership as providing safety and security; however, they experience elevated levels of violence compared to their non-member peers.[162] There are debates on whether gangs cause violence or are a result of violence. Communities that have higher rates of violent crime will experience higher rates of gang membership, according to a study by two economists that suggests that gangs form to protect against existing violence in the community.[163]

Example:

Alex Johnson, a former gang member in Nebraska who tries to prevent children from joining gangs, discussed the roles of communities saying, "Compared to a child who lives out in a different neighborhood where there is no violence and can truly go out and play baseball or football out in the yard without having to worry about bullets flying they are scared to death to come out of their houses."[164]

Sociopolitical and Cultural Factors

Political, societal, and cultural conditions, events, and grievances can drive an individual to seek an ideological explanation or reinforce existing beliefs. Sociopolitical-level factors include collective grievances, foreign policy, and external events. Such factors come in a variety of forms—such as anger at U.S. foreign policy or frustration with the political, economic, or conflict situation in his or her home country or toward their primary ethnic group. At the same time, economic marginalization, social vulnerability, and fragile family ties may reinforce personal-level factors of feelings of failure and helplessness.

- Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, a counterterrorism scholar at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, notes that "someone might deeply feel the political grievances that are being articulated and are drawn into the movement through that articulation."[165]

Violence normalization also may contribute to some youth radicalizing to violence. The more children are exposed to violence—at home, school, or in the media—the more they think it's normal, according to a study in Social Psychological and Personality Science. Thinking that aggression is "normal" led to more of it.[166] Although violence exposure can occur at multiple levels, at the sociopolitical and cultural levels, violence normalization occurs through violence-filled media.

- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) notes that extensive research indicates that media violence can contribute to aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, nightmares, and fear of being harmed.[167]

- According to an FBI study, a youth's fascination with violence-filled entertainment may be associated with violence. This entertainment included movies, TV shows, computer, games, music videos, internet content, and printed materials that focus intensively on themes of violence, hatred, control, power, death, and destruction.[168]

- Although there has been much debate on the role of videos games' influence on violence, the AAP notes that video games provide an ideal environment in which to learn violence and use many of the strategies that are most effective for learning. They place the player in the role of the aggressor and reward him or her for successful violent behavior.[169]

- Music that promotes violence is produced and consumed by young people in ways that both inform their sense of self and serve to construct the social world in which their identities operate.[170]

INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

Foreign terrorism by definition involves political factors. Section 2656f(d) of Title 22 of the United States Code notes "the term 'terrorism' means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents."[171]

- According to a National Institute of Justice-sponsored review of more than 900 terrorists and almost 600 nonviolent extremists in the United States, 72 percent of those who identified as Islamist terrorists noted being affected by a political event.[172]

- John Miller, the Deputy Commissioner of Intelligence and Counterterrorism at the New York Police Department, noted the role of violent media by highlighting that some individuals whom the NYPD investigated would watch the same terrorist propaganda videos hundreds of times in order to desensitize themselves to the violence.[173]

Examples:

Abdifatah Yusuf Isse—who pled guilty to providing material support to terrorists in 2009—left Minnesota to join al-Shabab in 2007, noting that Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia motivated him.[174]

Abdul Razak Ali Artan—an Ohio State University student who plowed into innocent bystanders with a car and then sliced others with a butcher knife—posted his sociopolitical grievances on social media. He said, "Seeing my fellow Muslims being tortured, raped and killed in Burma led to a boiling point. I can't take it anymore. America stop interfering with other countries."[175]

DOMESTIC TERRORISM

Domestic terrorists often are deeply affected by social, political, and cultural factors, including race, religion, the environment, and the role of the government. It could be argued that increased participation in domestic terrorism is a backlash to the isolation of modern life.[176]

- In states where women are or are becoming more empowered, both in personal choice and participation in economic and professional life, right-wing terrorism is more frequent, according to an academic study that statistically analyzed right-wing

terrorism and economic, societal, and political factors, from 1970 to 2011. The study also found that right-wing terrorism is not rooted in economic grievances, economic stress, or structural economic change.[177]

- In terms of recruitment, the most effective recruitment tool for white supremacist groups is extremist music. Music provided recruiters with opportunities to introduce potential recruits to the extremist subculture.[178]

Examples:

James Harris Jackson fatally stabbed Timothy Caughman in New York in 2017. In an interview with a reporter, Jackson said he had traveled to New York from Baltimore intending to kill numerous black men, imagining that the deaths would deter white women from interracial relationships.[179] Jackson said he had intended for the killing to be "a practice run" before enacting a larger plan with many more casualties, but he changed his mind and turned himself in.[180] Jackson has pleaded not guilty to murder as a hate crime and murder as an act of terrorism.[181]

Ted Kaczynski, also known as the Unabomber, was a mathematician disturbed by the pace of technological progress. He left his professor position and moved to a remote area of Montana, where he felt he could escape the threat of technological progress that he had come to fear and detest. He emerged occasionally from his wilderness cabin to hand-carry or mail bombs to people he saw as forwarding the industrial-technological progress he feared.[182] In total, the FBI tracked 16 bombs over 17 years created by Kaczynski that resulted in 23 injured victims and 3 deaths.[183]

SCHOOL SHOOTINGS
Although traditional sociopolitical-level factors do not appear to be significant for school shooters, violence normalcy and media about school shootings elsewhere in the country may influence would-be shooters. The American Psychological Association points out that this "fame" is something that most mass shooters desire.[184]

- There has been much debate over the influence that violent media has had on school shooters.[185] Although there is no evidence that media violence by itself causes school shootings, there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that some shooters were influenced by violent video games, movies, and books. At least nine shooters cited a form of violent media as an influence or had a fascination with a form of violent media, including the film Natural Born Predators and the video game Doom.[186]

- A study that applied a mathematical contagion model found that school shootings are inspired by similar events in the immediate past. School shootings occur on average every 31.6 days, according to the Brady Campaign School Shooting Data. However, they were more likely to occur after another one. On average, this temporary increase in probability lasts 13 days, and each incident incites at least 0.30 new incidents.[187] The increase was not geographically bounded, suggesting that the sensational media coverage mattered more than the physical proximity to the next shooter. There may have also been more false positives after an attack, as people are more concerned and willing to report in the wake of the attack.

Example:

Jesse Osborne—who killed his father and one child at his former elementary school before his gun jammed, preventing him from killing the "50 or 60" kids he aimed to shoot—was obsessed with school shooters. Although he had several other factors that make someone vulnerable to the pathway to violence, Osborne said his obsession began with a song that mentioned Columbine. Before the then-14-year-old conducted his attack, he had been researching other school shooters for months and was determined to kill more children than they did.[188] His Instagram username included "nbk," for the movie Natural Born Killers, which has been cited as influencing other school shooters.[189]

GANGS

There are a variety of social, cultural, economic, and political factors that have been found to drive gang membership. Most gang members come from marginalized demographic communities (i.e., racial or ethnic) with poor education systems, a shortage of economic opportunities and housing, discrimination, and perceived failed government institutions.[190]

- Some social scientists suggest that gang membership is the result of learned behavior based on subcultural values that differ from those of society at large or that are perceived by a narrow segment.[191]

- Gang young recruits—who are still developing critical thinking skills—believe media depictions of gangster life as one filled with excitement, influence, wealth, and ease, according to an article in Psychology Today.[192] Contrasted with their lives in relative poverty with limited alternate activities and few role models, they are wooed by the false promise of a glamorous lifestyle.[193]

Example:

In a 1997 study that interviewed 96 current, former, or associate gang members, one participant said, "If you grow up around it, you'll be in it."[194]

Ideological Factors

Ideological-level factors include the appeal of a justifying narrative and charismatic ideologues. Ideology provides individuals with a framework to interpret the world and their life events as well as a set of values, beliefs, and goals for a movement or social entity. It also establishes the justifying narrative for individual and collective action; it is, however, rarely the sole motivating factor.

- Most, if not all, extremist ideologies show a low tolerance for ambiguity; this goes along with a certain type of concrete thinking where a person wants to categorize things as "black and white" rather than deal with so-called gray areas.[195]

Many prevention practitioners have observed a change from the more traditional paradigm in the pathway to violence from using violence to justify an ideology to instead selecting an ideology to justify violence—"violence as an ideology," with the specific doctrine less important than the violence it condones, according to a 2018 NCTC conference report.[196]

INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

Radical Islamist terrorists have a violent extremist ideology that serves to create a common identity and sense of purpose for those susceptible to its core message, according to the 2018 National Strategy for Counterterrorism.[197] For Americans who join international terrorist groups, ideology is rarely an individual's sole driving factor. Although it is often present, it is usually the bow that ties everything together with the other factors.

Example:

Keonna Thomas—a single mother—demonstrated her ideological commitment to the Islamic State by her willingness to abandon her two young children to travel to Syria, join ISIS, and conduct a suicide attack. The Islamic State's ideology built on the personal-level factors that contributed to her vulnerability to radicalization, including a difficult life, marked by abuse and neglect.[198] Her defense noted that she joined the Islamic State to feel accepted and because she believed the Islamic State's messaging about its religious utopia.[199]

IDEOLOGY HOPPERS

Ideology hoppers change beliefs from one extreme ideology to another.

- Nicholas Young, a former Washington D.C. police officer who was found guilty in 2017 of trying to help the Islamic State , had an SS tattoo and Nazi paraphernalia. His anti-Semitic beliefs, prosecutors argued, was the link between his obsession with Islamic extremism and Nazism.[200]

- August Kreis—who is currently in prison for child molestation—served as the head of an Aryan Nation splinter faction after changing his ideological focus from the Ku Klux Klan's anti-black agenda to an anti-Jewish one.[201]

DOMESTIC TERRORISM

Domestic terrorism includes individuals who commit crimes in the name of ideologies related to anarchism, animal rights, anti-abortion, anti-government ideas, black separatism, environmental rights, and white supremacy.[202] Sociologist Pete Simi, who studies white supremacy groups, found that although ideology is important, it is not necessarily what attracts individuals to the group. Instead, he found that once someone joins a group, he or she tend to become more ideologically radicalized.[203]

- In a study that interviewed former white supremacists, only a small portion of subjects can be described as having embraced white supremacist ideology before they joined a violent extremist group.[204]

Example:

Wade Michael Page killed six people, injured four, and committed suicide when he attacked a Sikh Temple in Wisconsin in 2012. The 40-year-old veteran, who spent more than a decade in the neo-Nazi movement and was involved in white supremacist music groups, told his closest friend in the military that "the racial holy war that was

coming."[205,206] Although analysts do not know his motivation for targeting the temple, they do know that he had several personal losses before his decision to conduct the attack, which may have triggered his move from radicalization to mobilization. He was demoted and then not permitted to reenlist in the military.[207] He lost his civilian job, his trailer home, and his girlfriend.[208]

RECIPROCAL RADICALIZATION

Extremist groups can become more extreme in response to each other's activity. A group may frame violence as justified or necessary because its members perceive an opposing group as extreme.[209] For example, rhetoric from far-right extremists and violent Islamist extremists feed off one another. Salafi jihadist terrorists—like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda—claim that the West is at war with Islam; far-right domestic terrorist groups claim that Muslims are at war with the West. Both use narratives that victimize their in-group and demonize the defined out-group, resulting in a worldview that frames everything through the lens of two inherently opposed homogenous blocs.[210]

GANGS

Ideological factors do not appear to be significant for gang members.[211]

SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

Some school shooters held ideological beliefs—such as Nazism and Satanism—that helped them justify their attacks. Psychologist Peter Langman suggests that they may have latched onto violent ideologies to support their fragile identities.[212] At least seven school shooters were drawn to Nazi ideologies.[213] Other shooters created their own ideologies.

Although Columbine shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were not traditional ideologues, 33 gunmen have cited them as an influence. [214]

Example:

Eric Harris, one of the Columbine shooters, created his own ideology. His journal shows he concocted a grandiose version of himself apparently in response to feeling inadequate. He wrote, "I would love to be the ultimate judge and say if a person lives of dies—be godlike." [215] He wrote repeatedly of rejecting morality and values, and he created his own psychopathic philosophy that celebrated instinct and natural selection.[216]

Warning Signs

Bystanders—such as family members or friends—often observe concerning behaviors that may indicate mobilization to all four forms of violence examined in this paper. Bystanders can work with local authorities to intervene directly or help connect the person of concern to an appropriate off-ramp but are often hesitant to report their concerns to law enforcement for fear of getting themselves or loved ones in trouble.

- In a study by Paul Gill and John Horgan of 119 lone-actor terrorists, 82.4 percent of the time other people knew something about the terrorist's grievances and/or intent. In 79 percent of the cases, people were aware of the terrorist's commitment to an extremist ideology and in 64 percent of the cases, family and friends were aware of the plot because the terrorist told them. [217]

- According to an FBI study on school shooters, leakage—when a potential attacker intentionally or unintentionally leaves clues about his/her feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and intentions—is considered to be one of the most important clues that may precede a violent act. These clues can take the form of subtle threats, boasts, innuendos, predictions, or ultimatums. They may be spoken or conveyed in stories, diary entries, essays, poems, letters, songs, drawings, doodles, social media posts, tattoos, or videos. [218]

- The National Gang Center provides resources to help parents recognize and prevent their children from joining a gang. The resources assist parents in understanding why youths are motivated to join gangs and provide them with a list of common gang identifiers.[219] Parents play an important role in recognizing and preventing their children from joining gangs.

Examples:

Omar Mateen killed 49 people and injured 53 others in the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil since 9/11 when he attacked Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida. His wife Noor Zahi Salman—who was found not guilty of being an accomplice to the attack—likely knew about Mateen's beliefs and his desire to conduct an attack, but she was not privy to the specifics of it. As the foreman of the jury said, "A verdict of not guilty did NOT mean that we thought Noor Salman was unaware of what Omar Mateen was planning to do. On the contrary, we were convinced she did know. She may not have known what day, or what location, but she knew."[220]

Michael Carneal, the shooter in a 1997 attack at Heath High School, shared his thoughts about shooting his peers with multiple people, but none of them reported it, according to Katherine S. Newman—a professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at Princeton University. School kids heard him threaten to shoot people. His creative writing teacher received a story full of murderous mayhem that used the real names of his classmates. His Sunday school teacher heard him say he would resolve moral dilemmas by shooting people.[221]

Prevention Suggestions

Although the four forms of violence reviewed in this piece—international terrorism, domestic terrorism, school shootings, and gang violence—are different, some of the factors that lead a person to commit them are similar. As such, prevention should address multiple types of violence.

Individuals can be prevented from beginning on the path to violence or removed from the path at different stages of their progression on it. Prevention thus can be broken into three key components: early education, early intervention, and off-ramping efforts.

Prevention efforts can make personal, group, community, sociopolitical, and ideological factors become protective factors that make individuals more resilient instead of leading them to violence. The recommendations in this paper focus on the personal, group, and community levels, which are easier for program planning than societal changes.

There is no one perfect prevention strategy, framework, or program. Rather, different forms of prevention will resonate with different potential recruits, much like different factors affect an individual's path to violence. The most effective strategies build on indigenous

knowledge, expertise, and leadership to produce strategies that are culturally relevant and

appropriate to local conditions. Some individuals also may respond best to subject matter expertise at the intervention and off-ramping stage. Below are samples of the types of programs that can be supported, not an exhaustive list of recommendations.

Building Resiliency with Protective Factors

All individuals have personal or environmental protective factors that can be used to create a safety net around individuals and help build their resilience.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Personal

- Critical thinking skills
- Emotional and mental stability and resilience
- Empathy and openness to others
- Emotional self-regulation
- Mental health
- Stable identity
- Positive educational and career prospects
- Stable family situation
- Support and guidance during difficult life events
- Ability to balance opposing views

Group

- Belonging to a non-violent social network
- Stable relationships
- Strong family connections

Community

- Sense of social integration and community acceptance
- Strong social bonds

Society

- Open societal debates advocating for tolerance, respect, and integration
- Reinforcements of the principle of shared community

Ideological

- Counter-violence discourse in general society
- Collective resilience against hateful ideologies and hate speech

The above graphic is taken in part from studies by The Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence and the R3 Radicalization Risk Rubric.[222]

> Prevention policies should leverage existing programs that work to steer at-risk youth away from crime. In a review of international terrorists and domestic terrorists in the United States, individuals who engage in criminal behavior before they adopt extremist beliefs are significantly more likely to attempt or commit acts of violence post-radicalization.[223] This also is true for gang members. Adolescents are at a higher risk of joining a gang if they already participate in delinquent behavior.

Personal-Level Prevention Suggestions

Prevention efforts focusing on the personal level can have three separate aims: to build resilience to prevent someone from becoming radicalized, to get someone who is becoming radicalized off the path, and to off-ramp someone who is on the path. All three types of prevention are most effective when implemented at the local level. An example of personal-level prevention efforts to build resilience includes social and emotional learning (SEL). Providing positive alternatives is an example of the type of programming that could help someone who is on the path toward violence.

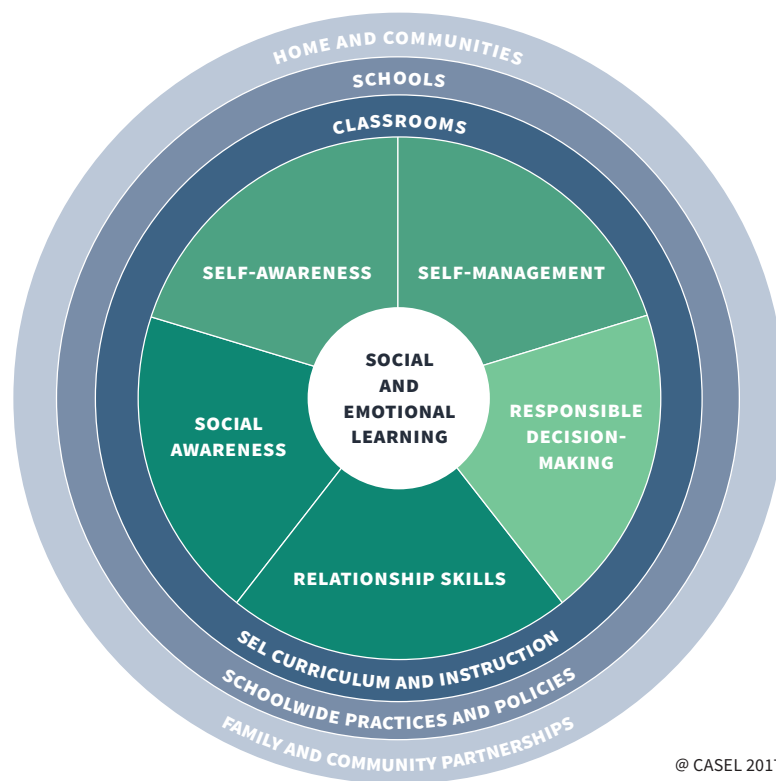### EARLY EDUCATION: SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Education programs that incorporate SEL enable students to be more resilient when facing personal factors that otherwise could lead them on a path to violence. For many students, school is the best place to address deficiencies. Violence prevention is a side benefit, though, to a robust program that teaches self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

- According to a national principal survey on SEL, social and emotional development improves student behavior, classroom management, school climate, and even student

health. SEL also improves grades and standardized test scores, boosts graduation rates and postsecondary completion rates, and leads to better employment outcomes.[224] Ninety-nine percent of the principals surveyed believed that students from all backgrounds would benefit from learning SEL in schools.[225]

▪ The principals in the survey noted that they need more guidance, training, and support for implementation. Thirty-three percent of principals implement SEL school-wide and only 25 percent reach benchmarks for high-quality implementation.[226]

▪ According to a Columbia University study, on average for every dollar invested in SEL interventions, there is a return of eleven dollars, a substantial economic benefit.[227]

Competencies Wheel for Social and Emotional Learning

@ CASEL 2017

Source: "What is SEL?" Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), https://casel.org/what-is-sel/.

INTERVENTION: ADDRESSING UNDERLYING TRAUMA

Intervention should occur when opportunities to dissuade individuals are more abundant. Once an individual has been identified as being on the path toward violence, options can include mental health interventions to address underlying trauma, personal history, or psychological issues, since trauma was an underlying contributing personal factor that is relevant to all four forms of violence reviewed in this study.

▪ Trauma itself often does not cause damage. Rather, damage occurs when someone feels helpless in the face of trauma. Giving those experiencing trauma the ability

to take action makes them feel empowered and reduces the impact of the trauma, according to psychiatrist Dr. Carl C. Bell, president and CEO of the Community Mental Health Council.[228]

▪ Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy® (TF-CBT) is an evidence-based treatment for youth and their caregivers affected by trauma. Research shows that TF-CBT successfully resolves a broad array of emotional and behavioral difficulties associated with single, multiple, and complex traumatic experiences.[229] The CDC recommends TF-CBT as an effective way to address trauma that leads to youth violence. [230]

▪ Homeboy Industries—the largest gang intervention and re-entry program in the United States—has evolved since it began 30 years ago. In the beginning, the program focused on finding a job for every gang member or employing them, but it since has expanded to working with former gang members to help them to come to terms with whatever suffering and trauma they've experienced. As Homeboy Industry founder Father Greg Boyle said, "They all come with, you know, kind of chronic, toxic stress that's attached to them like a big, old heavy backpack. And if they can find relief then they no longer have to actually operate out of survivor brain."[231]

OFF-RAMPING EFFORTS: PROVIDING POSITIVE ALTERNATIVES

For some individuals, positive alternatives can prevent someone from mobilizing to violence and can help reintegrate individuals into society. In the United States, studies show the need for and the success of positive alternatives to prevent violence.

▪ A National Institute for Justice-supported research project that reviewed 1,473 radicalized individuals in the United States, violent and non-violent, found that stable employment may decrease the risk that individuals with extreme views will mobilize to violence. The study noted that programs that emphasize the acquisition of job-relevant skills may be effective for promoting sustained employment among at-risk individuals.[232]

▪ In an example that may have analogous findings, a randomized control trial in Boston tested whether a summer youth employment program reduced crime. The main findings were that participants had few charges for violent crimes and property crimes in the 17 months after the program ended and that participants showed improvements in their skills, attitudes, and aspirations.[233]

Overseas off-ramping programs focused on international terrorism that provide positive alternatives also have demonstrated success.

Since 2009, The Unity Initiative (TUI)—a specialist intervention consultancy based in the United Kingdom that focuses on rehabilitating individuals convicted of terrorist offenses—has rehabilitated more than 50 individuals convicted of terrorism offenses and an additional 180 considered extreme by authorities, family members, or peers. TUI's model provides individuals with an alternative, positive activism, something that gives their life purpose.

Noor Huda Ismail—whom Indonesian media calls the "terrorism whisper"—includes positive alternatives in his rehabilitation program. He brings in humanitarian aid workers to show pictures of volunteers helping people on missions in Iraq and Afghanistan,

emphasizing the excitement, danger, and opportunity to help Muslims—the same things that attracted many to terrorism.[234]

Group-Level Prevention Suggestions

For decades, criminologists have known that building and maintaining relationships with socially accepted people is the best way to prevent violence.[235] Family support for nonviolence also is one of the few known protective factors against individuals engaging in terrorism.[236]

- A survey of 465 Somali-American and Somali-Canadian young adults from five communities that have experienced both gang violence and a small number of community members joining terrorist groups found that strong social bonds and civic engagement were crucial to resilience.[237]

EARLY EDUCATION: PROVIDING POSITIVE GROUP ENVIRONMENTS
A well-designed social environment helps foster positive peer relationships, creates positive interactions between adults and children, and provides opportunities for adults to support children to achieve their social goals.[238] Including family members in positive, group environments is an important aspect of designing the social environment. For children who have had negative peer and family experiences, programs that help create positive group environments may be beneficial.

- The CDC has several suggestions on how to reduce youth violence, including promoting family environments that support healthy development. The CDC recommends early childhood home visitation as well as parenting skill and family relationship programs.[239]

- Young children who demonstrate difficult behavior are more likely to be rejected by their peers, have negative family interactions, and to be disciplined by their schools. As high school students, these children are more likely to experience school failure, to drop out, and to encounter the juvenile justice system, according to an article in the journal Young Children.[240]

- One process that teachers can use to develop positive environments is Positive Behavior Support (PBS). PBS is a set of research-based strategies to increase quality of life and decrease problem behavior by teaching new skills and making changes in a person's environment.[241] This continuum involves universal support for all children, including building strong relationships and providing a high-quality environment. It also provides more targeted preventive practices for children who may need greater social and emotional support and individualized interventions.[242]

OFF-RAMPING: ADDRESSING ISOLATION
Disengaging people from violence also requires addressing group-level issues. Since people on the path to violence often alienate their friends and families with their abhorrent views, they may find it lonely to then abandon the only people who accept them.[243]

- As sociologist Michael Kimmel explains, the camaraderie that recruits found in domestic terrorist groups was what tended to keep them there long after they started to question white supremacy's toxic conclusions. [244]

Community-Level Prevention Suggestions

Community-level prevention efforts can engage a wide range of public and private stakeholders with the goal of helping disillusioned youths find a place for themselves in their communities. Community efforts can connect youth to caring adults and to activities through mentoring programs or after-school programs.

EARLY EDUCATION: DISCOVER TALENTS
Schools or civil society organizations can offer seminars that advise students on ways to discover their talents and interests and how to use them.[245]

- School psychologists and social workers can help disillusioned youths find a place for themselves in society, which many of them feel they lack.[246]

- The Harlem Children's Zone project serves thousands of children in Harlem, New York—a neighborhood historically known for broken homes, violent crime, and drug activity. The project provides family support centers, private schools, parent training, and after-school programs that emphasize how to have a prosperous life without crime. The project has been credited with having significantly increased the number of youths who go to college and decreasing criminal and gang activity.[247]

INTERVENTION/OFF-RAMPING: INVOLVE MULTIPLE PLAYERS
Involving public and private sector stakeholders can create encompassing efforts and avoid stigmatizing communities. The FBI's report, "Making Prevention a Reality," advocates convening a multi-disciplinary intervention and monitoring team to prevent violence.[248]

- Montgomery County, Maryland worked with the World Organization for Resource Development and Education (WORDE) to establish a violent extremism intervention and prevention model. This program engages and convenes a wide range of public and private stakeholders, including county agencies, nonprofit organizations, youth activists, gang prevention experts, and faith-based community organizations and clergy. This inclusive approach is specifically designed to reduce the stigma on Muslim communities by including a broad spectrum of other partners.[249]

Conclusions

Individuals proceed along the path to violence when they experience problems with which they are unable to cope and become convinced that non-violent solutions will not rectify their grievances. The pathway toward violence is complex, dynamic, and unique to each individual.

Although the four forms of violence reviewed in this piece—international terrorism, domestic terrorism, school shootings, and gang violence—are different, some of the factors that lead a person to commit them are similar. Personal, group, community, and sociopolitical factors were observed in all forms of violence examined, and ideological factors were relevant to all but gang violence. The existence of these factors on their own does not mean that an individual will choose to be violent; rather it indicates potential vulnerability.

There is no one perfect prevention strategy, framework, or program. Rather, different forms of prevention will resonate with different potential recruits, much like different factors affect an individual's path to violence. The most effective strategies build on indigenous knowledge, expertise, and leadership to produce strategies that are culturally relevant and appropriate to local conditions.

Individuals can be prevented from beginning on the path to violence or removed from the path at different stages of their progression on it. Prevention thus can be broken into three key components: early education, early intervention, and off-ramping efforts.

When possible, combining prevention efforts across different forms of violence may provide cost effective ways for addressing similar mobilization factors, especially at the early education stage. However, some individuals may respond best to subject matter expertise at the intervention and off-ramping stage.

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