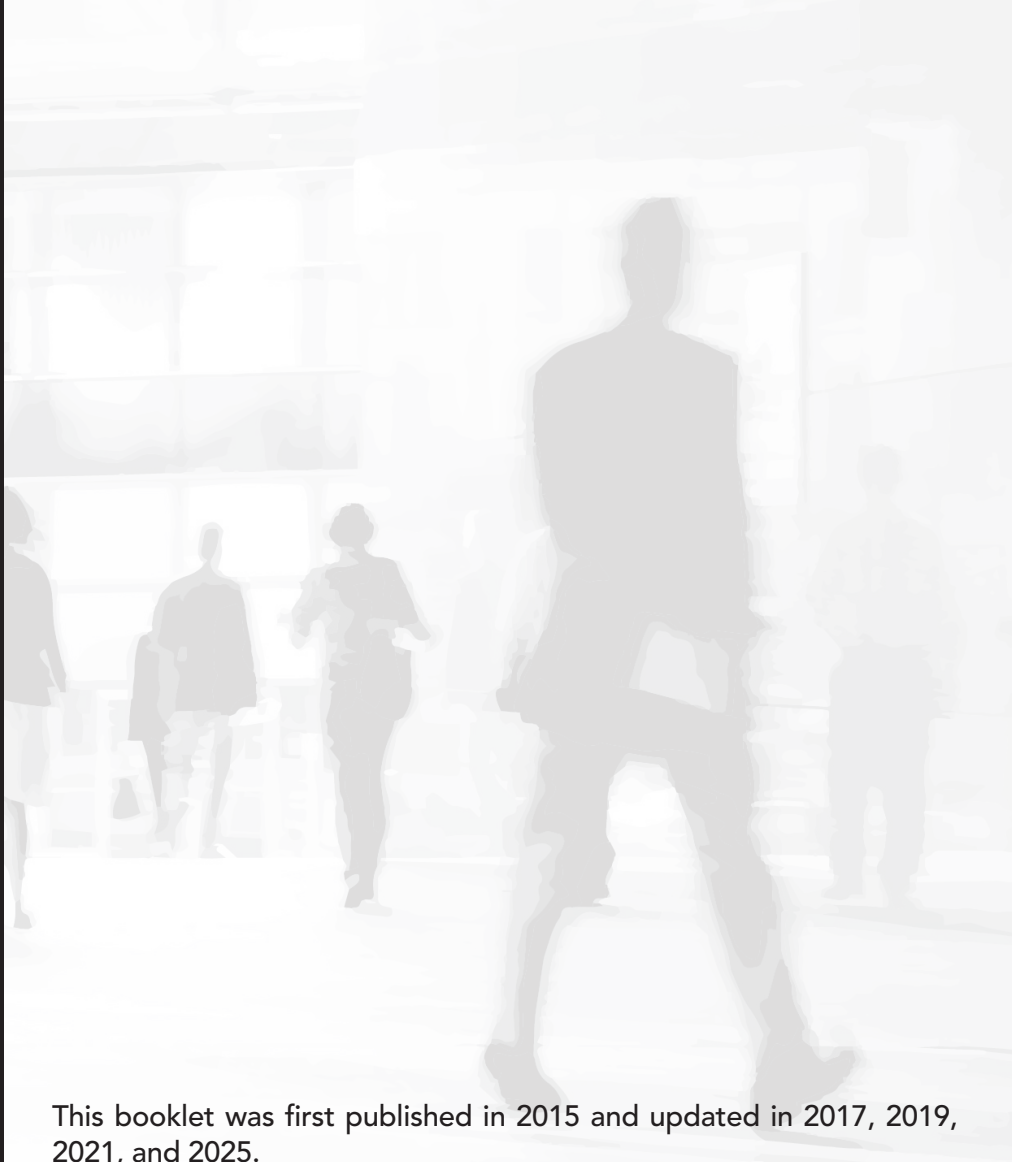


US VIOLENT EXTREMIST
**MOBILIZATION
INDICATORS**

2025



This booklet was first published in 2015 and updated in 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2025.

The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and 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 booklet 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, and sex; or of any combination of these factors. Individuals are encouraged to contact law enforcement if—given these 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 MOBILIZATION INDICATOR CRITERIA

08 THE INDICATORS

08 Mobilization

16 Preparation

20 Motivation

24 RISK FACTORS

26 INDEX

31 REFERENCE CARD

INTRODUCTION

US VIOLENT EXTREMIST MOBILIZATION INDICATORS

The United States and other nations face a heightened threat from violent extremists motivated by a broad range of ideologies. This booklet includes indicators that apply to US-based violent extremists motivated by multiple ideologies, given the evolving complexity and variety of factors influencing the US threat landscape.

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

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

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

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

For the purpose of this booklet, ideologically motivated US-based violent extremists consist of homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) and domestic violent extremists (DVEs). Please note that the contributions to this booklet 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 FBI and DHS on domestic violent extremism.

*FBI defines an **HVE** as a person of any citizenship who has lived and/or operated primarily in the United States or its territories who advocates, is engaged in, or is preparing to engage in ideologically motivated terrorist activities (including providing support to terrorism) in furtherance of political or social objectives promoted by a foreign terrorist organization, but is acting independently of direction by a foreign terrorist organization. HVEs are distinct from traditional domestic terrorists, who engage in unlawful acts of violence to intimidate civilian populations or attempt to influence domestic policy without direction or influence from a foreign actor. 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.*

^a The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may not constitute extremism and may be constitutionally protected.

MOBILIZATION INDICATOR CRITERIA

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

BEHAVIOR STAGES

These three categories of behavior represent the process an individual typically goes through on their way to carrying out an attack or traveling to join like-minded violent extremists, such as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO): MOBILIZATION to violence; engaging in PREPARATION and planning for an attack or for travel to join like-minded violent extremists or an FTO; and developing MOTIVATION for violent extremist activity. The behavior categories are listed in reverse chronological order, with the nearest-term and most concerning behaviors appearing first. Indicators are grouped within categories by the level of concern law enforcement typically associates with each indicator, with those of most immediate concern at the top.

- **MOBILIZATION INDICATORS:** Physical or virtual actions suggesting an attack or violent extremist travel may be imminent (within days/hours of observing the indicator)
- **PREPARATION INDICATORS:** Physical or virtual actions suggesting an attack (or travel to conduct or prepare for an attack) may occur within weeks or months of observing the indicator
- ◆ **MOTIVATION INDICATORS:** Physical or virtual actions that build, solidify, or communicate violent ideological beliefs and do not necessarily suggest an impending attack or violent extremist travel

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

OBSERVERS

Law enforcement may be in a position to observe all these indicators. Six categories of non-law-enforcement observers are most likely to see these activities firsthand and report them to law enforcement when appropriate:

- FAMILY** *Family members and peers* who have direct, in-person relationships with the individual; may include neighbors and casual acquaintances
- ONLINE** *Online contacts* who may passively observe or have a direct relationship with the individual online
- COMMUNITY** *Community authority figures and members*, including corrections officers and other government regulators; religious leaders and congregants; teachers and other school officials; work supervisors and colleagues; and passersby
- HEALTH** *Health and social service providers*, including therapists, rehabilitation group leaders, and case workers
- COMMERCIAL** *Commercial-sector representatives*, such as commercial company or store employees, online service providers, job recruiters, or travel professionals
- FINANCIAL** *Financial-sector representatives*, such as employees of banking or other investment entities

INDICATOR TYPES

We characterize each indicator as one of six behavior types:

- FINANCE** Moving or acquiring money or resources to prepare for, support, or conduct violence
- IDEOLOGY** Developing or communicating a worldview or justification that could lead to the commission of a violent act
- INTENT** Developing or communicating goals or plans to commit a violent act
- RELATIONSHIP** Interacting with others, including family, to discuss, prepare for, or conduct violence
- TACTICS** Acquiring or developing skills, knowledge, or materials to engage in violent extremist activities
- TRAVEL** Transiting within the United States or abroad to prepare for or conduct violence or join a violent extremist group

INDICATOR

MOBILIZATION

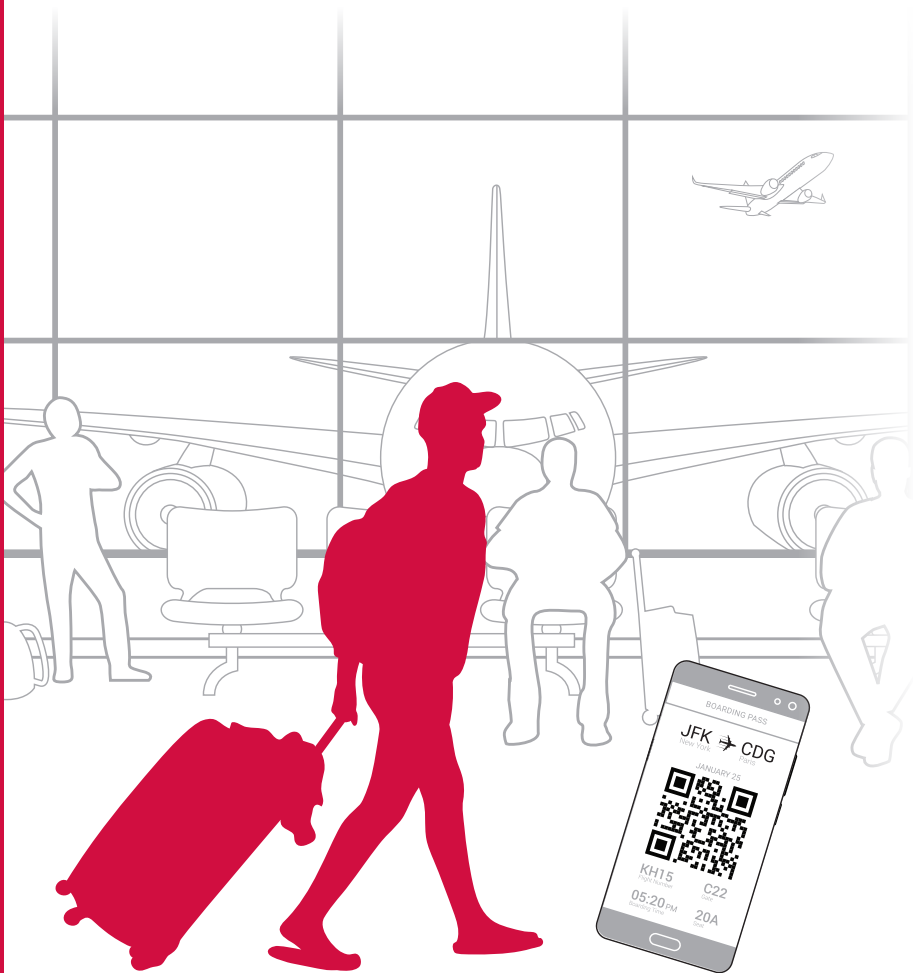
- 1 Traveling, within the United States or abroad, to carry out or participate in violent extremist activity or join a violent extremist group



FAMILY ONLINE COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL



TRAVEL



Physical or virtual actions suggesting an attack or violent extremist travel may be imminent (within days/hours of observing the indicator)

- 2 Threatening or violently resisting law enforcement on the basis of violent extremist ideology



FAMILY COMMUNITY HEALTH



INTENT



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

 **FAMILY** **ONLINE**
 **INTENT**



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

 **FAMILY** **COMMUNITY** **COMMERCIAL**
 **TACTICS**



- 5 Stating—in person or online—specific details of an intended violent activity, including target(s), time frames, and participant roles



FAMILY **ONLINE** **HEALTH** **COMMERCIAL**



INTENT



- 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



FAMILY **ONLINE** **COMMERCIAL** **FINANCIAL**



FINANCE



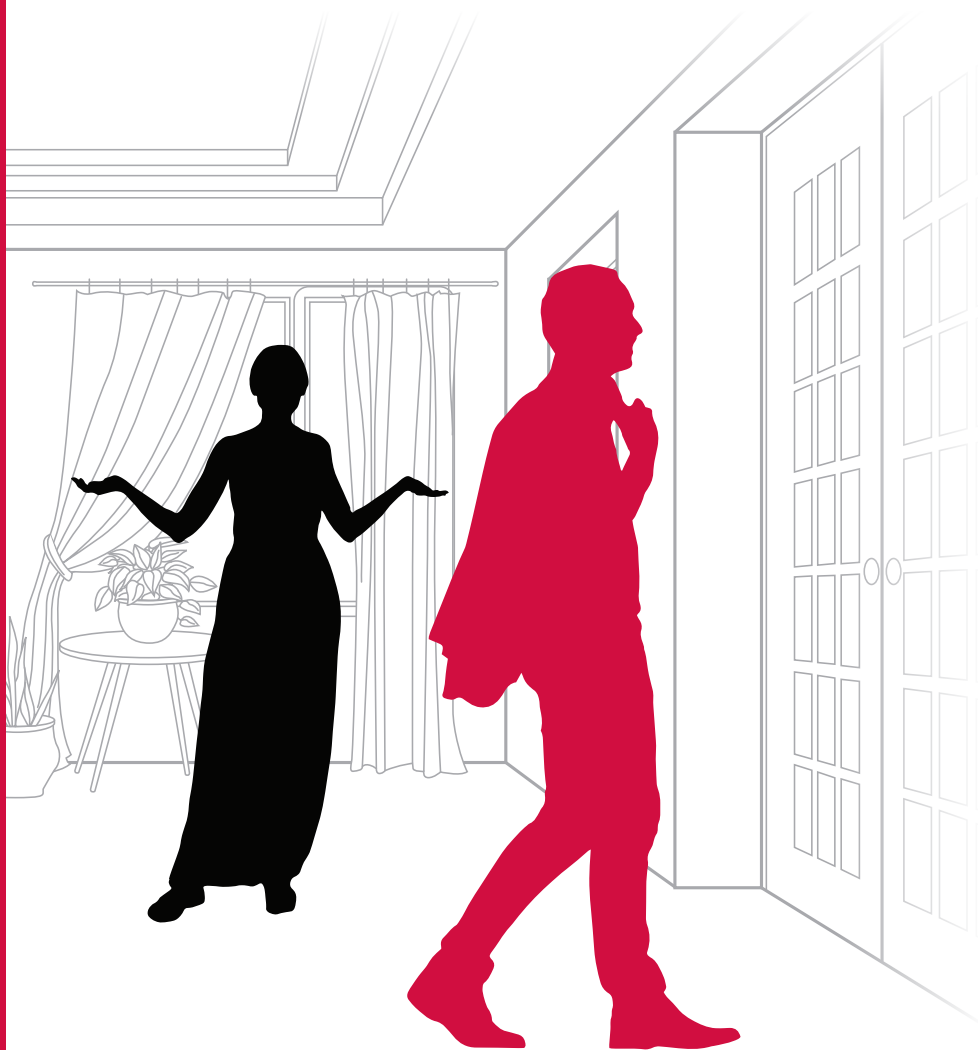
7 Unusual goodbyes or postdeath instructions



FAMILY ONLINE HEALTH



RELATIONSHIP



INDICATOR

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



- 9 Unusual interest in researching, building, or testing explosives, especially if tailored to a specific target; unusual injuries



- 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



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



- 13 Unusual purchase of military- or law enforcement-style tactical equipment, such as body armor or personal protective equipment, in a manner that raises suspicion of planning violence



Physical or virtual actions suggesting an attack (or travel to conduct or prepare for an attack) may occur within weeks or months of observing the indicator

- 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



- 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



- 18 Communicating directly or seeking to develop a relationship with violent extremists for suspected criminal purposes



- 19 Unusual efforts to obtain explosives precursors, especially illegally or surreptitiously



- 20 Acquisition of weapons or ammunition for suspected criminal purposes



FAMILY ONLINE COMMERCIAL



TACTICS

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



FAMILY ONLINE COMMERCIAL



TACTICS

- 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



FAMILY COMMERCIAL



TRAVEL

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



FAMILY COMMERCIAL FINANCIAL



FINANCE

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



FAMILY ONLINE COMMUNITY HEALTH COMMERCIAL



RELATIONSHIP

- 25 Conducting research related to target or tactic selection for violent acts (for example, seeking blueprints, maps, schematics, or technical specifications)



FAMILY ONLINE COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL



TACTICS

- 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)



FAMILY ONLINE COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL



TACTICS

- 27 Seeking technical expertise (for example, in aviation, biology, chemistry, or electronics) to enable planning violence



FAMILY ONLINE COMMERCIAL



TACTICS



INDICATOR

MOTIVATION

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

- 28** Expressing intent to harm law enforcement if law enforcement takes action that the individual believes is unjustified, or statement of intent to harm others (typically ideological opponents) if confronted



- 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



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



- 33** Posing with weapons and imagery associated with violent extremism in pictures or videos, especially if paired with threats of or expressed interest in violence against an ideological target



- 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



- 35** Attempting to radicalize others—especially family members and peers—to violence



- 36** Praising, fixating on, or researching past successful or attempted attacks or attackers



- 37** Adherence to narratives that create a sense of crisis (or sense of urgency) to justify violence against ideological opponents



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

-
- 38 Having outbursts around, fighting with, or condemning behavior of family, peers, community members, or authority figures while advocating violent extremist ideology



FAMILY COMMUNITY HEALTH



RELATIONSHIP

- 39 Adopting more than one violent extremist ideology



FAMILY ONLINE COMMUNITY HEALTH COMMERCIAL



IDEOLOGY

- 40 Rejecting engagement with nonviolent voices in favor of violent extremist ideologues



FAMILY ONLINE COMMUNITY HEALTH COMMERCIAL



IDEOLOGY

- 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



FAMILY ONLINE COMMUNITY HEALTH



IDEOLOGY

- 42 Isolating oneself from family and others, particularly while citing violent extremist doctrine or ideology



FAMILY ONLINE COMMUNITY HEALTH



RELATIONSHIP



RISK FACTORS

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, 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

INDICATOR INDEX

(BY TYPE)

● Mobilization ■ Preparation ◆ Motivation

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

INDICATOR TYPE

FINANCE

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

IDEOLOGY

- 12 Seeking or claiming religious, political, or ideological justification for a planned violent act
- 32 Producing, promoting, or extensively consuming violent extremist content online or in person, including videos, narratives, media, and messaging for suspected criminal purposes
- 33 Posing with weapons and imagery associated with violent extremism in pictures or videos, especially if paired with threats of or expressed interest in violence against an ideological target
- 36 Praising, fixating on, or researching past successful or attempted attacks or attackers

INDICATOR TYPE

IDEOLOGY *(continued)*

- 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

INTENT

- 2 Threatening or violently resisting law enforcement on the basis of violent extremist ideology
- 3 Disseminating one's own martyrdom or last will video or statement (such as a preattack manifesto or other final statement)
- 5 Stating—in person or online—specific details of an intended violent activity, including target(s), time frames, and participant roles
- 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
- 28 Expressing intent to harm law enforcement if law enforcement takes action that the individual believes is unjustified, or statement of intent to harm others (typically ideological opponents) if confronted
- 29 Expressing desire for notoriety or willingness to die through violent extremist acts

INDICATOR TYPE

INTENT *(continued)*

- 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

RELATIONSHIP

- 7** Unusual goodbyes or postdeath instructions
- 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
- 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

INDICATOR TYPE

TACTICS

- 4** Conducting a dry run of an attack or assault or attempting to get near or access identified targets
- 9** Unusual interest in researching, building, or testing explosives, especially if tailored to a specific target; unusual injuries
- 13** Unusual purchase of military- or law enforcement-style tactical equipment, such as body armor or personal protective equipment, in a manner that raises suspicion of planning violence
- 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
- 19** Unusual efforts to obtain explosives precursors, especially illegally or surreptitiously
- 20** Acquisition of weapons or ammunition for suspected criminal purposes
- 21** Change in or initiation of physical or weapons training, for suspected criminal purposes
- 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



INDICATOR TYPE

TRAVEL

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



- 1.** Traveling, within the United States or abroad, to carry out or participate in violent extremist activity or join a violent extremist group
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- 5.** Stating—in person or online—about specific details of an intended violent activity, including target(s), time frames, and participant roles
- 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
- 7.** Unusual goodbyes or postdeath instructions
- 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
- 9.** Unusual interest in researching, building, or testing explosives, especially if tailored to a specific target; unusual injuries
- 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
- 12.** Seeking or claiming religious, political, or ideological justification for a planned violent act
- 13.** Unusual purchase of military- or law enforcement-style tactical equipment, such as body armor or personal protective equipment, in a manner that raises suspicion of planning violence
- 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
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US VIOLENT EXTREMIST MOBILIZATION INDICATORS 2025 REFERENCE CARD



24. Creating, joining, or implying membership/association—in person or online—with violent extremist groups for the purpose of furthering violent activity
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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
28. Expressing intent to harm law enforcement if law enforcement takes action that the individual believes is unjustified, or statement of intent to harm others (typically ideological opponents) if confronted
29. Expressing desire for notoriety or willingness to die through violent extremist acts
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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
38. Having outbursts around, fighting with, or condemning behavior of family, peers, community members, or authority figures while advocating violent extremist ideology
39. Adopting more than one violent extremist ideology
40. Rejecting engagement with nonviolent voices in favor of violent extremist ideologues
41. Changing vocabulary, style of speech, or behavior to reflect a hardened point of view or new sense of purpose associated with violent extremist causes, particularly after a catalyzing event
42. Isolating oneself from family and others, particularly while citing violent extremist doctrine or ideology particularly if citing violent extremist doctrine or ideology





WWW.FBI.GOV



WWW.NCTC.GOV



WWW.DHS.GOV

Individuals 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.