

**Homeland
Security**

March 25, 2021

MEMORANDUM FOR THE OFFICE OF INTELLIGENCE AND ANALYSIS WORKFORCE

FROM: (b) (6), (b) (7)(C)
Acting Under Secretary for Intelligence and AnalysisSUBJECT: (U) **Interim Guidance: Terms and Definitions Associated with Domestic Terrorism or Domestic Violent Extremism**

(U) Purpose: To provide interim guidance on the terms and definitions used by the Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) regarding Domestic Terrorism or Domestic Violent Extremism. The terms “domestic terrorism” and “domestic violent extremism” are interchangeable.

(U//FOUO) Background: In March 2015, I&A published the “*Domestic Terrorism and Homegrown Violent Extremism*” lexicon. Following publication of the lexicon, I&A, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) engaged in discussions to update joint terminology on Domestic Terrorism (DT) actors and published a jointly-authored paper, *Domestic Terrorism: US Government Terminology Guide*, in December 2020, noting that DT terminology remains generally unsynchronized across the Intelligence Community (IC). The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), with participation from I&A, has initiated efforts to update the 2015 lexicon. While DHS is currently updating the 2015 lexicon in coordination with I&A, this memorandum establishes interim terms and definitions applicable to I&A in alignment with recent IC guidance. This interim guidance will be superseded by the updated DHS lexicon.

(U) Statutory Terms and Definitions: The *Homeland Security Act of 2002*¹ defines terrorism as any activity involving an act that:

- (U) Is dangerous to human life or potentially destructive of critical infrastructure or key resources; and
- (U) Is a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State or other subdivision of the United States; and
- (U) Appears to be intended:
 - (U) To intimidate or coerce a civilian population;
 - (U) To influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or
 - (U) To affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.

¹ 6 U.S.C. § 101(18).

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(U//FOUO) DHS derives its definition of Domestic Terrorism from the *Homeland Security Act of 2002* definition of terrorism.² It is substantively similar, but not identical, to the definition used by the FBI.³

(U//FOUO) Guidance: Effective immediately, all I&A personnel who collect, report, analyze, and disseminate intelligence information associated with Domestic Terrorism or Domestic Violent Extremism will use the following terms and definitions, consistent with their analytic judgment and I&A Instruction IA-1000, *Office of Intelligence and Analysis Intelligence Oversight Program and Guidelines* (IO Guidelines). I&A personnel should use the most specific term possible as supported by available information (e.g., use militia violent extremists instead of anti-government extremists.) These definitions are consistent with the report published by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) on March 1, 2021, titled, “Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021.” This interim guidance does not rescind the 2015 *Domestic Terrorism and Homegrown Violent Extremism* lexicon; rather, I&A personnel should, where applicable, use the appropriate updated terminology in this memo.

(U) Domestic Violent Extremist (DVE): 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 philosophic embrace of violent tactics does not constitute 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. I&A utilizes this term synonymously with “domestic terrorist.”

(U) DVE Categories

- **(U//FOUO) Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists (RMVEs):** Groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in the potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence with intent to intimidate or coerce, in furtherance of political and/or social agendas, which are deemed to derive from bias, often related to race or ethnicity, held by the actor against others, including a given population or group.

² DHS defines domestic terrorism as any act of unlawful violence that is dangerous to human life or potentially destructive of critical infrastructure or key resources committed by a group or individual based and operating entirely within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group. This act is a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State or other subdivision of the United States; and appears to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping. A domestic terrorist differs from a homegrown violent extremist in that the former is not inspired by, and does not take direction from, a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power.

³ 18 U.S.C. § 2331(5).

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(U) RMVE Sub-Categories:

- (U) RMVE- White Supremacist (RMVE-WS): Groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of unlawful violence or intent to intimidate or coerce the federal government, ethnic and racial minorities, or non-Christian faiths, and often specifically Jewish persons, in support of their belief in the inferiority of nonwhites and non-Christians.
- (U) RMVE-Black Separatist (RMVE-BS): Groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of unlawful violence with intent to intimidate or coerce, in furtherance of political and/or social agendas to oppose racial integration and/or to eliminate non-black and Jewish persons.
- (U//FOUO) Anti-Government or Anti-Authority Violent Extremists (AGAAVEs): Groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in the potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence with intent to intimidate or coerce, in furtherance of political and/or social agendas, which are deemed to derive from anti-government or anti-authority sentiment, including opposition to perceived economic, social, or racial hierarchies; or perceived government overreach, negligence, or illegitimacy. 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.

(U) AGAAVE Sub-Categories:

- (U//FOUO) Militia Violent Extremists (MVEs): Groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of unlawful violence directed at Federal, State, or local government officials or infrastructure in response to their belief that the government deliberately is stripping Americans of their freedoms and is attempting to establish a totalitarian regime. These individuals consequently oppose many Federal and State authorities' laws and regulations, particularly those related to firearms ownership, and often belong to armed paramilitary groups. They often conduct paramilitary training designed to violently resist perceived government oppression or to violently overthrow the US Government.
- (U//FOUO) Anarchist Violent Extremists (AVEs): Individuals who seek, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence, to further their opposition to all forms of capitalism, corporate globalization, and governing institutions, which they perceive as harmful to society.
- (U//FOUO) Sovereign Citizen Violent Extremists (SCVEs): Groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of unlawful violence directed at public officials, financial institutions, and government facilities in support of their belief that the legitimacy of US citizenship should be rejected; almost all forms of established

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government, authority, and institutions are illegitimate; and that they are immune from federal, state, and local laws.

- (U//FOUO) Animal Rights/Environmental Violent Extremists (AREVEs): Groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in the unlawful use or threat of force or violence or intent to intimidate or coerce, in furtherance of political and/or social agendas by those seeking to end or mitigate perceived cruelty, harm, or exploitation of animals or perceived exploitation or destruction of natural resources and the environment.
- (U//FOUO) Abortion-Related Violent Extremists (AbRVEs): Groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in the potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence or intent to intimidate or coerce, in furtherance of political and/or social agendas relating to abortion.
- (U//FOUO) All Other Domestic Terrorism Threat Actors (DTAs): This category encompasses threats involving the potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence or intent to intimidate or coerce, in furtherance of political and/or social agendas which are not otherwise defined under one of the other domestic terrorism threat categories. Such agendas could flow from, but are not limited to, a combination of personal grievances and/or beliefs with potential bias related to religion, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

(U) Other Domestic Terrorism or Domestic Violent Extremism Sub-Categories:

- (U//FOUO) Involuntary Celibate (Incel) Violent Extremists (DTA-Is): Individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of unlawful violence with intent to intimidate or coerce, in support of their belief that society unjustly denies them the sexual or romantic attention to which they are entitled. The involuntary celibate, or “incel,” community is a primarily online community; they blame social and political movements, such as feminism, for empowering others to deny them. Although most incels do not engage in violence, incel violent extremists represent a subset of incels who use force or violence, sometimes called “incel rebellion,” to further their goals.