

actions, which can be applied to real-life scenarios such as conducting an act of targeted violence.

CONCERNING BEHAVIOR

A Definition

The FBI defines violent extremism as encouraging, condoning, justifying, or supporting the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social or economic goals. The FBI uses an intelligence-driven process in its daily investigative and analytical activities to conduct baseline collections and assessments. Empirical data is extracted from investigations to assist in the identification of concerning behaviors.

Concerning behavior is defined as behavior that comes to the attention of third parties (bystanders) that suggests a possible future intention, resulting from a statement or action that causes concern. A 2002 *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*, drafted jointly by the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education, suggested acts of targeted violence are rarely impulsive and some may be preventable through the detection of planning behavior. This concept also applies within the violent extremism context, as students on the pathway to becoming radicalized or mobilizing, often exhibit behaviors, indicating support for extremist ideologies or highlighting future intentions.

The FBI does not advocate the application of any psychological or demographic “profiles” or check lists of indicators to identify students on a pathway to radicalization. Rather, the FBI endorses taking a holistic approach in considering the totality of concerning behaviors in the appropriate context, assessing the likelihood an individual is progressing on a trajectory to radicalization and/or future violent action in furtherance of an extremist cause.

The 2002 *Safe School Initiative (SSI)*, drafted jointly by the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education, shares the same conclusion. The SSI stated the use of profiles is not an effective tool for identifying students who pose a risk for targeted violence or assessing the risk that a particular student may pose for targeted violence. Rather, schools should focus on a student’s behaviors and communications to determine if the student appears to be planning or preparing for an attack.

The SSI conclusion also applies within the violent extremism context, as students on the pathway to becoming radicalized often exhibit behaviors or engage in communications, indicating support for extremist ideologies or highlighting future intentions. This progression is paramount to educators who rely on recognition of such concerning behaviors and communications to initiate the disengagement process intended to direct students down a less destructive path.



Violent extremists do not share a “typical” profile. They might be self-radicalized, self-trained, and self-executing.

Radicalization

Radicalization is defined as the process by which individuals come to believe that engagement in or facilitation of nonstate violence to achieve social and political change is necessary and justified. Radicalization enabling factors can be personal, community, group, socio-political, or ideological. Research conducted on youth-related radicalization indicates a vulnerability concerning a distinct identity, meaning, adventure, and belonging in their lives. However, factors driving or inhibiting radicalization change over time and vary individually.

Normal developmental vulnerabilities common to adolescents make some amenable to the influence of violent extremism, a trajectory that through inhibitors such as community engagement, mentoring, therapy, and education can be altered or suppressed.



Enabling factors advance the radicalization process while inhibitors deter progression.

Mobilization

Mobilization is defined as the process when a radicalized individual prepares for violence or engages in violence to reinforce their beliefs. Generally, mobilization to violence is premeditated and consists of acts directed against targets symbolic to their particular cause. The FBI and other experts studying these issues observed similarities in the pre-attack behaviors of lone offenders and those perpetrators from other forms of targeted violence, including terrorists.



The student's acceptance of lethal violence to advance an ideological, political, social, or religious cause.

Mobilizing is a behavioral pre-cursor to an act of targeted violence. The concept of “targeted violence” contains unique characteristics that befit most offenders:

- Targeted violence is the end result after a process of thinking and behavior;
- Perpetrators do not “just snap”; and
- Successful attacks typically require planning and preparation related to key activities (timing, tactic, target, capability).



A shift in attacks from directed at specific targets to targets of opportunity.

In 2000, the FBI conducted a study of school violence, *The School Shooter*, resulting in the identification of “leakage”—a common warning behavior for students advocating violence. Leakage occurs when a student intentionally or unintentionally reveals clues to feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes, or intentions that signal an impending act. These clues emerge as subtle threats, boasts, innuendos, predictions, or ultimatums and are conveyed in numerous forms (e.g. stories, diaries, journals, essays, poems, manifestos, letters, songs, drawings, and videos).



Leakage is one of the strongest clues prefacing a violent act.

According to the *Indicators of School Crime and Safety*, published in July 2015 through a partnership with the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice - Office of Justice Programs, there are many factors impacting school safety. These factors include victimization, teacher injury, bullying, cyber-bullying, fights, weapons, gangs, drugs, and alcohol abuse. These factors resulted in death, suicide, theft, simple assault, property damage, hate crimes, intimidation, and forced sexual offenses. This study highlighted valuable metrics and insight into the current school safety environment:

- Nearly 85% of public schools reported a criminal incident, resulting in an estimated 1.9 million crimes.
- Over 23% of public schools reported that bullying among students occurred on a daily or weekly basis; 22% of students reported being bullied at a public school.
- Nearly 7% of students reported being cyber-bullied during the school year.
- Over 16% of public schools reported gang activity.
- Over 2% of public school reported cult or extremist activities.
- Nearly 7% of students reported being the target of hate-related words and 25% of public schools reported hate-related graffiti.
- Nearly 88% of public schools utilize controlled access, monitoring, locking entrances, or security staff to enhance school safety.

Leakage applies to today's violent extremism environment, particularly through discovery—the uncovering of posted electronic messages, pictures, or videos on social media platforms that are of a violent nature or support violent extremist ideologies. Discovery can also take the form of written or verbal communications that reveal planned travel overseas or a willingness to commit a violent act.



To address leakage, a body of research suggests interactions extremists have with individuals occurring within their own social circles provide clues to their future intentions. Third parties who interact with radicalizing youth are referred to as *Bystanders*—individuals such as family members, peers, authority figures, and strangers whose relationship and level of interaction with an extremist enables them to witness or become aware of activities or behavior that may indicate radicalization or mobilization to violence. A student's interactions with a bystander provide opportunities for observations of suspicious behaviors and actions; or information relevant to future intentions. The key is communicating these observations and information in a timely manner to the proper authorities or a trusted community partner, mitigating a potential threat before an individual mobilizes to violence.



No behaviors depict an individual's willingness to commit a violent act.

The 2000 FBI School Shooter study suggests a student's personality, family, school, and social dynamics must be analyzed by school administrators and counselors to determine how best to respond to concerning behaviors or communications. Recognizing behavior or communications indicative of radicalization leading to violence allows for a community's preemptive action, including intervention or disruption, prior to mobilization.

An intervention takes many forms, including risk mitigation and conflict resolution; or disengagement. An intervention is conducted by experts from multiple disciplines, and if unsuccessful, law enforcement executes a disruption to mitigate the threat to the local community.

OUTCOMES OF EMBRACING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Abuse, Injury or Death

The actions of violent extremists result in multiple outcomes such as abuse, injury, death, or incarceration.

For example, American youth traveled to conflict zones where education is no longer needed but instead received lessons in violent extremism and military training that includes proficiency