

Factsheet: Comprehensive U.S. Government Approach to Countering Violent Extremism

The nature and range of terrorist and violent extremist threats has evolved quickly, in a media environment that often seizes on the sensational, and we must come together to channel the energies of citizens, communities, and the private sector toward building a greater sense of preparedness and resilience.

Policy Context

In August 2011, the White House released *Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*, the first national strategy to prevent violent extremism domestically. In December 2011, a corresponding Strategic Implementation Plan outlined the specific steps departments and agencies will take to achieve the strategy's central goal of preventing violent extremists and their supporters from radicalizing, recruiting, or inspiring individuals or groups in the United States to commit acts of violence.

While investigations and prosecutions are essential, successfully preventing violent extremism requires a range of government tools beyond traditional law enforcement activities. CVE often involves undercutting terrorist ideologies and local drivers of radicalization, and it is therefore equally if not more important that civil society and non-governmental actors participate, particularly given government's legal and credibility limitations in this space. As such, the underlying premise of our approach to countering violent extremism in the United States is that (1) communities are the solution to violent extremism; and (2) CVE efforts are best pursued at the local level, with considerations for local dynamics.

At the federal level, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) are implementing the strategy by executing their respective missions while collaborating with other agencies to ensure a coordinated, whole-of-government approach. In the field, local governments and law enforcement agencies continue to build relationships within their communities through established community policing and community outreach mechanisms. In this respect, decades of community-based problem solving, local partnerships, and community-oriented policing provides a basis for addressing violent extremism as part of a broader mandate of community safety, with an emphasis on crime prevention.

What is CVE?

The term "Countering Violent Extremism" refers to the "preventative" aspects of counterterrorism, which refers to efforts focused on preventing future recruitment into terrorist groups. It is distinct from disruptive actions which focus on stopping acts of terrorism by those who have already subscribed to violence.

CVE ranges from general prevention measures—programs that are not necessarily done for CVE purposes, but which might have CVE effects because they happen to address some of the possible causes of violent extremism (such as community engagement around civil rights issues and ensuring protections of religious freedom and protections from bullying—both of which happen to address grievances) to programs that do have a direct CVE purpose, such as:

- Violent extremism awareness: programs that build awareness of the violent extremism (such as briefings on radicalization, recruitment, and indicators).
- Counternarrative measures: programs or messages that directly address and counter the violent extremist recruitment narrative (such as encouraging community-led counternarratives online).
- Intervention measures: programs that facilitate intervention in a person's pathway to radicalization before the line of criminal activity is crossed (such as community-led intervention models).

Role of Local Partners

CVE efforts rely heavily on well-informed and equipped families, local communities, and local institutions. Communities play a strong role in CVE efforts—they are the first line of defense against violent extremists, and are best suited to lead in both counternarrative and intervention measures. Communities have more credibility than government to challenge the ideological underpinnings of violent extremist groups, and they are more suited to intervene when someone is vulnerable to radicalization.

Community Engagement on CVE

The U.S. Government has conducted outreach in various cities across the country with law enforcement, public safety officials, and directly to communities around the threat of violent extremism and terrorist recruitment. They have used certain “CVE Tools” that include the Community Awareness Briefing (CAB), as well as the Community Resilience Exercise (CREX).

- The Community Resilience Exercise (CREX) is a half-day table-top exercise designed to improve communication between law enforcement and communities and to share ideas on how best to build community resilience. DHS's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) and NCTC have worked with local partners to implement this exercise—which involves an unfolding scenario of possible violent extremist activity—in cities across the United States.
- The Community Awareness Briefing (CAB) is a presentation designed to help communities and law enforcement develop understanding of al-Qa'ida-inspired recruitment tactics and explore ways to collectively prevent and address such public safety threats at the local level. It is updated continually with new information or from feedback. Due to the growing number of individuals traveling to foreign conflicts, such as Syria and Iraq, the Community Awareness Briefing now includes information relating to the foreign fighter recruitment. The Community Awareness Briefing has been conducted by multiple U.S. cities over the past few years.

“Three Cities” Pilot Program

Over the past few months, local government and community members in Boston, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis have taken the lead in developing prevention frameworks that best address the unique issues facing their local communities. In the same way local partners have developed frameworks to address drug and gang prevention, they are developing frameworks to address violent extremism prevention. This pilot encourages local partners to develop mechanisms for engaging the resources and expertise available from a range of new partners, including the private sector, including communications and tech experts that can build capacity, and social service providers, including education administrators, mental health professionals, and religious leaders.

Local stakeholders—which include federal, state, local, and community partners—are in the best position to identify needs and gaps in services, assess existing local programs, leverage existing networks, form new relationships, and define and develop measurable goals that they have the capacity to implement.

The Federal Government’s role is to try and provide support to help address these gaps and meet their CVE goals.

Importance of Intervention Options

There are important non-law enforcement efforts that communities can take to stop a person from radicalizing. We can learn from intervention approaches in other situations, such as gang prevention. CVE intervention would use the same principles and we can make real progress by adapting the kinds of programs we are using in non-counterterrorism areas for our needs.

- Communities are taking a strong lead. We’ve seen this locally in Montgomery County, MD, where communities and law enforcement are collaborating to bring religious figures and education and mental health officials together to help at-risk youth.
- A non-profit, WORDE, partnered with the Montgomery County Chief of Police to set up an intervention board. The police Chief has been successful in bringing local government resources, such as mental health professionals and school officials, and WORDE has brought leaders who help with religious counseling. The intervention board gets referrals from the community, and the board identified government and community resources that could be brought to the table to help.
- Also, the Muslim Public Affairs Council released their Safe Spaces Initiative, which is essentially a guide for community centers on how to deal with violent extremism in their communities using a phased approach of prevention, intervention, and ejection.

Community-led Counternarratives

- Communities have also taken a lead in creating counternarratives to violent extremists. For instance, Somali communities in Minneapolis have created “The Truth About Al Shabaab”

and “Broken Dreams” to highlight the bankrupt ideology of this terrorist group. Also, communities are utilizing social media to challenge ISIL online.

Future Direction

- Government will continue to support local partners’ CVE frameworks, and help to ensure long-term, sustainable direction for their CVE work.