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## Research Roundup Newsletter: November 2022

National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center

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# NCITE

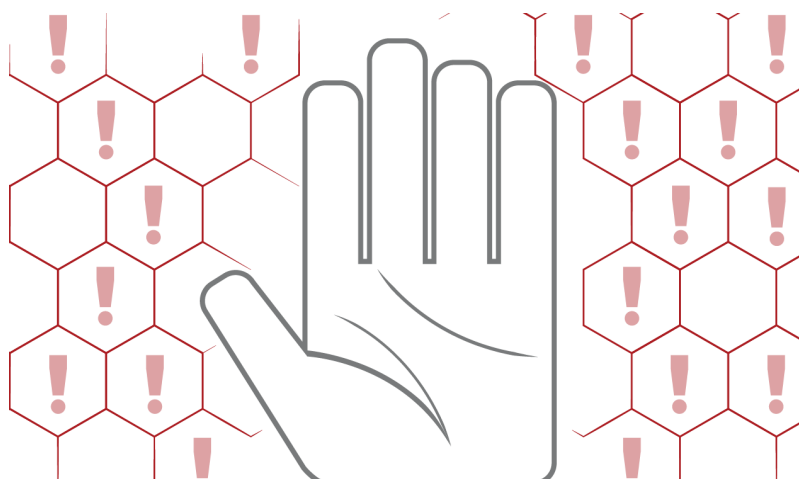
NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM  
INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY,  
AND EDUCATION CENTER

A U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

NOVEMBER 2022

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## NCITE RESEARCH ROUNDUP



### *Dear NCITE Community,*

NCITE's vision is to be the premier U.S. academic provider of counterterrorism research, technology, and workforce development. We take pride in producing actionable research and in translating academic knowledge for professionals in the Homeland Security Enterprise (HSE). We also believe in the importance of making science accessible to the public – to parents and students, to teachers and guidance counselors, to corporate safety officers and community leaders – so that they have tools to help keep their communities safe.

In our third year as the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Center of Excellence for counterterrorism and targeted violence, we are launching a new initiative to share academic research with the HSE and the broader public. In our **Research Roundups**, we will highlight recent research and resources on timely topics. In these research roundups, you will find:

- **Plain-language summaries** and links to new academic articles
- **Updates on relevant work** by members of the NCITE consortium
- **A list of resources** for further exploration

Today, we highlight research in the area of ***terrorism and targeted violence prevention***. In the wake of devastating recent shootings like those in Buffalo, N.Y. and Uvalde, Texas, we hope the research outlined can spark ideas for building community resilience and preventing similar events in the future.

Please let us know if you have ideas for future topics or if you'd like more information on any of the resources provided.

Sincerely,



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## What does the research say?

### **A public health ethics model of countering violent extremism**

**By N. D. Shortland, N. Evans, N., & J. Colautti**

This paper discussed the history of counter violent extremist (CVE) programs and the issues that have arisen from them. The authors discussed the ethical issues that CVE has faced and the shift to a public health model of CVE. This reflects the transition by DHS and CP3 to treat prevention as a public health issue. A public health model seeks to balance an interest in increasing community health while respecting the autonomy of the public. The authors point out that effective CVE programs in the U.S. must ensure the privacy and individual liberties of an individual.

#### **Key Takeaways**

- CVE is primarily made up of four components: prevention, intervention, deradicalization, and disengagement.
- CVE offers a range of programs, from “hard” to “soft” techniques.

- Utilizing a public health model for CVE allows for proportionate programs that respect individual liberties.

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## **Preventing violent extremism: A review of the literature**

**By W. Stephens, S. Sieckelinck, and H. Boutellier (2018)**

This article reviewed 73 papers addressing prevention of violent extremism across several disciplines, identifying four main themes that appear across the literature – building resiliency by helping individuals gain cognitive resources, skills, and characteristics; creating opportunities to discuss and strengthen identities; encouraging dialogue and action; and fostering community engagement and resilience. Importantly, there is an emphasis on building resilience at both the individual and community levels.

### **Key Takeaways**

- Prevention should be focused on building resilient individuals and communities.
- Building resilient individuals comes from building resilient communities that allow individuals to access resources (e.g., critical thinking and other cognitive resources to increase resiliency to extremist messaging) and “adapt positively in the face of hardship.”

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## **Cognitive and behavioral radicalization: A systematic review of the putative risk and protective factors\***

**By M. Wolfowicz, Y. Litmanovitz, D. Weisburd, and B. Hasisi (2021)**

This paper examined 101 different radicalization factors from 127 different studies to identify common risk and protective factors across terrorism generally and for specific ideologies.

The authors found five categories of factors for radical attitudes: individual background and sociodemographic factors, attitudinal factors, psychological and personality-related factors, experimental factors, and traditional criminogenic factors.

They looked at factors associated with *radical attitudes*, *radical intentions*, and *radical behaviors*.

The authors found that there is a significant crossover between traditional criminogenic factors and radical factors, which means counter-radicalization initiatives can draw on existing work from criminology. The authors found there were significantly fewer protective factors for radical intentions and behaviors than radical attitudes, which supports the work of CVE programs and a public health approach that attempts to deter radicalization by providing support “up the river.”

### Key Takeaways

- Risk and protective factors for ordinary crime and delinquency are also applicable to extremism.
- Many protective factors apply to radical attitudes, supporting the idea that it's easier to use early interventions to deter extremist ideas rather than try to deradicalize the individuals.
- Common risk factors for radical attitudes, intentions, and behaviors are realistic and symbolic threats, in-group superiority, moral neutralization, thrill-seeking, criminal history, authoritarian, self-control, radical attitudes, and anger.
- Common protective factors are age, marital status, socio-economic status, law abidance, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, school bonding, parental involvement, and outgroup friends.

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## **Is radicalization a family issue? A systematic review of family-related risk and protective factors, consequences, and interventions against radicalization\***

**By I. Zych & E. Nasaescu (2022)**

This article reviewed 33 published and unpublished quantitative studies to identify family-related risk and protective factors for radicalization and to evaluate the effectiveness of family-based interventions. The authors identified and tested 14 factors. Overall, risk factors included having extremist family members, familial ethnic socialization (or parentally-induced bias and mistrust against other cultures), and family conflict. Protective factors included high family socio-economic status, bigger family size, and high family commitment. While the review did not identify any

studies that focused on the effectiveness of interventions, the authors recommended focusing prevention and intervention efforts on the family unit.

### Key Takeaways

- Family-related risk factors for radicalization include having extremist family members, parents who demonstrate mistrust of other cultures, and family conflict.
- Family-related protective factors against radicalization include high family socio-economic status, bigger family size, and high family commitment (e.g., belief in the importance of family, family cohesion).
- There is limited evidence on the effectiveness of family-based interventions to reduce the risk of radicalization.

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### **Mental disorder, psychological problems and terrorist behaviour: A systematic review and meta-analysis\***

**By K. Sarma, S. Carthy, and K. Cox (2022)**

This article synthesized research focusing on the impact of mental health on terrorist activity. The authors examined the prevalence rates and risks posed by diagnosed and suspected mental disorders, as well as psychological problems, in 56 studies that included 73 terrorist samples. Results showed that there is little difference in the prevalence of mental health difficulties between terrorist groups and the general population; whereas the estimated lifetime prevalence rate of diagnosed mental disorders in the general public is 29%, the lifetime prevalence rates for terrorist samples was only 17.4%.

Further, when considering the risk factor of mental health difficulties among terrorist actors, there are inconsistent findings. Although some studies found that terrorists are more likely to have mental health issues than a non-terrorist comparison group, other studies reported that terrorists were less likely to have mental health issues than non-terrorist comparison groups. These inconsistent findings may be due to the different comparison groups that were used in the study. This suggests further investigation is needed to identify for which type of terrorist actors mental health issues are more likely to pose a risk.

## Key Takeaways

- Ultimately, this study does not support the notion that mental health difficulties are more prevalent among terrorists than to the general public.
- The findings suggest that there may be higher rates of mental health disorders among some terrorist samples than others – in particular among lone-actor terrorists.

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## What prevention and treatment of substance use disorder can tell us about addressing violent extremism

By R. Brown, R. Ramchand, & T. C. Helmus (2022)

In this perspective paper from RAND, the authors discussed the parallels between substance addiction and participation in violent extremism and the growing research supporting it. Drawing on this research, the authors identified three implications for prevention. First, practitioners should emphasize early interventions that expose children to diverse peers at a young age. Second, treating mental health issues early could prevent extremism. Third, addressing structural characteristics of communities that contribute to substance abuse (and extremism) might be a key prevention strategy.

## Key Takeaways

- Early research suggests that substance abuse and violent extremism might share similar underlying causes and, therefore, similar possible mitigation strategies.
- Prevention measures that incorporate community-centeredness, harm reduction, and radical forgiveness could address these similar causes.

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## Evaluation of a multi-faceted, U.S. community-based, Muslim-led CVE program

By M. J. Williams, J. G. Horgan, and W. P. Evans (2016)

The authors evaluated trainings from the World Organization for Resource Development and Education (WORDE), finding that their volunteer-service and multicultural programming had positive effects on CVE-relevant outcomes.

This was suggestive that peer intervention was most helpful in intervening during early stages of individuals engaging in violent extremist activity.

By evaluating reasons why participants might be compelled to participate in either program, the authors recommended practitioners consider how to make an initiative satisfying to participants, make it more attractive than alternatives, and enhance participants' personal investment in the initiative.

The authors also created a 99-item CVE program assessment suite that measures psychological processes, motivations, and social circumstances. Overall, WORDE was an effective community-based program for CVE interventions and aided in interceding in 12 out of 14 CVE potential mobilizations by leveraging peer intervention and volunteers who were trained to examine changes in behaviors, attitudes, and relationships.

### **Key Takeaways**

- Peers are likely best positioned to notice early signs that individuals who align with extremist ideologies are mobilizing to violence.
- However, fear of damaging peer relationships and of law enforcement interventions both act as barriers to reporting.
- The World Organization for Resource Development and Education's (WORDE) trainings show promise in educating volunteers about mobilization, likely leading to a broader implementation.

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## **Countering extremism(s): Differences in local prevention of left-wing, right-wing, and Islamist extremism**

**By J. Jämte and R. Ellefsen (2020)**

In response to critiques of CVE programs that treat prevention of all ideologies with a "one size fits all" approach, the authors explored how public servants in Sweden deal with different ideologies at a local level. They described that while the focus at a national and international level has been on Salafi-jihadist extremism, far-right extremism is seen as a more pressing and prevalent issue on the local level.



The authors discussed how the threat posed by each ideology affects how local officials prioritize them; far-left tend to cause property damage or counter-protest, the Salafi-jihadists “operate in silence and just strike,” while the far-right “go after politicians, being threatening, pushy, and unpleasant” and cause local officials to obscure their information.

### **Key Takeaways**

- The difference in threat type between ideologies does not balance the attention they get, with Salafi-jihadists being an “invisible” and sporadic threat while the far-right are an ongoing, visible threat.
- Far-right and Salafi-jihadist extremists often had a range of interconnected social problems which made it easier to gain access through social services and support systems.
- Far-left extremists were the hardest to intervene for prevention work because their ideas were more socially acceptable.

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## **Terrorism prevention in the U.S.: A policy framework for filling the CVE void**

**By H. Ingram (2018)**

This policy paper provided recommendations to improve terrorism prevention strategy in the U.S. In considering constitutionally protected activities, the piece advocates for designating a lead federal agency responsible for implementing and overseeing intervention efforts and coordinating contact between state and local law enforcement. Interventions both online and offline would help mitigate adoption of extremist ideologies, educate communities about recognizing the threat, and inform prison procedures to prevent recidivism.

### **Key Takeaways**

- Instituting measures to prevent support of violent extremist ideologies or idolizing violent extremist attacks is paramount for countering violent extremism.
- The U.S. needs to implement code to reflect domestic terrorism and update the list of proscribed foreign terrorist organizations to reflect extremist ideologies active in the United States.

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## **Comparative analysis of CT/CVE policies: USA, Canada, United Kingdom, Sweden, and North Macedonia\***

**By A. Montrond, A. Ekström, R. Nielson, M. Hadji-Janev, & E. Savoia (2022)**

Drawing from the 2019 DHS Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence, the authors conducted a comparative analysis of themes present in counterterrorism and countering violent extremism policies from the U.S., Canada, United Kingdom, Sweden, and North Macedonia. Central across each country's policies are advocacy for improved interagency, interdisciplinary, and international collaboration. Additionally, all five emphasize ensuring proactive measures are taken at a community level by working with community leaders, those in the private sector, as well as religious and nongovernment organizations.

### **Key Takeaways**

- There is a need to maintain and expand information sharing networks and collaboration across all levels, including internationally.
- Community trainings are essential for educating social workers, teachers, law enforcement officers, and other professionals who may encounter extremists.
- The U.S. policy introduced the concept of targeted violence, recognizing the need to devote resources to violent incidents not motivated by extremist ideologies (e.g., school and workplace shootings).

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## **What is the best approach for preventing recruitment to terrorism? Findings from ABM experiments in social and situational prevention**

**By D. Weisburd, M. Wolfowicz, B. Hasisi, M. Paolucci, & G. Andrighetto (2022)**

The authors built a mini, virtual world based on a city in Germany to test community prevention techniques. They created avatars with varying political affiliations and interacted with each other and their community. The authors were interested in radicalization and recruitment rates in the models as well as three protective factors (integration, trust/legitimacy, and subjective deprivation). They also varied the number of men, unemployed people, and those with criminal histories.

They found that interventions that focused on the attitudes of individuals, community policing, and increasing the number of community workers had the most effect on radicalization.

### Key Takeaways

- The most significant deterrent to *radicalization* was an increase in well-trained community workers at community centers. Community policing was also effective, though at a much smaller effect.
- Community policing and increased community workers did not affect *recruitment*.
- The findings contradict current assumptions that successful counter radicalization programs will lead to reduction in recruitment.

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## What are the effects of different elements of media on radicalization outcomes? A systematic review

By M. Wolfowicz, B. Hasisi, and D. Weisburd (2022)

This study sought to identify and evaluate the impact of media-related risk factors for radicalization. The authors focused on both cognitive radicalization (i.e., support, justification of, or a willingness/intention to use radical violence for a cause or ideology) and behavioral radicalization (i.e., involvement in violence). Across 76 samples, the authors found 23 media-related risk factors associated with cognitive radicalization, and two media-related risk factors associated with behavioral radicalization.

Results showed that mere exposure to radical content was not related to cognitively or behaviorally radicalizing. Rather, actively seeking and passively being exposed to online radical content generally have strong ties to radicalization compared to other media-related risk factors. These ties are most pronounced for behavioral outcomes of radicalization. However, the authors noted the findings should be interpreted cautiously due to limitations of existing studies, suggesting future research is needed to provide greater clarity on the associations between media-related risk factors and radicalization.

### Key Takeaways

- Mere exposure to radical content is not likely to lead to radicalization.
- Active and passive forms of internet-based exposure to radical content have a larger impact on radicalization than some other known risk factors.

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## **Online interventions for reducing hate speech and cyberhate: A systematic review\***

**By S. Windisch, S. Wiedlitzka, A. Olaghere, and E. Jenaway (2022)**

This systematic review assessed the effectiveness of online interventions geared toward reducing hate speech and cyberhate on the internet. The authors included four categories of intervention strategies: adaptation of legal responses to hate speech, automatic identification and regulation of hate speech through technology, creating online counter-spaces and counter-communication initiatives, and educational programs. The authors found a small, nonmeaningful effect of interventions on the generation and consumption of online hate speech. However, because of the small number of studies that rigorously tested online interventions, more research is needed to identify interventions that are effective in reducing hate speech consumption and production.

### **Key Takeaways**

- More evidence is needed to determine whether interventions can be beneficial in reducing the creation and consumption of hateful content online.
- Future studies should use experimental and quasi-experimental studies to examine intervention effectiveness, focus on the creation and/or consumption of hate speech as an outcome, and assess differences between both extremists and non-extremists.

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## **State targeted violence prevention: Programming and key performance indicators\***

**By Migacheva, K. & Reimer, J. for the National Governors Association (2022)**

This resource developed for the National Governors Association provides information to guide state governments on implementing targeted violence prevention models within their communities. It outlines categories of activities for implementation: preparation, reduction of risk factors, community education, disruption, mitigation,

and continued monitoring. The model recommends an interdisciplinary community stakeholder network, from K-12 education to the Department of Justice, and public awareness campaigning to be successful. It provides a checklist for each stage of implementation and includes performance metrics and impact measures for each stage.

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## What is NCITE doing?

**PREVENTION**



**DERADICALIZATION**



**EXIT**



**RECIDIVISM REDUCTION**



**NCITE researchers are currently working on projects that span four areas of terrorism and targeted violence prevention efforts.**

### **What national level violence prevention programming has shown promise across the United States?**

The **Best Practices: Local Implementation of National Violence Prevention Programs** document draws on violence prevention as a public health issue and provides an overview of national violence prevention programming in various cities across the United States. It links to external examples of the Cardiff Model, a multi-agency approach to violence prevention that relies on information sharing and coordination between health and law enforcement organizations that has been instituted in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Georgia.

Additionally, the document contains more information on firearm violence prevention programming, sexual assault prevention, and youth violence prevention. All three types of programming have shown national and local level success and are active in various cities across the United States. Drawing on these examples and the literature included in the monthly round-up, there is evidence to suggest that existing national programming may be useful in preventing radicalization and mobilization at a local level.

## How do families prevent loved ones from becoming extremists?

Dr. Karyn Sporer, a criminologist at the University of Maine, **has spent the last two years interviewing family members of homegrown violent extremists (HVEs)** to understand how the families cope with radicalization of a loved one.

Her recent report identifies observed and missed signs of radicalization, and two significant non-ideological risk factors that preceded violent extremist involvement.

She has compiled an excess of 39 hours of interview transcription about eight individuals who aligned with extremist ideologies. The non-ideological risk factors include the risk of childhood adversity (e.g., abuse, parent use of illegal substances, toxic divorces, and history of family mental illness) and the second is conduct and behavioral problems (e.g., alcohol and drug use, gang interactions, sexual deviance, and interactions with law enforcement). Both risk factors were prevalent in nearly 90% of the sample. The report provides recommendations on how the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies can partner with families to reduce the risk of recidivism.

## What resources can support bystanders of potential radicalization?

Dr. Pete Simi and Marisa Quezada at Chapman University **compiled a list of goal-oriented resources that could support bystander response toward radicalization** through conversations with DHS Regional Prevention Coordinators (RPCs).

In this report, they identify resources that may be effective for families and other bystanders in situations of potential radicalization. The resources may be used in community awareness briefings and include tips for conducting conversations with radicalized individuals, lists of warning signs of radicalization, guides to identify level of radicalization and corresponding responses, and testimonials from families and bystanders who have experienced radicalization.

The second phase of this project will involve interviews with family members of radicalized individuals, specifically white supremacist extremists, and will help further develop resource guides to support and aid responses toward a loved one's radicalization.

## What can be done to prevent recidivism?

NCITE researchers at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) are working to understand the phenomenon of recidivism, or returning to violent extremism after a period of incarceration.

Criminology graduate student Clara Braun's dissertation focuses on examining recidivism trends across violent extremist actors in the U.S. Braun and IT Innovation Graduate Student Lauren Zimmerman are also assisting Dr. Joel Elson with the **development of a tool to support federal supervisory officials in supervising suspected and known extremists**. The project aims to provide a database of profiles of domestic extremist groups and violent ideological groups to help identify extremist offenders and to connect with other supervisory officials who have experience with specific groups.

### **What can the U.S. do to repatriate foreign fighters?**

Dr. Austin Doctor is currently leading a project for DHS focused on repatriation and reintegration of U.S. foreign fighters who left the U.S. to fight for the Islamic State (IS).

Many of these individuals are detained in prison camps in Iraq and Syria, which are rife with human rights violations and national security concerns. Dr. Doctor is working with a team of researchers **to determine the safest way of bringing these foreign fighters back to the U.S.**

A number of factors can make this issue complicated and urgent, including the possibility for former IS fighters to return to extremist groups while detained in these prison camps. Recently, Dr. Doctor traveled to Iraq and the Netherlands to see the prison camps firsthand, conduct interviews, and understand how the Netherlands has dealt with repatriation of former foreign fighters.

### **How do we evaluate terrorism and targeted violence prevention programs?**

Dr. Matt Allen was recently awarded funding through the DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3) to enhance the terrorism and targeted violence prevention grant program.

In particular, the goal is to **provide meaningful assistance to, and oversight of, community-based prevention programs**. This will be accomplished, in part, via a thorough examination of best practices for intervention sustainability, process and impact evaluations, and scalability of future programming.

# LEARN MORE

## Resources

- **Request** a Community Awareness Briefing from DHS.
- **Learn** about active shooter training resources.

## Get involved with NCITE

- Attend **events**.
- Stay up to date on **research**.
- Follow on **social media**.
- Meet our **partners**.

## Apply for grants

- **Apply** for a terrorism and targeted violence prevention grant.
- **Apply** for a FEMA preparedness grant.

## What if someone is mobilizing to violence?

- Your local police and/or security team are first point of contact.
- Get your team educated about **suspicious activity**.
- **Report** suspicious activity by state.





## Thank you for reading!

Send future research roundup ideas to [ncite@unomaha.edu](mailto:ncite@unomaha.edu).



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