

VIOLENT EXTREMIST MOBILIZATION INDICATORS AND SPECIAL EVENTS



The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are committed to safeguarding the rights guaranteed by the US Constitution and applicable law. We therefore emphasize that many of the mobilization indicators included in this supplement may also relate to constitutionally protected activities. It is most important to look critically and contextually at the specific actions of individuals and their intent. Law enforcement action should never be taken solely on the basis of constitutionally protected activities; of the apparent or actual legally protected characteristics of the subject, such as, but not limited to, race, age, ethnicity, national origin, religion, or sex; or of any combination of these factors. Individuals are encouraged to contact law enforcement if—given the below indicators and the situational context—they suspect an individual is mobilizing to violence or engaging in other violent extremist activities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

02 INTRODUCTION

04 SECTION ONE Indicators of Potential Threats to Special Events and Examples of Behavior

18 SECTION TWO Risk Factors for Threats to Special Events

19 SECTION THREE Resources For Preventing and Managing Threats to Special Events

22 REFERENCE CARD

INTRODUCTION

The United States faces heightened threats from violent extremists motivated by a broad range of extremist ideologies. NCTC, FBI, and DHS's *US Violent Extremist Mobilization Indicators* (2025) is a booklet of 42 indicators—or observable behaviors—that could help determine whether US-based violent extremists may be mobilizing to violence.^a

For the purposes of this supplement, ideologically motivated US-based violent extremists consist of homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) and domestic violent extremists (DVEs). Please note that the contributions to this supplement from NCTC are informed by tactics, techniques, and procedures used by international terrorists; HVEs; and US-based violent extremists directed, enabled, or inspired by or who otherwise affiliate or collaborate with foreign violent extremists. NCTC defers to the FBI and DHS on domestic violent extremism.

The FBI defines an HVE as a person of any citizenship who has lived or operated primarily in the United States or its territories who advocates, is engaged in, or is preparing to engage in ideologically motivated terrorist activities (including providing support to terrorism) in furtherance of political or social objectives promoted by a foreign terrorist organization, but is acting independently of direction by a foreign terrorist organization. HVEs are distinct from traditional domestic terrorists, who engage in unlawful acts of violence to intimidate civilian populations or attempt to influence domestic policy without direction or influence from a foreign actor. FBI and DHS define a DVE as an individual based and operating primarily within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power who seeks to further political or social goals, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophical embrace of violent tactics does not constitute violent extremism and may be constitutionally protected. DVEs can fit within one or multiple categories of ideological motivation and can span a broad range of groups or movements. DHS's Office of Intelligence and Analysis utilizes this term synonymously with "domestic terrorist."

^a For a complete description of these behaviors, please see *US Violent Extremist Mobilization Indicators* (2025). For a full copy, please go to: <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/counterterrorism/us-violent-extremism-mobilization-indicators-2025-pdf.pdf/view>. It is important to consider the totality of circumstances when observing potential concerning behaviors because the presence of a single indicator does not necessarily equate to mobilization to violence. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, the use of strong rhetoric, or the generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may not constitute extremism and may be constitutionally protected.

This supplement^b is intended to show how these indicators can be used to detect threats against special events. This includes a variety of events of significant national or international importance, such as major sporting events, commemorative gatherings, and holiday parades or festivals. US-based violent extremists have attacked or aspired to target special events for a variety of factors, including their symbolic value, high-profile or large numbers of attendees, and real or perceived security vulnerabilities.

This supplement is organized into three sections:

- **Section one** lists examples of behavioral indicators derived from a review of US-based violent extremists who plotted or targeted special events, and inputs from subject matter experts across DHS, FBI, NCTC, and other coordinating agencies. As in *US Violent Extremist Mobilization Indicators* (2025), the indicators are categorized into six behavioral types—intent, tactics, finance, ideology, relationship, and travel—with examples for each category.

Various observers—the most common and best positioned being family members and peers of would-be attackers—may witness signs that an individual is mobilizing to violence. We have identified various categories of non-law enforcement observers, sometimes referred to as bystanders, who are most likely to notice unusual activity, which they can report to law enforcement when appropriate. Examples of such observers include:

- » People in direct, regular contact with the individual who may be mobilizing to violence, in-person or online, including those with varying levels of access and insight. Examples include family members, co-workers, neighbors, online contacts, community authority figures such as teachers and professors, and health and social service providers.
- » Potential observers more likely to witness unusual behaviors in or around special events include a variety of commercial and financial sector representatives. These could include event attendees and volunteers, venue employees, food service workers, hotel staff, bank employees, tour guides, transportation personnel, landlords or other short-term lodging providers, and staff at event-adjacent locations.

- **Section two** provides a list of risk factors to consider in conjunction with the indicators of mobilization to violence.
- **Section three** provides a list of additional sector-specific resources for countering or reporting concerns about violent extremism.

^b This supplement does not respond to a specific threat against the United States. It provides general awareness of, considerations for, and additional resources related to threats resulting from general terrorist tactics, techniques, and procedures that could be leveraged to conduct a terrorist attack in the United States.

SECTION ONE

INDICATORS OF POTENTIAL THREATS TO
SPECIAL EVENTS AND EXAMPLES OF BEHAVIOR

INTENT

Developing or communicating goals or plans to commit a violent act

MOBILIZATION

- 3 Disseminating one's own martyrdom or last will video or statement (such as a preattack manifesto or other final statement)

PREPARATION

- 8 Communicating intent to engage in violence or a direct threat with justification for action, particularly if presented as necessary or inevitable, in person or online

MOTIVATION

- 29 Expressing desire for notoriety or willingness to die through violent extremist acts
- 30 Threatening specific violence against a particular physical target or category of target, especially in response to sociopolitical or other flashpoint events related to ideological concerns
- 31 Threatening violence toward specific individuals or groups, including civilian, government, law enforcement, or military personnel
- 34 Expressing acceptance of violence, including destruction of critical infrastructure and key resources, as a necessary means to achieve ideological goals and rejection of nonviolent means as ineffective or unavailable

Potential Examples:

- Posting online threats of violence targeting special event locations, attendees, or participants, and using ideological terms to justify violence, such as a desire for revenge against ideological opponents.
- Communicating a desire to target a specific event or attendee or participant of an event, or sharing potential plans or post-attack material relating to a special event.
- Attempting to create or seeking to post online manifestos, post-attack material, or other statements that justify violence or dehumanize high-profile attendees or participants at upcoming special events.



TACTICS

Acquiring or developing skills, knowledge, or materials to engage in violent extremist activities

MOBILIZATION

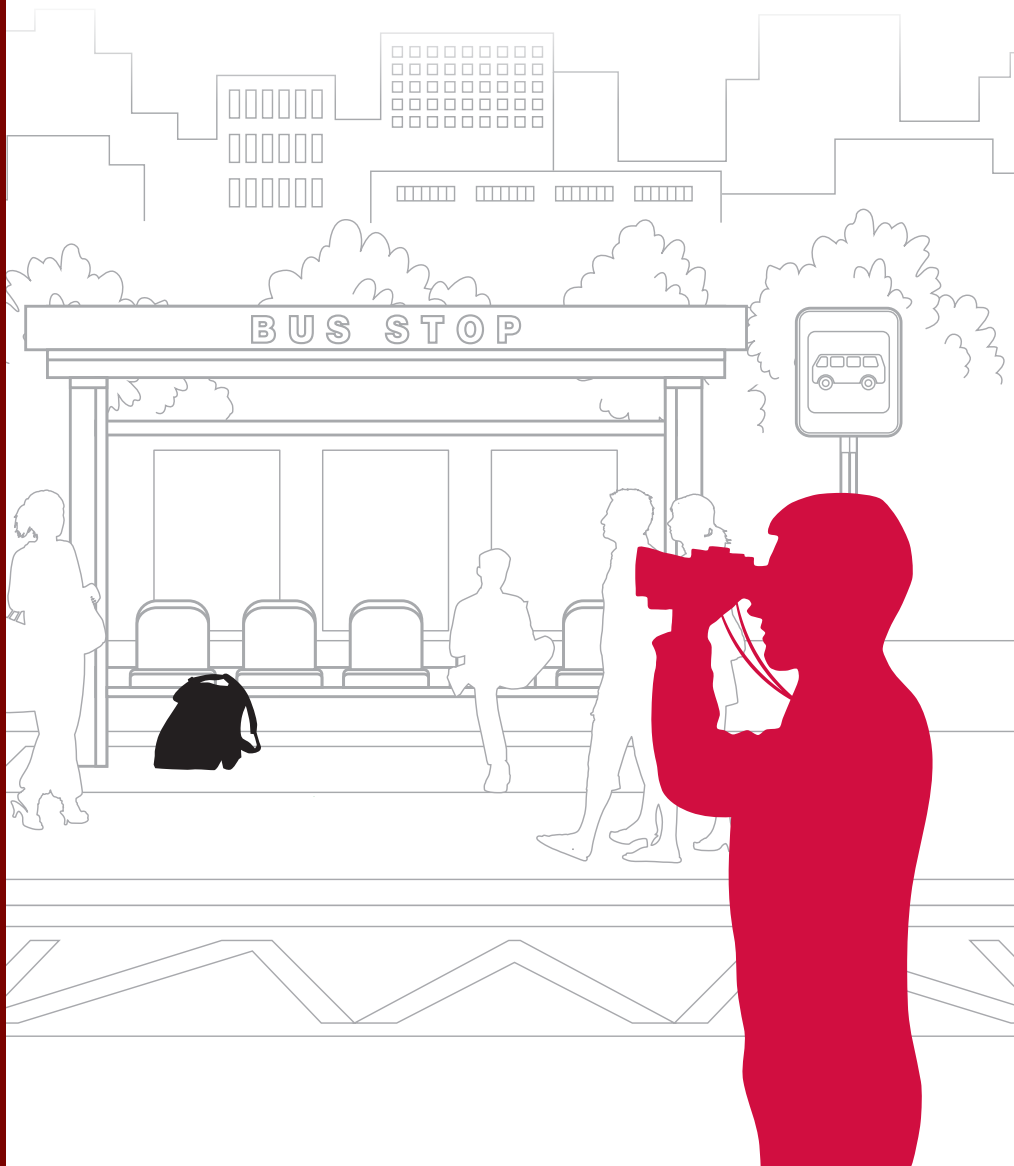
- 4 Conducting a dry run of an attack or assault or attempting to get near or access identified targets

PREPARATION

- 9 Unusual interest in researching, building, or testing explosives, especially if tailored to a specific target; unusual injuries
- 15 Surveilling potential attack targets
- 16 Increased use of physical concealment tactics (for example, countersurveillance techniques or disposable phone) in support of planning a specific act of violence
- 17 Increased use of online concealment tactics (such as deleting, hiding, or manipulating social media or other online accounts to misrepresent location or hide group membership, contacts, or activities) in support of planning a specific act of violence
- 25 Conducting research related to target or tactic selection for violent acts (for example, seeking blueprints, maps, schematics, or technical specifications)
- 26 Pursuing or exploiting jobs or personnel who provide sensitive access to enable violent acts (in sectors such as critical infrastructure, the Intelligence Community, law enforcement, or the military)
- 27 Seeking technical expertise (for example, in aviation, biology, chemistry, or electronics) to enable planning violence

Potential Examples:

- Unusual attempts to seek employment or acquire event credentials, access sensitive event areas, including rooftops or other sensitive areas, without plausible explanation.
- Unusual behavior intended to restrict access to one's short-term lodging or vehicle in the vicinity of special event sites, especially in conjunction with other indicators of interest in violent extremist activities.
- Leaving items unattended in public places that could be used to conceal explosives, such as bags, luggage, briefcases, strollers, or suspicious equipment.
- Conducting physical, online, or UAS surveillance of event venues or event-specific transportation services before an event, including seeking to track event security measures and exploitable access points.
- Wearing weather-inappropriate attire as a means to conceal firearms or other weapons at special event areas where weapons are prohibited.



FINANCE

Moving or acquiring money or resources to prepare for, support, or conduct violence

MOBILIZATION

- 6 Disposing of meaningful personal assets or belongings in an unusual manner, including sudden unexplained account closures and disbursements, particularly with a sense of urgency or without regard for personal financial gain

PREPARATION

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

Potential Examples:

- Abruptly opening multiple lines of credit by acquiring several credit cards or taking out one or more loans for unclear reasons; especially if the individual uses the newly obtained credit almost exclusively for cash advances and purchases of virtual currencies but fails to make payments.
- The sudden adoption or increased use of financial methods that conceal or obfuscate the ultimate source or end use of funds, such as person-to-person transfers, ATM withdrawals, third party processors, prepaid cards, virtual currency, wire transfers, false identities to layer transactions, or using a series of electronic wallets to obscure the origin of transfers.
- Soliciting or receiving funding from online networks in which violent extremists participate or associated crowdfunding platforms.
- Using cryptocurrency or unlicensed money service businesses to obscure financial activity related to logistical planning in connection with a special event, particularly for travel or material acquisition.



IDEOLOGY

Developing or communicating a worldview or justification that could lead to the commission of a violent act

PREPARATION

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

MOTIVATION

- 32 Producing, promoting, or extensively consuming violent extremist content online or in person, including videos, narratives, media, and messaging for suspected criminal purposes
- 36 Praising, fixating on, or researching past successful or attempted attacks or attackers
- 37 Adherence to narratives that create a sense of crisis (or urgency) to justify violence against ideological opponents
- 39 Adopting more than one violent extremist ideology
- 40 Rejecting engagement with nonviolent voices in favor of violent extremist ideologies
- 41 Changing vocabulary, style of speech, or behavior to reflect a hardened point of view or new sense of purpose associated with violent extremist causes, particularly after a catalyzing event

Potential Examples:

- Identifying with the cause and expressing support for an FTO or other violent extremists; or praising or glorifying previous attacks and attackers, particularly those with mass casualties or who targeted special events, such as the 1 January 2025 ISIS-inspired attacker who targeted crowds celebrating New Year's on Bourbon Street in New Orleans.
- Developing hostile "us-versus-them" worldviews, and making dehumanizing statements against high-profile individuals or groups they identify as the "enemy" or the "other."
- Increasingly using violent extremist terminology; possessing or posting imagery associated with FTOs or other violent extremists; or referring to their perceived adversaries as legitimate targets to seek justification for a planned violent act.
- Creating video game modifications, a.k.a. mods, or simulations that depict attacks on special event venues, stadiums, or fan gatherings, especially in conjunction with other indicators of interest in violent extremist activities.



RELATIONSHIP

Interacting with others, including family, to discuss, prepare for, or conduct violence

MOBILIZATION

- 7 Unusual goodbyes or post death instructions

PREPARATION

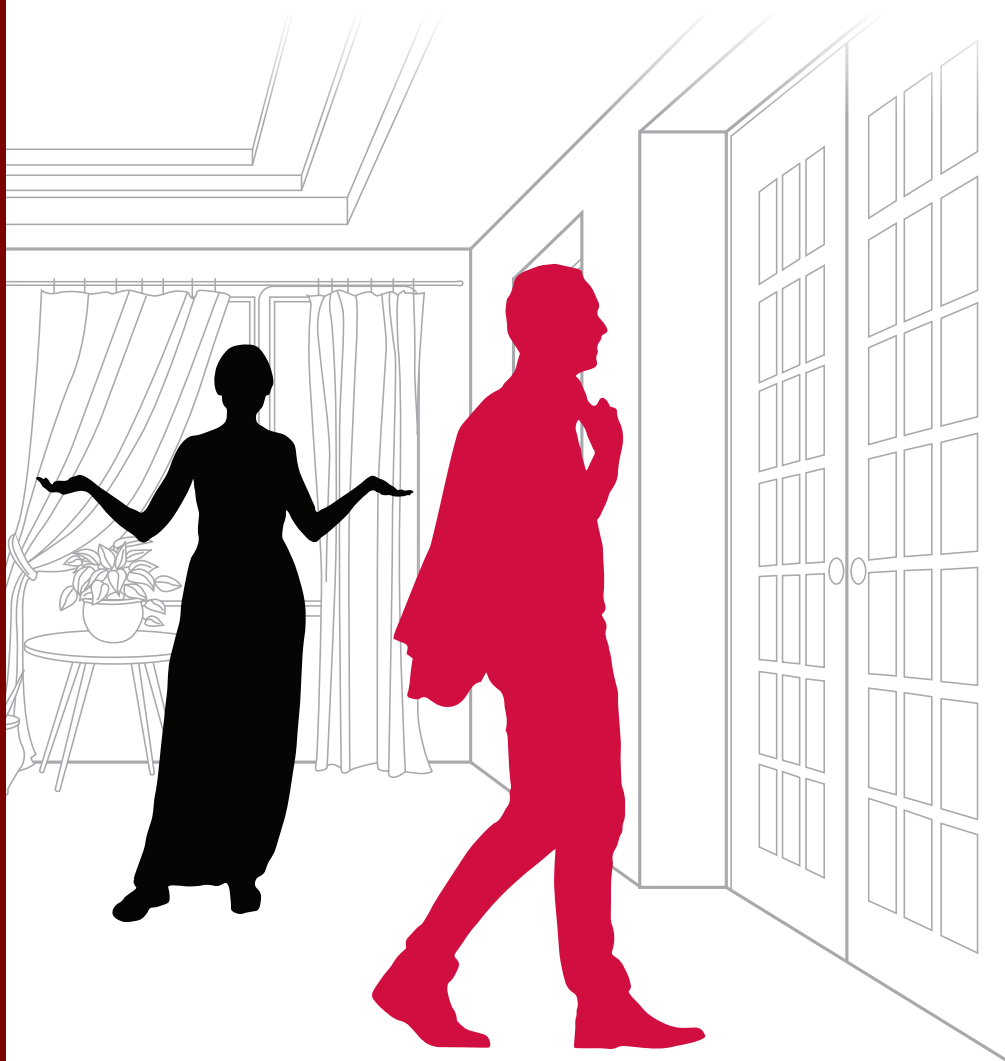
- 14 Breaking away from a larger in-person or online group or creating a more exclusive or operationally secure group to discuss or plan specific violent activity
- 18 Communicating directly or seeking to develop a relationship with violent extremists for suspected criminal purposes
- 24 Creating, joining, or implying membership/association—in-person or online—with violent extremist groups for the purpose of furthering violent activity

MOTIVATION

- 35 Attempting to radicalize others—especially family members and peers—to violence
- 38 Having outbursts around, fighting with, or condemning behavior of family, peers, community members, or authority figures while advocating violent extremist ideology
- 42 Isolating oneself from family and others, particularly while citing violent extremist doctrine or ideology

Potential Examples:

- Unusual attempts to seek detailed information from family, friends, employees, or strangers about event security or other sensitive site information.
- Increasingly isolating from family and friends in the months leading up to a special event; increasing engagement with violent extremist communities online or in-person; exhibiting violent and unusual reactions with family and friends.
- Attempting to recruit others to participate in coordinated or lone-actor attacks at special events by emphasizing their symbolic and ideological impact.
- Participating in online forums associated with FTOs or other violent extremists and expressing a willingness to become a “martyr” or “saint” on behalf of the cause.





MOBILIZATION

- 1 Traveling, within the United States or abroad, to carry out or participate in violent extremist activity or join a violent extremist group

PREPARATION

- 10 Planning or preparing to travel abroad to join violent extremist organizations, seek training, or engage in violent activities in a conflict zone
- 11 Planning or preparing to travel within the United States to participate in violent extremist activity
- 22 Planning or pursuing suspicious travel (for example, unusual purchase of one-way tickets, false excuses for international travel, or fraudulent passport application) in a manner that raises suspicion of planning violence

Potential Examples:

- Traveling to event venue locations for unusually short periods, especially in conjunction with other indicators to suggest the travel is for reconnaissance of potential attack locations.
- Unusual travel patterns to host cities during special events or preliminary competitions, including attempts to observe security measures and crowd management protocols.
- Purchasing tickets or accommodations near a special event, such as fan zones, opening ceremonies, or other high-density public viewing areas, combined with other indicators of radicalization.

SECTION TWO

RISK FACTORS FOR THREATS TO SPECIAL EVENTS

It is important to consider the totality of an individual's circumstances when observing potential indicators, because some factors (or the combination thereof) may increase the risk of mobilization to violence in a given situation. No one of the illustrative risk factors listed below is more significant than another, and each might be insignificant on its own. Some of these risk factors may involve constitutionally protected activities.

- Family, significant other, or peer espousal of or support for violent extremist ideology
- History of dehumanizing ideological opponents or people as part of an "outgroup," creating a justification for violence
- History of notable noncompliance with restrictions, boundaries, or laws
- History of stalking, harassing, threatening, or menacing behavior
- History of violence—not necessarily related to terrorism—or unstable mental state resulting in threat or harm to self, others, or animals
- Past exposure to violence or trauma, desensitization to violence, or indifference to the suffering of others
- Negative response to or failure to cope with existing, new, or changing personal circumstances, including personal relationships, financial hardship, family dynamics, employment, isolation, and substance use
- Feeling of real or perceived injustice or grievance that may be broad or specific to a person, group, or event
- Previous travel or exposure to a conflict zone or area of high political or social violence, including personal and noncombatant travel

Multiple risk factors, when observed in combination with multiple indicators described in Section one of this supplement, may warrant reporting to family members, community authority figures, health and social service providers, and/or law enforcement. Please see Section three, Sector Specific Resources for more information on reporting.

SECTION THREE

RESOURCES FOR PREVENTING AND MANAGING THREATS TO SPECIAL EVENTS

Event venue personnel and any other commercial or financial sector representatives associated with special events should immediately report any threats of violence or activity that may constitute criminal conduct to the FBI or local law enforcement. Partners are encouraged to share observations of ideologically motivated calls for violence against their events facilities to NCTC, FBI, and DHS to enhance the accuracy and utility of future editions of this supplement.

Active Shooter Safety Resources

FBI: This webpage provides a consolidated list of FBI's active shooter school safety case resources, including publications, training, videos, and victim assistance.

<https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/active-shooter-safety-resources>

DHS/CISA: IS-907.A, Active Shooter: What You Can Do | CISA This course offers guidance to non-law-enforcement individuals to help organizations and communities become better prepared to prevent, respond to, and recover from an active shooter situation. Also see DHS/CISA.

<https://cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/active-shooter-emergency-action-plan-112017-508v2.pdf>

Explosive Detection and Mitigation Resources

DHS/CISA and FBI; Bomb Threat Guide: This guide provides awareness and guidance in preparing for and reacting to a bomb threat. It assists decisionmakers with assessment of and response to received bomb threats.

<https://www.cisa.gov/resources-tools/resources/bomb-threat-guide>

<https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/suspicious-package-indicators.pdf>

The National Explosives Task Force coordinates rapid integration of explosives expertise with intelligence and law enforcement information to support operational activities.

[netf-suspicious-package-indicators-032218.pdf](https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/netf-suspicious-package-indicators-032218.pdf)

USPS: Suspicious packages resources

<https://about.usps.com/what/corporate-social-responsibility/securing-the-mail/>

Emergency Planning Resources

DHS/CISA: Resources for facilities that draw large crowds such as sports events, public facilities, conference centers, arenas and more.

<https://www.cisa.gov/topics/critical-infrastructure-security-and-resilience/critical-infrastructure-sectors/commerical-facilities-sector>

DHS/CISA: [CISA Tabletop Exercise Packages \(CTEP\)](#) are a comprehensive set of resource designed to assist stakeholders in conducting their own exercises to address a variety of threat scenarios.

<https://www.cisa.gov/resources-tools/services/cisa-tabletop-exercise-packages>

Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team (JCAT): JCAT produces [First Responders Toolboxes](#) which are reference aids designed to improve interagency coordination at the federal, state, local, tribal and private levels. JCAT is housed at the National Counterterrorism Center and consists of FBI, DHS and NCTC personnel.

<https://www.odni.gov/index.php/nctc-how-we-work/joint-ct-assessment-team/first-responder-toolbox>

Reporting Suspicious Activity

FBI: Contains links to National Missing Child Exploitation Center, Cyber, Homeland Security, and Tax-related crime reporting. Electronic Tip Form:

<https://tips.fbi.gov/home>

DHS's National Threat Evaluation and Reporting (NTER) Program Office engages homeland security partners to advance their threat identification and mitigation capabilities, protect public officials, safeguard critical infrastructure, and secure the Homeland primarily through two National Programs: the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative and the Master Trainer Program.

<https://www.dhs.gov/nter-national-programs>

<https://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something/how-to-report-suspicious-activity>

VIOLENT EXTREMIST MOBILIZATION INDICATORS AND SPECIAL EVENTS REFERENCE CARD

INTENT

- Posting online threats of violence targeting special event locations, attendees, or participants, and using ideological terms to justify violence, such as a desire for revenge against ideological opponents.
- Communicating a desire to target prominent public figures, or holidays and other special events based on their symbolic value.
- Attempting to create or seeking to post online manifestos, post-attack material, or other statements that justify violence or dehumanize high-profile attendees or participants at upcoming special events.

TACTICS

- Unusual attempts to seek employment or acquire event credentials, access sensitive event areas, including rooftops or other sensitive areas, without plausible explanation.
- Unusual behavior intended to restrict access to one's short-term lodging or vehicle, especially in conjunction with other indicators of interest in violent extremist activities.
- Leaving items unattended in public places that could be used to conceal explosives, such as bags, luggage, briefcases, strollers, or suspicious equipment.
- Conducting physical, online, or UAS surveillance of event venues or event-specific transportation services before an event, including seeking to track event security measures and exploitable access points.
- Wearing weather-inappropriate attire as a means to conceal firearms or other weapons at special event areas where weapons are prohibited.

FINANCE

- Abruptly opening multiple lines of credit, for example, by acquiring several credit cards and taking out one or more loans for unclear reasons, especially if the individual uses the newly obtained credit almost exclusively for cash advances and purchases of virtual currencies, but fails to make payments when due.
- Sudden adoption or increased use of financial methods that conceal or obfuscate the ultimate source or end use of funds, such as person-to-person transfers, ATM withdrawals, third party processors, prepaid cards, virtual currency, wire transfers, false identities to layer transactions, or using a series of electronic wallets to obscure the origin of transfers.
- Soliciting or receiving funding from violent extremist online networks and associated crowdfunding platforms.
- Using cryptocurrency or unlicensed money service businesses to obscure financial activity related to logistical planning in connection with a special event, particularly for travel or material acquisition.

IDEOLOGY

- Identifying with the cause and expressing support for a violent extremist organization, and praising or glorifying past attacks and attackers, particularly those with mass casualties or who targeted special events, such as the ISIS-inspired attacker who targeted crowds celebrating New Year's on Bourbon Street in New Orleans on 01 January 2025.
- Developing hostile "us-versus-them" worldviews, and making dehumanizing statements against high-profile individuals or groups they identify as the "enemy" or the "other."
- Increasingly using violent extremist terminology; possessing or posting imagery associated with FTOs and other violent extremist organizations; and referring to their perceived adversaries as legitimate targets to justify their planned violent act.
- Creating video game modifications (known as mods) or simulations that depict attacks on special event venues, stadiums, or fan gatherings.

RELATIONSHIP

- Attempting to recruit others to conduct a lone actor attack or form a group to target a special event by emphasizing its symbolic and ideological value.
- Participating in online forums associated with FTOs and other violent extremist organizations and expressing a willingness to become a "martyr" or "saint" on behalf of the cause.
- Unusual attempts to seek detailed information from family, friends, employees, or strangers about event security or other sensitive site information.
- Increasingly isolating from family and friends in the months leading up to a special event; increasing engagement with violent extremist communities online or in-person; exhibiting violent and unusual reactions with family and friends.

TRAVEL

- Travelling to event venue locations for unusually short time periods, especially in conjunctions with other indicators that suggest the travel is for reconnaissance of potential attack locations.
- Unusual travel patterns to host cities during special events or preliminary competitions, including attempts to observe security measures and crowd management protocols.
- Purchasing tickets or accommodations near a special event, such as fan zones, opening ceremonies, or other high-density public viewing areas, especially without expressing legitimate interest in the actual event.



WWW.FBI.GOV



WWW.NCTC.GOV



WWW.DHS.GOV

Readers are strongly encouraged to contact their local FBI office by telephone or submit an online tip to the FBI at <https://tips.fbi.gov> if, based on these indicators and the situational context, they suspect an individual is mobilizing to violence.

In case of an emergency, please call 9-1-1.

Link to 2025 Booklet

[https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/counterterrorism/
us-violent-extremism-mobilization-indicators-2025-pdf.pdf/view](https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/counterterrorism/us-violent-extremism-mobilization-indicators-2025-pdf.pdf/view)