



OFFICE of INTELLIGENCE and ANALYSIS

INTELLIGENCE IN VIEW

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(U//FOUO) Certain Activities Indicate Potential for Violence at First Amendment-Protected Events

(U//FOUO) **SCOPE NOTE:** The DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis, the United States Capitol Police, the District of Columbia Fusion Center, and the St. Louis Missouri Police Department reviewed violence at lawful protests or during periods of civil unrest in the United States from 2014 to 2023 and solicited inputs from federal and local law enforcement agencies to develop this overview of potential indicators and mitigators of violence at First Amendment-protected events. Indicators and mitigators are provided for partner use in their own jurisdictions and may include Constitutionally-protected activity that alone do not indicate criminal or violent extremist activity.

(U//FOUO) In advance of or during a lawful First Amendment-protected event, observation of the attendance of individuals with a violent history, use of paramilitary training or tactics, plans to bring armor and weapons to an event, plans to co-opt an event for violence or criminal activity, the purposeful distracting or diverting of law enforcement, or incitement attempts by notable figures or leaders likely indicate a greater risk for violence. These high concern indicators were derived from a review of multiple events where severe or notable violence occurred, and demonstrate stronger violent intent and better capabilities. We also identified other indicators—like sociopolitical tensions or a larger group size than anticipated—which alone are not indicative of violence but may have a compounding effect when observed with other indicators. Conversely, mitigating factors like inclement weather and internal group strife or disorganization could reduce the likelihood of violence.

(U//FOUO) Violence can occur with little or no warning, even with these mitigators or in the absence of the indicators. Some indicators and mitigators may be observed during pre-event intelligence gathering and planning, others will only be observable during events, and some may be observable during both.

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OVERALL GRAPHIC CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

Level of Concern ☒ High ☐ Moderate ☐ Low ☐ Potential mitigators of violenceTiming ☒ Before ☒ During

INDICATOR/MITIGATOR	TIMING	DESCRIPTION
(U//FOUO) Individuals Attending with a History of Exploiting Lawful Protests to Engage in Violence against Law Enforcement or Other Attendees	 	(U//FOUO) The attendance of groups or individuals with a history of engaging in violent tactics against opponents or law enforcement raises the possibility of violence at an event, whether in retaliation for prior violent altercations or as a standard operating procedure for a group or individual.
(U//FOUO) Use of Paramilitary Training or Tactics	 	(U//FOUO) The use of paramilitary training or tactics in preparation for or during an event may indicate a willingness and ability to breach a building, combat removal efforts, or conduct violence. This could also include training and/or designating quick reaction forces and utilizing military-style formations during an event.
(U//FOUO) Attendee Plans to Wear Armor, Bring Weapons, or Hide Weapons at Event Site	 	(U//FOUO) Plans to hide weapons at the event location, bring weapons, or wear armor to an event may indicate preparation to conduct potential violence or anticipation of being the target of violence. The presence of these items may increase tension between opposing groups and heighten the potential for a public safety issue, although laws related to this issue vary nationwide and possession of weapons or armor should not be considered an indicator of potential violence in and of itself. Items could include firearms, knives, body armor, shields, pepper spray, sticks, flagpoles, bricks, rocks, and pavers.
(U//FOUO) Planned Co-opting of Event for Violence or Criminal Activity		(U//FOUO) Some individuals may plan to co-opt a lawful First Amendment-protected event to engage in pre-planned violence or criminal activity.
(U//FOUO) Pre-planned or Opportunistic Distracting/Diverting of Law Enforcement for Violence or Criminal Activity	 	(U//FOUO) Individuals may use pre-planned distractions, including bomb hoaxes or false calls for police intervention at distant locations, to divert and limit law enforcement resources. Individuals may also engage in similar activity opportunistically during an event without prior planning.
(U//FOUO) Notable Figures or Leaders Attempting to Incite Violence	 	(U//FOUO) Perceived leaders' encouragement of violence may embolden some individuals to engage in violent action.
(U//FOUO) Specific Calls for Violence		(U//FOUO) Observable online calls for violence prior to the event may indicate an escalating threat, particularly if it specifies a certain tactic, target, and weapon.
(U//FOUO) Plans to Photograph or Video Violent Confrontations to Recruit and Inspire Others to Violence		(U//FOUO) Videos and images of opponents fighting at protests can be used to recruit supporters and inspire others to engage in violence.
(U//FOUO) Violence at Prior Related Protests		(U//FOUO) Violence at prior related events could indicate a potential for future violence at events surrounding the same or similar topic, particularly if the event takes place relatively soon after the initial violent event.
(U//FOUO) Accumulation of Sociopolitical Stressors		(U//FOUO) The presence of a combination of sociopolitical stressors in the lead up to an event may heighten tensions and increase the potential for violence or criminal activity. Sociopolitical stressors could include contentious legislative or policy changes, increasing economic issues or wealth division, high-profile incidents involving law enforcement accompanied by perceptions of wrongdoing, or a public health crisis.

**(U//FOUO) Certain Activities Indicate Potential for Violence at First Amendment-Protected Events (Cont.)**

OVERALL GRAPHIC CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

Level of Concern High Moderate Low Potential mitigators of violence

Timing Before During

INDICATOR/MITIGATOR	TIMING	DESCRIPTION
(U//FOUO) History of Violent Protests in a Specific Location at Unrelated Events	↻	(U//FOUO) A history of violent protests at a specific location or city may indicate the potential for future events to turn violent.
(U//FOUO) Protesters Engaging in Low-Level Criminal Activity	↻	(U//FOUO) Protesters engaging in low-level criminal activity or property damage may indicate a possibility for future escalating behavior.
(U//FOUO) Plans by Out-of-Town Protesters to Travel to an Event for Criminal or Violent Purposes	↻	(U//FOUO) Non-local protesters planning to attend an event for the purposes of committing violence may overwhelm law enforcement resources.
(U//FOUO) Attendance of a Larger Crowd than Anticipated Increasing the Potential for Violent Ideological Confrontations	↻	(U//FOUO) Larger than anticipated crowds may strain law enforcement resources and increase the potential for violent ideological confrontations.
(U//FOUO) Efforts to Counter Interdiction Efforts or Identification by Law Enforcement, Either Online or In-Person	↻ ↻	(U//FOUO) Examples of efforts to obscure identification from law enforcement include encouragements to leave cell phones at home, using rubbing alcohol to erase fingerprints from surfaces, destroying security cameras, wearing gloves and face masks, and changing clothing.
(U//FOUO) Planned Integration or Purposeful Resemblance with Law Enforcement, Creating a Public Safety Issue	↻ ↻	(U//FOUO) Some protesters may wear clothing or equipment similar to law enforcement or military personnel, possibly to integrate themselves with law enforcement, receive preferential treatment, blend in during violent acts, or to avoid identification. These actions may also present public safety concerns if individuals who need law enforcement or medical intervention mistake these individuals as first responders.
(U//FOUO) Encouraging Individuals to Migrate Conversations from Open Forums to Encrypted Platforms to Avoid Law Enforcement Detection	↻	(U//FOUO) Observable references to closed groups or encouragements of migrating discussions of violence or illegal activities to closed and encrypted channels suggest intent to engage in these tactics and avoid law enforcement detection.
(U//FOUO) Protesters or Counter-Protesters Engaging in Harassing or Intimidating Behavior Which may Escalate to Physical Violence	↻ ↻	(U//FOUO) Protesters or counter-protesters engaging in harassing or intimidating behavior may indicate a willingness or potential for escalatory behavior. This activity may be observed online prior to the event or may occur spontaneously during the event.
(U//FOUO) Early Arrival to Scout or Prepare for Violent Confrontations	↻	(U//FOUO) Some protesters may intend to arrive early to an event location to prepare for violent confrontations, including surveilling law enforcement procedures, identifying unsecured areas or materials for exploitation, or to prevent ideological opponents from engaging in a planned event.
(U//FOUO) Event Organizers or Protesters Unwilling to Cooperate with Protocols, Which Could Lead to Public Safety Risks	↻ ↻	(U//FOUO) In advance of an event, this indicator could include withholding attendance estimates or general event plans from law enforcement and, to a lesser extent, refusing to obtain permits for the event. During an event, this indicator may include protesters disregarding law enforcement commands or security apparatuses or barriers for violent or criminal purposes.
(U//FOUO) Observable Homogeny Among Protesters for Violent or Criminal Purposes	↻	(U//FOUO) This indicator could include protesters who wear the same uniform, emblems, or signage, exhibiting a concerted effort to conceal identities in anticipation of violent altercations or consistent with groups known to engage in violence. Groups wear common clothing to help identify with one another, demonstrate a unified presence and/or purpose, or to make identifying individuals within each group more difficult, particularly in the case of individuals or groups intending to engage in violence or property destruction.
(U//FOUO) Entrapment and "False-Flag" Narratives Surrounding the Event	↻	(U//FOUO) Narratives implying protest events are "false flags"—alleging an event is orchestrated by the government to entrap and arrest protesters—may impact attendance at some events and potentially deter planned violence.
(U//FOUO) Group/Leadership Infighting, Disunity, and Disorganization	↻ ↻	(U//FOUO) Infighting among a group's leadership or failure to identify a cohesive message could decrease participant engagement in events and opportunity for violence or criminal activity. This indicator includes public disputes between top officials in the group, disagreements regarding permit information or message unity, or lack of organization and participation at an event.
(U//FOUO) Notable Figures or Leaders Advocating for Peaceful Demonstration	↻ ↻	(U//FOUO) Calls for peaceful demonstration from leadership figures could reduce protesters' willingness and desire to engage in violence. Calls by protest organizers, community leaders, or influential individuals involved in the topic of protest during the initial promotion of the event may have more influence over the participants' behavior than calls after an event has turned violent.
(U//FOUO) Inclement Weather	↻ ↻	(U//FOUO) Adverse weather conditions such as heavy rain, snowstorms, extreme heat or cold, or strong winds could potentially act as a deterrent for participation in First Amendment-protected events. These conditions can reduce turnout and minimize the likelihood of violence or criminal behavior at events.

**(U//FOUO) APPENDIX A: Potential Mitigation Practices for Violence at First Amendment-Protected Events**

(U//FOUO) **SCOPE NOTE:** Appendix A contains examples of mitigation practices which law enforcement and public safety agencies can incorporate into their planning and response procedures to potentially mitigate violence at First Amendment-protected events.

(U//FOUO) Opportunities likely exist for law enforcement and public safety agencies to mitigate the potential for violence at First Amendment-protected events and include implementing best practices in intelligence gathering and sharing, physical security and location considerations, planning and resource coordination, and communication with the public and participants. Law enforcement and public safety agencies likely would have the best success in limiting violent and criminal activity when implementing mitigators as soon as realistically feasible.

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**(U//FOUO) Appendix B: Real-World Incidents Demonstrating Indicators**

(U//FOUO) **SCOPE NOTE:** To support our partners in use of this tool, below is a breakdown of the potential indicators of violence with real world examples.

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(U//FOUO) Appendix B: Real-World Incidents Demonstrating Indicators (Cont.)

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(U//FOUO) Appendix B: Real-World Incidents Demonstrating Indicators (Cont.)

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(U//FOUO) Appendix B: Real-World Incidents Demonstrating Indicators (Cont.)

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