



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**IGNITING A FLAME: EXAMINING THE ROLE  
OF CATALYTIC EVENTS IN TRIGGERING VIOLENCE**

by

Kelli A. Foy

September 2023

Co-Advisors:

Patrick E. Miller (contractor)  
Erik J. Dahl

**Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.**

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC, 20503.				
<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY</b> (Leave blank)	<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> September 2023	<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> Master's thesis		
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> IGNITING A FLAME: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF CATALYTIC EVENTS IN TRIGGERING VIOLENCE			<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Kelli A. Foy				
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A			<b>10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.			<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b> A	
<b>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</b>  Despite several high-profile cases in recent years where a catalytic event appeared to directly impact a perpetrator's mobilization to terrorism or targeted violence, traditional law enforcement prevention and mitigation frameworks have not formally integrated the concept. Through a structured, focused comparison of 11 plots and acts of violence triggered, at least in part, by three catalytic events—the COVID-19 pandemic, the police murder of George Floyd, or the 2020 presidential election—this thesis seeks to gain insight into the ways in which catalytic events mobilize individuals to violence. This research finds that catalytic events have the potential to trigger a range of individuals to violence, while playing a significant role in their target selection and the timing of their attacks. The primary contribution of this thesis is an initial typology of catalytic event-driven violence, which proposes that catalytic events trigger an individual to violence in three primary ways: presenting a perceived opportunity to maximize violence or capitalize on chaos, exacerbating grievances and contributing to radicalization, or compounding personal stressors, resulting in violence that may appear impulsive and/or random. Leveraging the typology, this thesis provides law enforcement with an initial set of tools for incorporating catalytic events into violence prevention and mitigation frameworks.				
<b>14. SUBJECT TERMS</b> triggering event, catalytic event, terrorism, targeted violence			<b>15. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 101	
			<b>16. PRICE CODE</b>	
<b>17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT</b> Unclassified	<b>18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE</b> Unclassified	<b>19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT</b> Unclassified	<b>20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UU	

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)  
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39-18

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

**Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.**

**IGNITING A FLAME: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF CATALYTIC EVENTS  
IN TRIGGERING VIOLENCE**

Kelli A. Foy  
Intelligence Research Specialist, New York City Police Department  
BSFS, Georgetown University, 2016

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(HOMELAND SECURITY AND DEFENSE)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
September 2023**

Approved by: Patrick E. Miller  
Co-Advisor

Erik J. Dahl  
Co-Advisor

Erik J. Dahl  
Associate Professor, Department of National Security Affairs

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

## ABSTRACT

Despite several high-profile cases in recent years where a catalytic event appeared to directly impact a perpetrator's mobilization to terrorism or targeted violence, traditional law enforcement prevention and mitigation frameworks have not formally integrated the concept. Through a structured, focused comparison of 11 plots and acts of violence triggered, at least in part, by three catalytic events—the COVID-19 pandemic, the police murder of George Floyd, or the 2020 presidential election—this thesis seeks to gain insight into the ways in which catalytic events mobilize individuals to violence. This research finds that catalytic events have the potential to trigger a range of individuals to violence, while playing a significant role in their target selection and the timing of their attacks. The primary contribution of this thesis is an initial typology of catalytic event-driven violence, which proposes that catalytic events trigger an individual to violence in three primary ways: presenting a perceived opportunity to maximize violence or capitalize on chaos, exacerbating grievances and contributing to radicalization, or compounding personal stressors, resulting in violence that may appear impulsive and/or random. Leveraging the typology, this thesis provides law enforcement with an initial set of tools for incorporating catalytic events into violence prevention and mitigation frameworks.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>PROBLEM STATEMENT .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>DEFINING CATALYTIC EVENT.....</b>	<b>2</b>
	<b>1. Internal Triggers.....</b>	<b>2</b>
	<b>2. External Triggers.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>1. Catalytic Events and Radicalization to Violence .....</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>2. Terrorism and Targeted Violence Prevention and         Mitigation Strategies.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>E.</b>	<b>RESEARCH DESIGN .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>F.</b>	<b>OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>COVID-19 PANDEMIC AS A CATALYTIC EVENT .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>SETTING THE STAGE.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>PLOT TO BOMB MISSOURI MEDICAL CENTER .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>TRAIN DERAILMENT NEAR U.S. NAVY HOSPITAL SHIP .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>PLOT TO KIDNAP MICHIGAN GOVERNOR.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>E.</b>	<b>MACHETE ATTACK TARGETING COUPLE IN NASHVILLE .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>F.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>POLICE MURDER OF GEORGE FLOYD AS A CATALYTIC EVENT ..</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>SETTING THE STAGE.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>TARGETED SHOOTINGS OF OFFICERS IN CALIFORNIA .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>PLOT TO INCITE VIOLENCE AT PROTEST IN LAS VEGAS ....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>MOLOTOV COCKTAIL ATTACKS TARGETING THE NYPD .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>E.</b>	<b>VEHICLE RAMMING AT PROTEST IN VIRGINIA .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>F.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AS A CATALYTIC EVENT.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>SETTING THE STAGE.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>U.S. CAPITOL RIOT .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>PLOT TO BOMB SACRAMENTO DEMOCRATIC HEADQUARTERS.....</b>	<b>44</b>

D.	CONCLUSION .....	48
V.	ASSESSING THE ROLE OF VARIOUS FACTORS ON THE ROAD TO VIOLENCE .....	49
A.	LINKS TO EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES AND GROUPS .....	49
B.	PERSONAL STRESSORS AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES .....	51
C.	CRIMINAL HISTORY .....	52
D.	THE CATALYTIC EVENT .....	52
1.	Target Selection.....	53
2.	Timing .....	55
E.	CONCLUSION .....	56
VI.	CONCLUSION .....	59
A.	SUMMARY OF RESEARCH .....	59
B.	TYPOLOGY OF CATALYTIC EVENT-DRIVEN VIOLENCE .....	59
1.	Presenting a Perceived Opportunity to Maximize Violence or Capitalize on Chaos.....	60
2.	Exacerbating Grievances and Contributing to Radicalization .....	61
3.	Compounding Personal Stressors.....	62
C.	IMPLICATIONS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT .....	63
D.	SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	65
E.	LOOKING FORWARD.....	66
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	69
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	79

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Timeline of Catalytic Events to Violence.....	56
Figure 2.	Typology of Catalytic Event-Driven Violence.....	60

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Perpetrator Affiliations with Extremist Ideologies and Groups .....	50
Table 2.	Impact of Catalytic Event on Target Selection .....	53
Table 3.	Countermeasures by “Type” of Catalytic Event-Driven Violence .....	63

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AGAAVE	anti-government, anti-authority violent extremism
ATF	Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives
AVE	anarchist violent extremism
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
IED	improvised explosive device
IID	improvised incendiary device
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
MVE	militia violent extremism
NIJ	National Institute of Justice
NSM	National Socialist Movement
NYPD	New York City Police Department
REMVE	racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism
SLTT	state, local, tribal, and territorial
VBIED	vehicle-borne improvised explosive device
VSD	Vorherrschaft Division

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Anticipating, preventing, and mitigating acts of terrorism and targeted violence remains an ongoing and urgent challenge for law enforcement and homeland security practitioners. Despite several high-profile cases in recent years where a triggering event—referred to herein as a catalytic event—appeared to directly impact a perpetrator’s mobilization to violence, traditional law enforcement prevention and mitigation frameworks have not formally integrated the concept of catalytic events. This thesis defines a catalytic event as an external occurrence that plays a significant role in mobilizing a malicious actor to plan or carry out an act of violence. These are events to which the perpetrator may not have a direct, personal connection but that contribute meaningfully to a violent outcome; examples include political developments, controversial court rulings, police-involved shootings or uses of force, civil unrest or protests, global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, or other high-profile attacks.

Through an analysis of 11 plots and acts of violence triggered, at least in part, by three catalytic events—the COVID-19 pandemic, the police murder of George Floyd, or the 2020 presidential election—this thesis seeks to gain insight into the ways in which catalytic events mobilize individuals to violence. Two primary research questions guide this analysis: 1) What role do catalytic events play in mobilizing individuals to violence? and 2) How should law enforcement agencies position themselves to anticipate, prevent, and mitigate violence linked to a catalytic event? This thesis uses a structured, focused comparison—a method which involves asking general questions of each case to standardize data collection and focus on aspects most relevant to the research objective.<sup>1</sup>

In examining how catalytic events interact with other risk factors, this thesis finds that catalytic events have the potential to trigger a broad range of individuals to violence. Perpetrators of plots and acts of violence in this analysis have ties to a variety of extremist ideologies, beliefs, and/or mindsets, including racially and ethnically motivated violent

---

<sup>1</sup> Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennet, “Chapter 3: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison,” in *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 67–72.

extremism, extremist conspiracies, and anti-government, anti-authority violent extremism. They also vary in terms of their struggle with personal stressors and mental health issues, as well as their criminal history. Another key finding is that catalytic events play a significant role in altering or determining a perpetrator's target selection and the timing of their attack. This thesis finds that individuals triggered by a catalytic event often rapidly mobilize to violence—in some cases, within days—highlighting the need for early detection and swift action to prevent and mitigate violent outcomes.

Based on findings from the case studies, this thesis presents an initial typology—or way of conceptualizing—different “types” of catalytic event-driven violence and implications for law enforcement. It proposes that catalytic events trigger an individual to violence in three primary ways:

1. **Presenting a perceived opportunity to maximize violence or capitalize on chaos.** The catalytic event directly guides the target selection and timing of these perpetrators, who may have already been on law enforcement's radar and considering or planning for violence. Given the opportunistic nature of these perpetrators, they may seek to attack high-value targets in terms of casualty numbers and publicity.
2. **Exacerbating grievances and contributing to radicalization.** The catalytic event appears to be the primary determinant of violence for these perpetrators, potentially triggering those with no prior links to extremist ideologies or plans for violence. These individuals may prioritize symbolic targets, including groups that lie at the center of their rage or public officials they perceive as responsible for policies linked to their grievances.
3. **Compounding personal stressors, resulting in violence that may appear impulsive and/or random.** For these perpetrators, the catalytic event interacts with personal triggers in a way that causes them to engage in spontaneous violence. Targets may be seemingly random, including locations that the perpetrator happens to frequent.

Since it remains difficult to predict which “type” of catalytic event-driven violence is most likely to emerge, an optimal approach to prevention and mitigation would involve identifying likely targets of each “type” within an agency’s area of responsibility, allowing for more effective prioritization and allocation of resources to confront threats. Table 1 outlines potential countermeasures and their applicability to each “type.”

Table 1. Countermeasures by “Type” of Catalytic Event-Driven Violence

Law Enforcement Prevention & Mitigation Measures	“Type” of Catalytic-Event Driven Violence		
	Opportunistic	Grievance-Based	Personal Stressors
Assess resonance of catalytic event with current subjects of concern	X	X	
Implement or enhance protective measures at certain locations or for specific individuals	X	X	
Enhance situational awareness and preparedness of relevant stakeholders	X	X	
Emphasize partnerships with entities likely to frequently interact with individuals of concern			X
Track online threats and violent extremist propaganda linked to catalytic event	X	X	X

This thesis confirms the significant role of catalytic events in sparking acts of violence and aims to provide law enforcement with an initial set of tools for incorporating them into violence prevention and mitigation frameworks. The complexity of the subject necessitates further research and continuous refinement of the typology, with the goal of eventually leveraging it to develop or formalize relevant policies and procedures within a law enforcement agency and evaluating the success of its application. Recent targeted acts of violence and a flood of online threats in reaction to specific events—such as the Supreme Court’s overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and criminal indictments brought against former President Donald Trump—reiterate the significance of this research, while forthcoming developments—including the 2024 presidential election—signal a sense of urgency.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I embarked on writing this thesis, I was inspired to transform a topic that I am deeply passionate about into a research project, with the hope that it can contribute, even in a small way, to terrorism and targeted violence prevention and mitigation efforts that will make us all safer. While I am proud of my own efforts, I am humbled to acknowledge that I did so only with the tremendous support of a wonderful team of family, friends, fellow cohort members, advisors, CHDS instructors, and colleagues at the NYPD. To Matt, especially, thank you for your advice, encouragement and patience, and for believing in the value of my work even when I doubted it myself.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

On July 21, 2021, Ian Benjamin Rogers and Jarrod Copeland were indicted for a plot to destroy the John L. Burton Democratic Headquarters in Sacramento, California, following the 2020 presidential election.<sup>1</sup> Both men pleaded guilty, admitting they conspired to attack the building by throwing ignited gasoline cans through the front windows.<sup>2</sup> Based on their statements, Rogers and Copeland were triggered to violence by the outcome of the election, which sparked anger directed at Democratic lawmakers. In another incident on March 24, 2020, Timothy Wilson died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound as FBI agents attempted to arrest him for allegedly plotting to bomb a medical center in the Kansas City, Missouri, area.<sup>3</sup> While Wilson explored a range of potential targets, he accelerated his attack planning and settled on targeting a hospital at the onset of the pandemic, seeking to maximize casualties.<sup>4</sup>

Both cases illustrate how triggering events—referred to herein as catalytic events—impact an individual’s mobilization to violence. This thesis defines a catalytic event as an external occurrence that plays a significant role in mobilizing a malicious actor to plan or carry out an act of violence. These are events to which the perpetrator may not have a direct, personal connection but that contribute meaningfully to a violent outcome; examples include political developments, controversial court rulings, police-involved shootings or uses of force, civil unrest or protests, global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, or other high-profile attacks.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Second Man Pleads Guilty to Scheme to Attack Democratic Headquarters in Sacramento,” Press Release, Department of Justice, May 27, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndca/pr/second-man-pleads-guilty-scheme-attack-democratic-headquarters-sacramento>.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Justice.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Vockrodt, “FBI Releases How Man Who Plotted to Bomb KC Area Hospital Died in Battle with Agents,” *Kansas City Star*, May 15, 2020, <https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article242763241.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Kosnar and Phil Helsel, “FBI Says Man Killed in Missouri Wanted to Bomb Hospital amid Coronavirus Epidemic,” NBC News, March 25, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/fbi-says-man-killed-missouri-wanted-bomb-hospital-amid-coronavirus-n1169166>.

Despite several high-profile cases in recent years where a catalytic event appeared to trigger a perpetrator's violent actions, traditional law enforcement prevention and mitigation frameworks have not formally integrated the concept of catalytic events. Although law enforcement agencies adjust deployments and investigative approaches following the identification of potential catalytic events, this alteration primarily occurs on an ad-hoc basis rather than through established thresholds and criteria. Some existing radicalization frameworks reference "triggering events," and prior research has examined violence following specific catalytic events, like the 2020 presidential election.<sup>5</sup> However, there has yet to be a comprehensive study of this phenomenon. By examining the influence of catalytic events and offering a typology for conceptualizing how they trigger individuals to violence, this thesis seeks to empower law enforcement agencies to incorporate catalytic events into prevention and mitigation frameworks.

## **B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

What role do catalytic events play in mobilizing individuals to violence?

How should law enforcement agencies position themselves to anticipate, prevent, and mitigate violence linked to a catalytic event?

## **C. DEFINING CATALYTIC EVENT**

This section defines and distinguishes between internal and external triggers to violence, with the latter as the focus of this thesis.

### **1. Internal Triggers**

While this thesis focuses on external triggers to violence, it is important to acknowledge that personal, or internal, triggering events, such as the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, or another personal crisis, can similarly spark individuals to plan or carry out an act of violence. Melanie Taylor's article "A Comprehensive Study of Mass Murder

---

<sup>5</sup> Allison G. Smith, *How Radicalization to Terrorism Occurs in the United States: What Research Sponsored by the National Institute of Justice Tells Us* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2018), <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/250171.pdf>; and Rachel Kleinfeld, "The Rise of Political Violence in the United States," *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 4 (October 2021): 106–76, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-rise-of-political-violence-in-the-united-states/>.



Precipitants and Motivations of Offenders” demonstrates that internal triggers can play a significant role in leading to a violent outcome.<sup>6</sup> Taylor argues that mental health services must be made available to a person of concern, especially one who has previously demonstrated a propensity for violence, to reduce the likelihood of violent behavior following a triggering event.<sup>7</sup> The loved ones of such an individual, as well as others in their inner circle who would be made aware of a traumatic event, are uniquely empowered to recognize the potential for that internal trigger to catalyze violence and intervene to prevent it. Since internal triggers are personal and do not carry the potential to spark numerous acts of violence beyond the specific individual affected, they are not assessed to have the same broad, predictive value for law enforcement as external triggers and are thus not the focal point of this research.

## **2. External Triggers**

This study focuses on external triggers—occurrences that the perpetrator may not have a direct, personal connection to but that contribute meaningfully to mobilizing them to violence. Examples of potential external triggers include political developments, controversial court rulings, police-involved shootings or uses of force, civil unrest or protests, global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, or other high-profile attacks. This definition includes all events that play a role in the outcome of violence, regardless of how central they are to the violence. In other words, the external trigger may be one of several notable factors on the road to violence or it may be *the* determining factor.

## **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review examines existing research and varying perspectives regarding how catalytic events contribute to and interact with other factors in radicalizing an individual to violence. Additionally, it surveys current terrorism and targeted violence prevention and mitigation strategies, revealing a lack of focus on catalytic events and their

---

<sup>6</sup> Melanie A. Taylor, “A Comprehensive Study of Mass Murder Precipitants and Motivations of Offenders,” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 62, no. 2 (February 2018): 427–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X16646805>.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, 427–49.

implications for law enforcement. This review finds the influence of catalytic events to be an under-explored yet likely consequential component of radicalization and mobilization processes.

## **1. Catalytic Events and Radicalization to Violence**

The literature on radicalization pathways, including U.S. government-sponsored research, concurs that catalytic events—often referred to in the literature as triggering events—play a role in radicalization and mobilization to violence. However, it diverges on the significance of that role, whether acting as one of many factors or being central to the outcome of violence. Additionally, the literature does not address how catalytic events drive malicious actors or extremists to violence, how to identify them proactively, and what law enforcement personnel can do about them.

In analyzing the pathways of radicalization and mobilization to violence, some researchers note the importance of triggering events yet consider them one among many factors. Based on a 2015 study of incidents of lone wolf terrorism, Mark Hamm and Ramon Spaaj present a radicalization model asserting that lone wolf terrorism involves a combination of grievances, the “identification of an enabler,” the “broadcasting of terrorist intent,” and finally, a triggering event.<sup>8</sup> Allison Smith’s article summarizing various studies sponsored by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) also includes triggering events on a list of “facilitators” of terrorism, along with terrorist belief systems or narratives, activities that demonstrate commitment to a terrorist group or cause, connections with other terrorists, group dynamics, and grievances.<sup>9</sup> Other terrorism scholars view catalytic events as precursors to radicalization while downplaying their impact on violent outcomes. Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt’s article “Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat”—a foundational but controversial piece on radicalization specific to Salafi-jihadist

---

<sup>8</sup> Mark Hamm and Ramon Spaaj, “Lone Wolf Terrorism in America: Using Knowledge of Radicalization Pathways to Forge Prevention Strategies, 1940–2013: Version 1,” *Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research*, November 2017, 10, <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36107.V1>.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, *How Radicalization to Terrorism Occurs in the United States: What Research Sponsored by the National Institute of Justice Tells Us*, 13.

extremism—highlights that sometimes a crisis catalyzes individuals to explore the ideology. However, the authors somewhat minimize the influence of such a trigger, noting that “ultimately the individual was alienated from his former life and affiliated with like-minded individuals,” which “strengthened his dedication to Salafi Islam.”<sup>10</sup> The inclusion of catalytic events in such frameworks reflects a consensus that they play a role in mobilization to violence; however, their brief mention, among many other factors, illustrates a lack of perceived centrality to the outcome of violence and an understanding of their impact.

Another segment of the literature focuses on catalytic—or triggering—events as a primary determinant of violence rather than simply one of many factors on the pathway to radicalization. For example, J. Reid Meloy and Jeffrey W. Pollard focus on “lone actor terrorism” from a psychological perspective and note cases where the perpetrator “acted impulsively in response to a triggering event which contained a loss and humiliation,” causing them to forgo the often-considerable preparation associated with such attacks.<sup>11</sup> In this case, the authors demonstrate that the triggering event determined the timing of the attack. In a study of 152 mass murders from 2007 to 2011, Melanie Taylor finds that “triggering events,” such as divorce, the death of a loved one, or the loss of a job, preceded the acts of violence in 51% of cases.<sup>12</sup> She notes that, “in many cases,” the perpetrator experienced issues and stressors over a prolonged period before a “triggering event” sparked the mass murder.<sup>13</sup> However, she also highlights cases where “there was a triggering event but no apparent reason as to why the offender became so enraged as to commit such a violent crime.”<sup>14</sup> Boaz Ganor proposes a “Bathtub Model” for conceptualizing the process of a “lone wolf” deciding to perpetrate an attack as akin to

---

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell D Silber and Arvin Bhatt, “Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat,” *The New York City Police Department*, 2007, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/radicalization-west-homegrown-threat>.

<sup>11</sup> J. Reid Meloy and Jeffrey W. Pollard, “Lone-Actor Terrorism and Impulsivity,” *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 62, no. 6 (November 2017): 1643–46, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.13500>.

<sup>12</sup> Taylor, “A Comprehensive Study of Mass Murder Precipitants and Motivations of Offenders,” 437.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, 437.

<sup>14</sup> Taylor, 437.

filling up a bathtub, with various sources of water representing different motivations.<sup>15</sup> He notes that exposure to “concrete triggers,” in particular, including another terrorist attack, a traumatic event, or incitement messages, can “speed up the filling of the bathtub,” driving the individual to conduct an act of violence immediately or shortly thereafter.<sup>16</sup> Examining factors contributing to the “resurgence of right-wing extremism in the United States,” Joshua Vitali highlights the importance of catalytic events—in this case, presidential elections—in exacerbating other grievances and ultimately stimulating and intensifying violent reactions.<sup>17</sup> These authors demonstrate that internal or external triggering events can be directly tied to a damaging outcome, indicating the value of future research focusing on this phenomenon.

Across both camps, the authors do not elaborate extensively on the role of catalytic events, suggesting a recognition of their importance but lacking a full understanding of the part they play in mobilizing individuals to violence. Indeed, a study of “lone wolf terrorism” incidents reveals evidence of a triggering event in 71% of cases from 2001 to 2013, warranting deeper insight into the role of such triggering events.<sup>18</sup> Multiple authors seem to recognize this gap, with Hamm and Spaaj calling attention to a lack of “guideposts” for understanding the specific circumstances that set “lone wolves” on the pathway to violence.<sup>19</sup>

## **2. Terrorism and Targeted Violence Prevention and Mitigation Strategies**

A review of current strategies for terrorism and targeted violence prevention and mitigation reveals a focus on identifying and disrupting would-be attackers, as well as enhancing the protection of vulnerable targets and overall community preparedness. These

---

<sup>15</sup> Boaz Ganor, “Understanding the Motivations of ‘Lone Wolf’ Terrorists: The ‘Bathtub’ Model,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2023): 23–32, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007294>.

<sup>16</sup> Ganor, 28.

<sup>17</sup> Joshua D Vitali, “Fueling the Fire: An Examination of Right-Wing Extremism in the United States Over the Last Decade” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2020), <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/65460>.

<sup>18</sup> Hamm and Spaaj, “Lone Wolf Terrorism in America,” 10.

<sup>19</sup> Hamm and Spaaj, 11–12.

are worthwhile, common-sense strategic priorities aimed at combatting terrorism and targeted violence and building resilience. However, they represent a big-picture view of the problem space, and challenges persist regarding how local law enforcement agencies should operationalize these strategies and allocate limited resources in a way that is dynamic and responsive to the current threat environment.

Policies and strategies for identifying and disrupting future perpetrators of terrorism and targeted violence often emphasize the root causes of violence rather than short-term triggers. The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) *Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence*, released in 2019, outlines and elaborates on several broad policy goals, including understanding the threat environment and preventing acts of violence.<sup>20</sup> The report discusses the need for “whole-of-society partnerships” to reduce the likelihood of radicalization to violence in the first place while providing “off ramps” for those deemed at risk of mobilizing to violence.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the National Council for Mental Wellbeing's *Mass Violence in America* report released that same year analyzes causes, impacts, and solutions pertaining to mass violence in America and recommends identifying root causes and developing strategies to mitigate them rather than “focusing only on quick fixes downstream from the sources of the problem.”<sup>22</sup>

Current terrorism prevention strategies aimed at identifying and disrupting individuals already on the pathway to violence focus on increasing the situational awareness of law enforcement and community members regarding signposts and indicators. The White House's June 2021 *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism* outlines four “strategic pillars,” including to “understand and share domestic terrorism-related information,” “prevent domestic terrorism recruitment and mobilization

---

<sup>20</sup> Department of Homeland Security, *Department of Homeland Security Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence* (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, 2019), [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19\\_0920\\_plcy\\_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19_0920_plcy_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Department of Homeland Security, *Department of Homeland Security Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> National Council for Mental Wellbeing, *Mass Violence in America* (Washington, DC: National Council for Mental Wellbeing, 2019), 55, [https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Mass-Violence-in-America\\_8-6-19.pdf](https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Mass-Violence-in-America_8-6-19.pdf).

to violence,” “disrupt and deter domestic terrorism activity,” and “confront long-term contributors to domestic terrorism.”<sup>23</sup> In terms of identifying and investigating those planning for an act of violence, U.S. federal agencies have emphasized training on recognizing terrorist iconography and phraseology, as well as mobilization indicators.<sup>24</sup> However, as the *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism* notes, the “often solitary and, at times, rapid nature of such mobilization to violence poses a particularly acute challenge to law enforcement and others seeking to prevent, disrupt, and deter domestic terrorism,” as well as targeted violence more broadly.<sup>25</sup> This important caveat underscores that, while law enforcement can enhance their capabilities to identify those at risk of perpetrating violence in the near term, efforts focusing on disrupting the individuals themselves can be somewhat akin to playing whack-a-mole.

Terrorism and targeted violence prevention and mitigation strategies also focus on hardening measures for high-value terrorist targets, including critical infrastructure and what DHS refers to as “soft targets and crowded places”—“locations that are easily accessible to large numbers of people and that have limited security or protective measures in place making them vulnerable to attack.”<sup>26</sup> DHS’s *Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence* includes as one of its primary goals enhancing U.S. infrastructure protections and community preparedness, calling on state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) and private sector stakeholders to conduct threat and risk assessments and bolster the security of soft targets.<sup>27</sup> DHS’s *Soft Targets and Crowded Places Security Plan Overview*, released in 2018, similarly presents the security of these locations as a “shared mission” while highlighting the importance of private sector owners and operators

---

<sup>23</sup> White House, *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism* (Washington, DC: White House, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/National-Strategy-for-Countering-Domestic-Terrorism.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> White House, 25.

<sup>25</sup> White House, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Department of Homeland Security, *U.S. Department of Homeland Security Soft Targets and Crowded Places Security Plan Overview* (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, 2018), iii, [https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/DHS-Soft-Target-Crowded-Place-Security-Plan-Overview-052018-508\\_0.pdf](https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/DHS-Soft-Target-Crowded-Place-Security-Plan-Overview-052018-508_0.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Department of Homeland Security, *Department of Homeland Security Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence*, 28.

understanding the threats and risks associated with their venues and the value of intelligence and information sharing.<sup>28</sup> In 2022, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism released a “good practices guide” titled *Protecting Vulnerable Targets from Terrorist Attacks*, highlighting case studies and best practices utilized by governments, private sector entities, vulnerable sites, and civil society organizations.<sup>29</sup> The report identifies three key areas of roles and responsibilities for law enforcement agencies protecting soft targets: supporting operators of vulnerable targets, investigating terrorist attacks or preparations against vulnerable targets, and community outreach efforts emphasizing the importance of collaboration.<sup>30</sup> While there is a consensus that law enforcement has a role to play in securing critical infrastructure and soft targets from threats of terrorism and targeted violence, there is limited guidance on how they should prioritize locations for the implementation of protective measures and how or if current threats and catalytic events should impact these considerations.

As outlined in the previous section, despite a consensus that catalytic events contribute to radicalizing and mobilizing individuals to violence, a gap remains in the literature on the role of these short-term triggers. A limited understanding of how catalytic events mobilize individuals to violence may also explain why terrorism and targeted violence prevention and mitigation strategies do not sufficiently consider their influence. Although addressing the root causes of violence and fortifying locations assessed to be high-value terrorist targets are key aspects of violence prevention and mitigation efforts, considering how events or circumstances may spark violence in the near term is an equally critical part of such efforts, which appears to be currently lacking.

---

<sup>28</sup> Department of Homeland Security, *U.S. Department of Homeland Security Soft Targets and Crowded Places Security Plan Overview*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Office of Counterterrorism, *Protecting Vulnerable Targets from Terrorist Attacks* (United Nations, 2022), [https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/2118451e-vt-mod1-introduction\\_final-web.pdf](https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/2118451e-vt-mod1-introduction_final-web.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> United Nations Office of Counterterrorism.

## **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This thesis used a structured, focused comparison to examine 11 plots and acts of violence linked to three catalytic events—the COVID-19 pandemic, the police murder of George Floyd, and the 2020 presidential election. The structured, focused comparison is a simple, straightforward method whereby the researcher asks general questions of each case to standardize data collection and focus on only those aspects most relevant to the research objective.<sup>31</sup> In this case, the structured, focused comparison enabled a targeted study of how catalytic events mobilize individuals to violence, including how they interact with other factors to produce a violent outcome. I established a connection between the cases included in this study and the catalytic event based on a review of perpetrators' statements, their target selection, and open-source reporting on the incidents and court proceedings. The litmus test for inclusion in this study was whether I could make a compelling case that, in the absence of the external trigger, the act of violence may not have ultimately occurred.

I used the following questions to guide the analysis of each case:

1. What happened? (Brief background on the plot or act of violence)
2. Who perpetrated the plot or act of violence? Did they have any known links to an extremist group or ideology?
3. Was the perpetrator on law enforcement's radar before the disrupted plot or act of violence?
4. What information suggests that the catalytic event played a role in the perpetrator plotting or conducting the act of violence?
5. How long after the catalytic event did the act of violence occur?
6. Did the perpetrator plan for an act of violence before the catalytic event?
7. How did the catalytic event inform the perpetrator's target selection, if at all?
8. How did the perpetrator reference or discuss the catalytic event?

---

<sup>31</sup> George and Bennet, "Chapter 3: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison."



The results of this analysis appear in each case study's chapter, followed by chapters aggregating findings across all cases.

## **F. OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS**

Chapter I lays out the problem statement and research questions. Based on a review of existing literature, the chapter establishes that there is a gap in research on the role of catalytic events in mobilizing individuals to violence and how law enforcement agencies can incorporate them in prevention and mitigation strategies. Chapter II, Chapter III, and Chapter IV each use a structured, focused comparison to examine plots and acts of violence linked to three catalytic events—the COVID-19 pandemic, the police murder of George Floyd, and the 2020 presidential election—seeking to gain insight on the role of catalytic events and how they interact with other factors to produce a violent outcome. Chapter V includes a comprehensive analysis of findings across case studies examined in the previous three chapters. Finally, Chapter VI proposes a preliminary typology of catalytic event-driven violence and discusses its implications for law enforcement agencies before offering concluding thoughts and recommendations for future research.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

## II. COVID-19 PANDEMIC AS A CATALYTIC EVENT

In the months following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, there were several disrupted plots and acts of violence perpetrated by individuals who directly referenced or appeared to be acting in response to the pandemic or associated government restrictions. This chapter uses the structured, focused comparison to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalytic event and motivated malicious actors to plan or carry out two disrupted plots and two acts of violence. The first section sets the stage for the chapter, offering a brief overview of the pandemic's initial impacts in the United States, the ways in which various extremists sought to exploit it in online messaging, and preliminary assessments from several scholars on how the pandemic would affect the overall terrorism threat environment. The remaining sections include case studies of the plot to bomb a Missouri medical center, the intentional derailment of a train near a U.S. Navy hospital ship in California, the plot to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, and the machete attack targeting a couple in Nashville.

### A. SETTING THE STAGE

The COVID-19 pandemic—along with government-instituted measures intended to slow the spread of the virus and lower hospitalization rates—caused significant hardship, sparked civil unrest in the form of anti-lockdown protests, and mobilized malicious actors to plot and perpetrate acts of violence. According to a study from the U.S. Census Bureau, a “high percentage of the adult population” reported experiencing mental health symptoms, followed by job, housing, and food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>32</sup> Deprivation in mental health—defined as “feeling down, depressed, or hopeless more than half the days in the previous week”—reportedly peaked at 21.5% in July 2020; however, researchers noted that broadening the definition to include those who reported these feelings “any days in the previous week” suggested that 44.3% of respondents were

---

<sup>32</sup> Shatakshee Dhongde and Brian Glassman, “Multidimensional Hardship in the U.S. during the COVID-19 Pandemic” (working paper, U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2021/demo/SEHSD-WP2021-16.html>.

deprived in mental health.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, in a report examining the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the workforce, the Congressional Research Service noted that, "in April 2020, the unemployment rate reached 14.8%—the highest rate observed since data collection began in 1948."<sup>34</sup>

The pandemic sparked widespread civil unrest in the form of anti-lockdown protests, as individuals expressed frustration with government-instituted restrictions meant to protect the public as the virus continued to spread. Some protesters argued that such measures infringed on their civil liberties, while others believed that lockdowns' economic and social costs outweighed the potential public health benefits. On April 30, 2020, hundreds of people, some of whom were allegedly armed, gathered outside the Michigan State Capitol building to express their opposition to "stay-at-home" orders.<sup>35</sup> Dozens of protesters gained entry to the building and demanded access to legislative chambers; however, police on scene managed to hold them back.<sup>36</sup>

Seeking to capitalize on stressors and grievances emanating from the pandemic, extremists espousing a range of ideologies leveraged the crisis in online messaging to incite opportunistic violence, intimidate perceived ideological enemies, and promote conspiracy theories likely aimed at undermining public trust in government. For example, a March 19, 2020 editorial in ISIS's digital weekly newspaper *al-Naba* noted that it would be the "worst nightmare of the crusaders" to experience attacks at a time when they are seeking to combat the spread of the disease and avert economic disaster.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, online racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists (REMVEs) encouraged supporters who contracted

---

<sup>33</sup> Dhongde and Glassman, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Gene Falk, *Unemployment Rates During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, CRS Report No. R46554 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2021), 1, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R46554.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Ivan Pereira, "Protesters, Some Armed, Spill into Michigan Capitol Building Demanding End to Stay-at-Home Order," ABC News, April 30, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/michigan-rally-shelter-place-order-spills-capitol-building/story?id=70432928>.

<sup>36</sup> Lois Beckett, "Armed Protesters Demonstrate against Covid-19 Lockdown at Michigan Capitol," *The Guardian*, April 30, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/30/michigan-protests-coronavirus-lockdown-armed-capitol>.

<sup>37</sup> "IS Urges Jihadists Capitalize on Paralysis and Fear Amid COVID-19 Pandemic in Enemy Lands," SITE Intelligence Group, March 19, 2020, <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/is-urges-jihadists-capitalize-on-paralysis-and-fear-amid-covid-19-pandemic-in-enemy-lands.html>.

COVID-19 to turn it into a bioweapon through deliberate contact with goods, infrastructure, or individuals. One graphic released on Telegram urged followers to “cough on your local minority,” while another online user posted, “Visit your local synagogue and hug as many Jews as possible.”<sup>38</sup>

As the COVID-19 crisis took hold, various terrorism scholars speculated about its potential impact on the terrorism threat environment. For example, Gary Ackerman and Hayley Peterson argued that terrorists could “exploit conditions of uncertainty and instability [arising from the pandemic] to further their goals.” They outlined several ways in which terrorists could exploit the pandemic, including leveraging “increased susceptibility to radicalization,” encouraging supporters to “weaponize” COVID-19, and perpetrating “conventional attacks” that would have a more significant impact in the present environment.<sup>39</sup> Others also highlighted the potential for the pandemic to fuel grievances and exacerbate personal stressors, which could similarly spark acts of violence. Francesco Marone noted that “negative states of mind and grievances due to the COVID-19 crisis could push some individuals or groups of people to threaten or even carry out acts of politically motivated violence, even without a clear reference to a specific ideology.”<sup>40</sup>

## **B. PLOT TO BOMB MISSOURI MEDICAL CENTER**

Soon after then-President Donald Trump declared COVID-19 a national emergency, federal law enforcement disrupted a plot to bomb a medical center in Missouri—an early indication of the potential for the pandemic to serve as a catalyst for violence. On March 24, 2020, 36-year-old Timothy Wilson of Raymore, Missouri, died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound during a shootout with FBI agents as they attempted to arrest him for allegedly plotting to attack a medical center in the Kansas City area using a vehicle-

---

<sup>38</sup> “The Far-Right’s Online Discourse on COVID-19 Pandemic,” SITE Intelligence Group, March 24, 2020, [https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/index.php?option=com\\_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=20576&tmpl=component](https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/index.php?option=com_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=20576&tmpl=component).

<sup>39</sup> Gary Ackerman and Hayley Peterson, “Terrorism and COVID-19: Actual and Potential Impacts,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 3 (June 2020), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26918300>.

<sup>40</sup> Francesco Marone, “Hate in the Time of Coronavirus: Exploring the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the West,” *Security Journal* 35, no. 1 (March 1, 2022): 212, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41284-020-00274-y>.

borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).<sup>41</sup> According to court records, two days before his death, Wilson and an undercover officer conducted pre-operational surveillance of the Belton Regional Medical Center in Cass County.<sup>42</sup> In advance of serving the arrest warrant, the FBI sent an alert to state and local law enforcement agencies noting that the subject “made a threat that if any agent attempted to [search his property] they should ‘bring a lot of body bags.’”<sup>43</sup>

Wilson first appeared on the FBI’s radar in September 2019 after the Bureau discovered his connection to Jarrett William Smith, another convicted extremist who espoused REMVE ideologies.<sup>44</sup> Smith is a former army infantry soldier who was sentenced in August 2020 to 30 months in prison for sharing instructions on social media for creating improvised explosive devices (IEDs).<sup>45</sup> According to the Department of Justice, Smith conveyed in social media posts that he was interested in traveling to Ukraine to fight with a “violent, far-right military group”—identified in media reporting as Azov Battalion.<sup>46</sup> Smith was also reportedly associated with Feuerkrieg Division—“a small international neo-Nazi group that advocates for a race war” and “calls for violence against their perceived enemies and the destruction of ‘the system’...which they believe is controlled by the Jews.”<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Vockrodt, “FBI Releases How Man Who Plotted to Bomb KC Area Hospital Died in Battle with Agents.”

<sup>42</sup> “FBI: Government’s Response to Virus Spurred Would-Be Bomber,” AP News, April 15, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/ad891a0e69f0e3d285c397a1626d1e0d>.

<sup>43</sup> Mike Levine, “FBI Learned of Coronavirus-Inspired Bomb Plotter through Radicalized U.S. Army Soldier,” ABC News, March 26, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/fbi-learned-coronavirus-inspired-bomb-plotter-radicalized-us/story?id=69818116>.

<sup>44</sup> “FBI: Government’s Response to Virus Spurred Would-be Bomber.”

<sup>45</sup> “Former Fort Riley Soldier Sentenced for Distributing Info on Napalm, IEDs,” Press Release, Department of Justice, August 19, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ks/pr/former-fort-riley-soldier-sentenced-distributing-info-napalm-ieds>.

<sup>46</sup> Department of Justice; Levine, “FBI Learned of Coronavirus-Inspired Bomb Plotter through Radicalized U.S. Army Soldier.”

<sup>47</sup> John Hanna, “‘Satanist’ Ex-Soldier Sentenced to 2 ½ Years in Bomb Plot,” *Army Times*, August 19, 2020, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2020/08/19/satanist-ex-soldier-sentenced-to-2-years-in-bomb-plot/>; Anti-Defamation League, “Feuerkrieg Division (FKD),” Anti-Defamation League, October 7, 2019, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/feuerkrieg-division-fkd>.

Wilson similarly espoused REMVE views and indicated to an undercover law enforcement officer that he planned to perpetrate an act of mass violence that would “create enough chaos to kick start a revolution.”<sup>48</sup> This is a common refrain among accelerationist extremists, who advocate for violence to “hasten the downfall of a societal order they believe is complicit in white genocide.”<sup>49</sup> According to an independent online investigation conducted by *The Informant*, Wilson actively participated in Telegram channels affiliated with the National Socialist Movement (NSM) and Vorherrschaft Division (VSD), two white supremacist organizations.<sup>50</sup> Further confirming his link to NSM, the *Anti-Defamation League* (ADL) reported that Wilson received a membership patch for the group at a regional meeting in Ulysses, Pennsylvania, in November 2019.<sup>51</sup> In an online post on March 1, 2020, that foreshadowed his deadly confrontation with law enforcement, Wilson criticized members of other REMVE groups for going “quietly to prison.” He stated that “if they were serious, they would have pulled a Robert J Matthews,” referring to the founder of the white supremacist group The Order who was killed after a standoff with law enforcement in 1984.<sup>52</sup>

Wilson’s online presence and law enforcement reporting revealed how he viewed the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of his REMVE beliefs, which impacted his target selection and the timing of his attack planning. Across multiple online posts, Wilson suggested that the government was using the pandemic as an “excuse to destroy our people” and that the “whole thing was engineered by Jews as a power grab.”<sup>53</sup> According to the FBI, Wilson considered a range of targets for an attack prior to the pandemic,

---

<sup>48</sup> Vockrodt, “FBI Releases How Man Who Plotted to Bomb KC Area Hospital Died in Battle with Agents.”

<sup>49</sup> “Accelerationism.” Counter Extremism Project, accessed July 17, 2023, <https://www.counterextremism.com/content/accelerationism>.

<sup>50</sup> Nick R. Martin, “Heartland Terror,” *The Informant*, March 25, 2020, <https://www.informant.news/p/heartland-terror>.

<sup>51</sup> Anti-Defamation League, “White Supremacists Respond to Coronavirus With Violent Plots and Online Hate,” Anti-Defamation League, March 26, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/white-supremacists-respond-coronavirus-violent-plots-and-online-hate>.

<sup>52</sup> Martin, “Heartland Terror.”

<sup>53</sup> Martin.

including Islamic Centers, a synagogue, a nuclear power plant, and a predominantly black elementary school.<sup>54</sup> However, within two weeks of the nation's first COVID-19 lockdowns, Wilson settled on targeting a hospital. According to an FBI alert obtained by media sources, Wilson may have "believed the additional stress on society posed by the COVID-19 pandemic provided unique opportunities to exploit."<sup>55</sup> Wilson also reportedly became more agitated as his community became impacted by COVID-19 and expressed concerns about "stay-at-home" orders.<sup>56</sup> Missouri Governor Mike Parson declared a state of emergency in response to the pandemic on March 13, 2020.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, the Mayor of Belton, Missouri, where Wilson planned to perpetrate his attack, issued a "stay-at-home" order on March 24, the same day the FBI attempted to arrest Wilson.<sup>58</sup>

For Wilson, the pandemic appeared to serve as a catalytic event, fueling grievances and presenting what he perceived as an opportunity to maximize violence in the near term. Based on Wilson's adherence to REMVE ideologies and previously expressed desire to perpetrate an act of violence, it is probable that he would have eventually attempted to conduct an attack, irrespective of the pandemic. However, the pandemic appeared to play a central role in rapidly narrowing his target selection to the Belton Regional Medical Center, further demonstrating how quickly a malicious actor can focus their attack planning and mobilize to violence in response to a catalytic event. Should Wilson's plot have come to fruition, in addition to the potential for direct casualties, it would have undoubtedly raised the already heightened level of public fear and anxiety as the United States struggled to grapple with the pandemic.

---

<sup>54</sup> Vockrodt, "FBI Releases How Man Who Plotted to Bomb KC Area Hospital Died in Battle with Agents."

<sup>55</sup> Levine, "FBI Learned of Coronavirus-Inspired Bomb Plotter through Radicalized U.S. Army Soldier."

<sup>56</sup> Vockrodt, "FBI Releases How Man Who Plotted to Bomb KC Area Hospital Died in Battle with Agents."

<sup>57</sup> Kaitlyn Schallhorn, "Missouri's Response to Coronavirus: A Timeline," *Missouri Times*, June 30, 2020, <https://themissouritimes.com/missouris-response-to-coronavirus-a-timeline/>.

<sup>58</sup> Anti-Defamation League, "White Supremacists Respond to Coronavirus With Violent Plots and Online Hate."



### C. TRAIN DERAILMENT NEAR U.S. NAVY HOSPITAL SHIP

During the first month of the onset of COVID-19 in the United States, another incident—the intentional derailment of a train—further demonstrated how the pandemic could contribute to mobilizing an individual to violence or destruction. On March 31, 2020, law enforcement authorities arrested Eduardo Moreno, a former train engineer, after he ran a locomotive at full speed off railroad tracks at the Port of Los Angeles in an attempt to crash into the USNS Mercy, which was docked there to help alleviate the surge in hospitalizations due to COVID-19.<sup>59</sup> According to the Department of Justice, no one was injured; however, the derailment resulted in the spilling of approximately 2,000 gallons of fuel and caused \$755,880 in damages. Moreno pleaded guilty to one count of “committing a terrorist attack and other violence against railroad carriers and mass transportation systems;” he received a three-year prison sentence.<sup>60</sup>

Based on his own admissions, Moreno intentionally ran the train off the tracks because he was suspicious of the USNS Mercy and wanted to “bring attention” to the U.S. government’s activities surrounding the pandemic—a goal which was likely influenced by his exposure to conspiracy theories.<sup>61</sup> Some media reports suggested that Moreno was consuming online material associated with QAnon—a decentralized movement that emerged in 2017 centered around the conspiracy that the “Deep State” controls the world and former President Trump is the only person who can defeat it.<sup>62</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the derailment, Moreno told a responding officer, “You only get this chance

---

<sup>59</sup> “Former San Pedro Train Engineer Sentenced to 3 Years in Prison for Intentionally Derailing Locomotive Near U.S. Navy Hospital Ship,” Press Release, Department of Justice, April 13, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-cdca/pr/former-san-pedro-train-engineer-sentenced-3-years-prison-intentionally-derailing>.

<sup>60</sup> Department of Justice.

<sup>61</sup> “Train Engineer Gets 3 Years for Intentional Derailment in Los Angeles,” CBS Los Angeles, April 13, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/train-engineer-sentenced-3-years-intentional-derailment-los-angeles/>.

<sup>62</sup> “QAnon,” Anti-Defamation League, October 28, 2022, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/qanon>.

once...The whole world is watching.”<sup>63</sup> This statement resembles an online post on March 28, 2020, attributed to the anonymous user signing off as “Q,” which read, “The entire world is watching.”<sup>64</sup> Moreno elaborated on his motive in follow-up interviews with law enforcement, expressing suspicion regarding the ship’s purpose and stating that he felt a responsibility to “wake people up.”<sup>65</sup>

In addition to engaging with conspiracy theories, mental health issues reportedly played a role in Moreno conducting the derailment. Around the time of the incident, Moreno was drinking “copious amounts of caffeine which may have contributed to the psychosis,” according to court documents.<sup>66</sup> While limited information is available on the extent to which these mental health issues sparked Moreno’s actions, he has since undergone psychological treatment. Additionally, his probation office concluded that he has “recovered from his psychotic episode.”<sup>67</sup>

Regarding the timing of the incident, Moreno appeared to rapidly mobilize to violence based on pandemic-related conspiracies, apparently in the absence of any pre-operational planning. He conducted the derailment during the first month of the public health crisis in the United States and just four days after the USNS Mercy arrived in Los Angeles.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, “Q” shared their first post about COVID-19 on March 23, 2020, just one week before the derailment.<sup>69</sup> Moreno indicated to investigators that he did not

---

<sup>63</sup> Matthew Gault, “Man Inspired by QAnon and Hopped Up on Caffeine Purposefully Derailed Train,” *Vice*, April 15, 2022, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/7kb38q/man-inspired-by-qanon-and-hopped-up-on-caffeine-purposefully-derailed-train>.

<sup>64</sup> Kristina Hummel, “The QAnon Conspiracy Theory: A Security Threat in the Making?,” *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* 13, no. 7 (July 2020), <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-qanon-conspiracy-theory-a-security-threat-in-the-making/>.

<sup>65</sup> Douglas Swain Affidavit, *United States v. Eduardo Moreno*, March 31, 2020, <https://www.courthousenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/MercyTrain-CRAffidavit.pdf>.

<sup>66</sup> Gault, “Man Inspired by QAnon and Hopped Up on Caffeine Purposefully Derailed Train.”

<sup>67</sup> Gault.

<sup>68</sup> David Vergun, “USNS Mercy Arrives in Los Angeles to Aid COVID-19 Response,” Department of Defense, March 27, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2129077/usns-mercy-arrives-in-los-angeles-to-aid-covid-19-response/>.

<sup>69</sup> Hummel, “The QAnon Conspiracy Theory.”

pre-plan the incident, recalling that he began thinking about “everything” and “just kept going and going,” adding, “Sometimes you just get a little snap” and “I just went for it.”<sup>70</sup>

In Moreno’s case, the COVID-19 pandemic and the government’s response, along with mental health issues, appeared to fuel his belief in conspiracy theories. These factors, taken together, ultimately led to his seemingly impulsive decision to perpetrate an act of violence. This case demonstrates the potential for a catalytic event to interact with extremist or conspiratorial beliefs and mental health issues in a way that causes individuals to engage in spontaneous violence, perpetrating an act of violence or destruction that may or may not have otherwise occurred. Similar to the previous case, Moreno also quickly mobilized to violence on the basis of pandemic-related grievances and conspiracies, underscoring the potential value of proactively identifying potential catalytic events.

#### **D. PLOT TO KIDNAP MICHIGAN GOVERNOR**

This next case study, which focuses on the plot to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, highlights the role of controversial government policies in catalyzing individuals to plot violence against a public official. On October 8, 2020, the Department of Justice announced the arrests of six men for allegedly conspiring to kidnap Whitmer.<sup>71</sup> The State of Michigan simultaneously charged seven additional men, who were linked to the Wolverine Watchmen militia group.<sup>72</sup> Authorities later charged an eighth alleged group member, resulting in 14 total individuals charged in connection with the plot.<sup>73</sup> According to the criminal complaint, those involved in the plot “discussed plans for assaulting the Michigan State Capitol, countering law enforcement first responders, and using ‘Molotov

---

<sup>70</sup> Douglas Swain Affidavit.

<sup>71</sup> “Six Arrested on Federal Charge of Conspiracy to Kidnap the Governor of Michigan,” Press Release, Department of Justice, October 8, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/six-arrested-federal-charge-conspiracy-kidnap-governor-michigan>.

<sup>72</sup> Department of Justice.

<sup>73</sup> Graham Macklin, “The Conspiracy to Kidnap Governor Gretchen Whitmer,” *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* 14, no. 6 (August 2021), <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-conspiracy-to-kidnap-governor-gretchen-whitmer/>.

cocktails’ to destroy police vehicles.”<sup>74</sup> They also allegedly conducted pre-operational surveillance, engaged in weapons trainings, and attempted to construct and procure IEDs.<sup>75</sup>

Given the number of individuals involved, this review focuses generally on the plot and how the pandemic and associated government measures appeared to act as a catalytic event for the group. What follows is a brief outline of those charged and their case outcomes, as they will be referenced in connection with relevant statements and reporting. At the time of writing, two individuals—Ty Garbin and Kaleb Franks—pleaded guilty to federal charges and received prison sentences of two and a half years and four years.<sup>76</sup> Two others—Barry Croft Jr. and Adam Fox—were convicted and later sentenced to 19 years and 16 years in prison, according to the Department of Justice. The final two individuals who faced federal charges in connection with the plot—Daniel Harris and Brandon Caserta—were acquitted in April 2022.<sup>77</sup> In December 2022, Joe Morrison, Pete Musico, and Paul Bellar, who were associated with the Wolverine Watchmen, were sentenced to 10, 12, and seven years in prison after they were convicted at the state level for providing material support for a terrorist act.<sup>78</sup>

Unlike some of the previously discussed incidents, where individuals were rapidly catalyzed to violence, the plot to kidnap Governor Whitmer took shape over several months. On March 10, 2020, as COVID-19 began to spread in Michigan, Whitmer declared a state of emergency and subsequently issued and extended a “stay-at-home” order until April 30, 2020.<sup>79</sup> Some of the earliest and most sizeable “anti-lockdown” protests occurred

---

<sup>74</sup> Criminal Complaint, *United States v. Adam Fox, Barry Croft, Ty Garbin, Kaleb Franks, Daniel Harris, and Brandon Caserta*, October 6, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-wdmi/press-release/file/1326161/download>.

<sup>75</sup> Criminal Complaint.

<sup>76</sup> Department of Justice, “Final Defendant in Michigan Governor Kidnapping Plot Sentenced to Over 19 Years in Prison,” Press Release, Department of Justice, December 28, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/final-defendant-michigan-governor-kidnapping-plot-sentenced-over-19-years-prison>.

<sup>77</sup> Department of Justice.

<sup>78</sup> Joey Cappelletti and Ed White, “Lengthy Prison Terms for 3 Who Aided Whitmer Kidnap Plotter,” AP News, December 15, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/crime-michigan-government-and-politics-f6ed3d5b2546dbe9c60bb34b9ee8ddb4>.

<sup>79</sup> Macklin, “The Conspiracy to Kidnap Governor Gretchen Whitmer.”

in the state, including one on April 30, 2020, during which dozens of armed individuals entered the Michigan State Capitol building and demanded entry to the Senate floor.<sup>80</sup> Morrison, Musico, and Bellar, who attended the protest to recruit for the Wolverine Watchmen, were among those who entered the building.<sup>81</sup> Fox and Croft, identified as the primary drivers behind the plot, reportedly met with 13 others belonging to different militia groups in Dublin, Ohio, in June 2020. According to the criminal complaint, several individuals at the meeting discussed “murdering ‘tyrants’ or ‘taking’ a sitting governor”—likely signifying the earliest phase of the plot.<sup>82</sup> Fox reportedly connected with the Wolverine Watchmen shortly thereafter.<sup>83</sup>

Those charged in the plot to kidnap Governor Whitmer demonstrated varying levels of association with extremist ideologies and militia groups. As already highlighted, several of those charged were members of the little-known Wolverine Watchmen militia group. On its Facebook page, the Wolverine Watchmen advertised itself as being for “Boojahideen only”—a reference to the broader anti-government and accelerationist Boogaloo movement, which seeks to bring about a second civil war.<sup>84</sup> According to court documents, the “Michigan Patriot Three Percenters” listed Fox as its leader and president, and Croft also reportedly affiliated himself with the militia group.<sup>85</sup> The Three Percenters is a militia movement that “supports the idea of a small number of ‘patriots’ protecting Americans from government tyranny;” the group derives its name from the unfounded claim that just “three percent of Americans fought in the Revolutionary War.”<sup>86</sup>

The defendants’ social media posts and chat messages, information captured by the FBI’s confidential human sources and undercover employees, and trial testimony by group

---

<sup>80</sup> Macklin.

<sup>81</sup> Macklin.

<sup>82</sup> Criminal Complaint, *United States v. Adam Fox, Barry Croft, Ty Garbin, Kaleb Franks, Daniel Harris, and Brandon Caserta*.

<sup>83</sup> Criminal Complaint.

<sup>84</sup> Macklin, “The Conspiracy to Kidnap Governor Gretchen Whitmer.”

<sup>85</sup> Macklin.

<sup>86</sup> “Three Percenters,” Anti-Defamation League, June 26, 2017, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/three-percenters>.

members offer insight into the role that the pandemic and associated government restrictions played in catalyzing the group to plot the kidnapping of Whitmer. During the trial of Croft, Fox, Harris, and Caserta, Kaleb Franks testified that Fox believed the U.S. Constitution granted them the right to fight back against Whitmer’s “tyrannical” COVID-19 policies.<sup>87</sup> During a surveillance operation in September 2020, Fox asserted that Whitmer had “uncontrolled power” and said, “I can see several states takin’ their [expletive] tyrants.”<sup>88</sup> Ty Garbin also testified that the men believed the abduction could be the “ignition” for a civil war in the United States.<sup>89</sup>

Given the group’s pre-existing anti-government and accelerationist extremist beliefs, it is plausible that some or all of those involved would have eventually plotted or perpetrated an act of violence against a government target. However, the pandemic and associated mitigation measures implemented by the state acted as a catalytic event, appearing to influence the target and timing of their disrupted plot significantly. The Governor’s policies surrounding the pandemic and broader opposition to pandemic-related restrictions exacerbated the grievances of those involved in the plot and intensified their extremist beliefs. Based on testimony that the group believed the kidnapping of Governor Whitmer could spark a civil war, the men also viewed the plot as an opportunity to exploit in the pursuit of larger extremist ideological goals.

#### **E. MACHETE ATTACK TARGETING COUPLE IN NASHVILLE**

The final case study, which focuses on a machete attack in Nashville in May 2020, illustrates how a catalytic event can interact with personal stressors in a way that leads to violence, rendering it an outlier from previously discussed cases. In an apparently random and unprovoked attack on May 17, 2020, a homeless man identified as Kelvin Edwards

---

<sup>87</sup> Ed White, “Man in Gov. Whitmer Kidnap Plot: No One Twisted Our Arms,” AP News, March 24, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/whitmer-kidnap-plot-trial-biden-covid-health-michigan-aff035ce3331139a029b052a77279962>.

<sup>88</sup> Criminal Complaint, *United States v. Adam Fox, Barry Croft, Ty Garbin, Kaleb Franks, Daniel Harris, and Brandon Caserta*.

<sup>89</sup> “Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer Kidnapping Aimed at Stopping Biden Win and Being ‘Ignition’ for U.S. Civil War, Witness Says,” CBS News, March 24, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/gretchen-whitmer-kidnapping-plot-trial-ty-garbin-testifies-civil-war/>.

assaulted two individuals—a married couple—with a machete inside a Public Storage warehouse office in Nashville, Tennessee; the attack left the victims in critical condition.<sup>90</sup> Immediately after the attack, Edwards exited the building, dropped the machete on the ground, and stood in the street with his hands above his head, presumably to signal he was ready to surrender to police.<sup>91</sup> He was later charged with two counts of attempted murder and agreed to a plea deal that included a 35-year prison sentence.<sup>92</sup>

Edwards' actions just before the attack point to his denial of access to a homeless shelter due to COVID-19 restrictions as the final trigger to violence. Approximately 15 minutes before police received an emergency call about the attack, staff at the Nashville Rescue Mission, a local homeless shelter, denied Edwards access to the facility because he failed to provide documentation of a negative COVID-19 test.<sup>93</sup> According to the CEO of the Nashville Rescue Mission, after personnel told Edwards he needed to visit a testing facility, he crumpled up the expired ticket from his previous stay, threw it on the ground, and left.<sup>94</sup> The Rescue Mission men's campus is about a half-mile from the location where Edwards ultimately perpetrated his attack.<sup>95</sup>

Edwards' statements to investigators following the attack appeared to confirm the role of the pandemic and associated mitigation measures in catalyzing his violent actions. Edwards told police that he was frustrated with shutdowns prompted by the pandemic and enraged when he was denied entry to the Nashville Rescue Mission.<sup>96</sup> He further explained that he retrieved the machete from his bin at the storage facility and decided to demonstrate

---

<sup>90</sup> Sandy Mazza and Adam Sparks, "Minutes before Machete Attack, Suspect Denied Access to Nashville Homeless Shelter Due to Coronavirus Restrictions," *The Tennessean*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/crime/2020/05/17/nashville-storage-facility-stabbing/5210034002/>.

<sup>91</sup> Mazza and Sparks.

<sup>92</sup> "Plea Deal Reached in Nashville Machete Attack," News Channel 5 Nashville, April 1, 2021, <https://www.newschannel5.com/news/plea-deal-reached-in-may-2020-machete-attack-that-critically-injured-2-in-nashville>.

<sup>93</sup> Mazza and Sparks, "Minutes before Machete Attack, Suspect Denied Access to Nashville Homeless Shelter Due to Coronavirus Restrictions."

<sup>94</sup> Mazza and Sparks.

<sup>95</sup> Mazza and Sparks.

<sup>96</sup> Mazza and Sparks.

his anger through an attack on the victims.<sup>97</sup> It is worth noting that Edwards' criminal history reflects a propensity for violence. He was convicted of felony vandalism in 2017 and, during his time in prison, was also charged and convicted on two counts of assault.<sup>98</sup>

Edwards' attack highlights the complex interaction between catalytic events—in this case, the COVID-19 pandemic—and personal stressors in motivating an individual to violence. While Edwards indicated that pandemic-related grievances contributed to mobilizing him to violence, these grievances were likely, to a large degree, exacerbated by personal stressors, including homelessness. The combination of these personal stressors and grievances may have rendered Edwards more susceptible to impulsive violence, illustrating the potential for a seemingly small external trigger to spark an immediate and violent response. This case is also notable as it demonstrates that external triggers, when coupled with personal stressors, can lead to a violent outcome even in the absence of extremist ideological beliefs.

## **F. CONCLUSION**

While all the case studies in this chapter involved individuals who were driven to violence, at least in part, by the COVID-19 pandemic, perpetrators across the cases possessed vastly different motivations for violence and were influenced by unique combinations of extremist beliefs and personal stressors. Wilson and those involved in the plot to kidnap Whitmer held grievances surrounding the pandemic and government restrictions, while also viewing it as an opportune time to maximize violence and chaos in pursuit of extremist ideological goals. In contrast, personal stressors played a leading role in sparking Moreno and Edwards to spontaneous violence, with the former also influenced by extremist conspiracies. In three of the four cases, the catalytic event directly impacted the perpetrators' target—a medical center, a hospital ship, and a public official responsible for pandemic-related policies—reiterating the value of this research.

---

<sup>97</sup> Jon Haworth, "Man Slashes Married Couple with Machete, Says He Was Angry over Coronavirus Lockdown," ABC News, May 18, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/man-slashes-married-couple-machete-angry-coronavirus-lockdown/story?id=70739374>.

<sup>98</sup> Haworth.



### III. POLICE MURDER OF GEORGE FLOYD AS A CATALYTIC EVENT

Following the May 2020 police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, there were multiple plots and acts of violence perpetrated by extremists across the ideological spectrum that appeared to have been catalyzed either by Floyd’s killing or subsequent mass demonstrations. This chapter leverages the structured, focused comparison to examine five incidents, including one plot and four acts of violence, to understand the role of Floyd’s killing and civil unrest in sparking violent outcomes. As expected, attackers motivated by Floyd’s killing targeted law enforcement, while those catalyzed by civil unrest sought to harm protesters. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the mass demonstrations in May 2020 and throughout that summer, as well as the opportunistic violence and destruction observed at a small percentage of protests. It also discusses the ways in which extremists espousing a range of ideologies sought to exploit the crisis in online messaging. The remaining sections provide case studies of targeted shootings of officers in California, a plot to incite violence at a protest in Las Vegas, two improvised incendiary device (IID) attacks targeting officers in New York, and a vehicle ramming attack at a protest in Virginia.

#### A. SETTING THE STAGE

After the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, protests and demonstrations erupted across the United States, demanding both justice for Floyd and an end to perceived instances of racial injustice and police brutality in the United States. According to the *U.S. Crisis Monitor*, there were “more than 10,330 demonstrations associated with the BLM movement across more than 2,730 locations in all 50 states and Washington, DC,” in 2020.<sup>99</sup> While the *U.S. Crisis Monitor* report indicated that a “vast majority of these events—94%—involved no violent or destructive activity,” there were significant incidents of opportunistic looting, vandalism, targeted assaults on law enforcement, and

---

<sup>99</sup> Sam Jones, “US Crisis Monitor Releases Full Data for 2020,” ACLED, February 5, 2021, <https://acleddata.com/2021/02/05/us-crisis-monitor-releases-full-data-for-2020/>.

arson during this time, including the burning down of the Minneapolis Third Precinct Police Station.<sup>100</sup>

As with other crises, various extremists sought to exploit the situation in online propaganda and messaging to support their strategic agendas. For example, some REMVEs discussed carrying out assaults on protesters and law enforcement to accelerate violence, while other likeminded extremists encouraged police to perpetrate racially-motivated attacks.<sup>101</sup> Salafi-jihadist extremists, including ISIS and al-Qa'ida-affiliated groups, primarily leveraged nationwide protests to criticize racial inequalities in the United States and incite opportunistic lone-offender attacks as the country grappled with civil unrest.<sup>102</sup> Anti-government, anti-authority violent extremists (AGAAVEs) also celebrated instances of destruction, arson, and looting, presenting these acts as necessary aspects of successful societal revolts. A common theme across all extremist propaganda was the promotion of targeted assaults on law enforcement.

## **B. TARGETED SHOOTINGS OF OFFICERS IN CALIFORNIA**

Just four days after the killing of George Floyd, a shooting targeting law enforcement officers in California illustrated the potential for the tragedy to catalyze violence. On May 29, 2020, Steven Carrillo, a former Air Force sergeant, perpetrated a drive-by shooting outside a federal courthouse in Oakland, California.<sup>103</sup> The shooting occurred amid ongoing protests in the area in reaction to Floyd's killing. Carrillo shot at two Federal Protective Services officers, killing one and injuring the other, before fleeing

---

<sup>100</sup> Jones.

<sup>101</sup> Hannah Gais, "Far Right Exploits Racial Justice Protests to Further an Agenda of Hate," Southern Poverty Law Center, June 18, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/06/18/far-right-exploits-racial-justice-protests-further-agenda-hate>.

<sup>102</sup> "Al Qaeda Releases 'America Burns' Video, Framing U.S. as Nation in Crisis," Anti-Defamation League, July 27, 2021, <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/al-qaeda-releases-america-burns-video-framing-us-nation-crisis>.

<sup>103</sup> Department of Justice, "Steven Carrillo Sentenced to 41 Years in Prison for Murder and Attempted Murder for Role in Drive-By Shooting at Federal Courthouse in Oakland," Press Release, Department of Justice, June 3, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndca/pr/steven-carrillo-sentenced-41-years-prison-murder-and-attempted-murder-role-drive>.

the scene.<sup>104</sup> On June 6, 2020, eight days after his initial assault, Carrillo ambushed officers in Santa Cruz County as they responded to reports of firearms and bomb-making materials inside a van.<sup>105</sup> During that incident, Carrillo fatally shot one officer and injured several others before law enforcement ultimately took him into custody.<sup>106</sup> Carrillo later pleaded guilty to a federal murder charge in connection with the first shooting and was sentenced to 41 years in prison.<sup>107</sup> He also pleaded guilty to nine counts, including murder, for the second shooting and was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.<sup>108</sup>

Physical evidence uncovered in investigations following Carrillo's attacks revealed his affinity for anti-government and accelerationist extremist ideologies. According to court documents, Carrillo was a member of the Boogaloo Bois, "a loosely connected group" that believes in "an impending second civil war in the United States that includes a violent uprising against the government."<sup>109</sup> During a search of Carrillo's van, officers recovered a ballistic vest with a patch depicting symbols of the Boogaloo movement, including "an igloo and a Hawaiian-style print."<sup>110</sup> While attempting to flee the scene of the shooting in Santa Cruz, Carrillo also carjacked a vehicle and marked it with slogans related to the Boogaloo movement using his own blood.<sup>111</sup> These phrases included

---

<sup>104</sup> Department of Justice.

<sup>105</sup> "Ex-Air Force Sergeant Pleads Guilty in Killing of Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Sergeant," NBC Bay Area, June 28, 2022, <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/ex-air-force-sergeant-pleads-guilty-in-killing-of-santa-cruz-county-sheriffs-sergeant/2931686/>.

<sup>106</sup> "Ex-Air Force Sergeant Pleads Guilty in Killing of Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Sergeant."

<sup>107</sup> Department of Justice, "Steven Carrillo Sentenced to 41 Years in Prison for Murder and Attempted Murder for Role in Drive-By Shooting at Federal Courthouse in Oakland."

<sup>108</sup> "Boogaloo Militia Extremist Steven Carrillo Gets Life Sentence for Murdering Santa Cruz Co. Sheriff's Sgt. Damon Gutzwiller," CBS Bay Area, August 27, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/sanfrancisco/news/steven-carrillo-boogaloo-militia-extremist-life-sentence-damon-gutzwiller-david-patrick-underwood/>.

<sup>109</sup> "Self-Described Member of 'Boogaloo Bois' Sentenced to Prison for Riot Conviction," Press Release, Department of Justice, April 5, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-mn/pr/self-described-member-boogaloo-bois-sentenced-prison-riot-conviction>.

<sup>110</sup> Brett Woolard Affidavit, *United States v. Steven Carrillo*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1285706/download>.

<sup>111</sup> Cheri Mossburg and Theresa Waldrop, "A Man Allegedly Linked to the Boogaloo Movement Accused of Going to a BLM Protest with a Homemade Machine Gun to Kill Cops," CNN, June 16, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/16/us/steven-carrillo-california-officers-deaths-suspect-boogaloos/index.html>.

“BOOG,” “I became unreasonable,” and “Stop the duopoly.”<sup>112</sup> Additionally, as part of his guilty plea in connection with the Oakland shooting, Carrillo acknowledged to the court that he “aligned himself with an anti-government movement and wanted to carry out violent acts against federal law enforcement officers.”<sup>113</sup>

In the days leading up to the shootings, Carrillo posted and exchanged messages on social media, indicating the Floyd protests’ role in his attack planning. According to the criminal complaint, on May 28, 2020, Carrillo shared a “link to a YouTube video showing a large crowd violently attacking two California Highway Patrol vehicles,” along with a message stating, “It’s on our coast now, this needs to be nationwide. It’s a great opportunity to target the specialty soup bois. Keep that energy going.”<sup>114</sup> In another post on the day of the initial shooting, Carrillo wrote, “Go to the riots and support our own cause. Show them the real targets. Use their anger to fuel our fire. Think outside the box. We have mobs of angry people to use to our advantage.”<sup>115</sup>

Carrillo’s adherence to accelerationist extremist ideologies, as well as the timing of his attack just days after the killing of George Floyd, suggest that he was rapidly catalyzed to violence by the murder and subsequent mass demonstrations, which he perceived as an opportunity to maximize violence in furtherance of broader extremist ideological goals. While Floyd’s killing appeared to directly spark Carrillo’s decision to perpetrate violence, he would likely have, at some point, conducted an attack in response to another catalytic event he viewed as lending itself to the acceleration of the collapse of society.

### **C. PLOT TO INCITE VIOLENCE AT PROTEST IN LAS VEGAS**

As civil unrest following the killing of George Floyd intensified, law enforcement disrupted a plot to incite violence at a protest in Las Vegas, Nevada, further illustrating the

---

<sup>112</sup> Brett Woolard Affidavit.

<sup>113</sup> Department of Justice, “Santa Cruz County Resident Pleads Guilty To Murder And Attempted Murder After Drive-By Shooting At Federal Courthouse,” Press Release, Department of Defense, February 11, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndca/pr/santa-cruz-county-resident-pleads-guilty-murder-and-attempted-murder-after-drive>.

<sup>114</sup> Brett Woolard Affidavit, *United States v. Steven Carrillo*.

<sup>115</sup> Brett Woolard Affidavit.

potential for opportunistic exploitation of the crisis to advance extremist agendas. On May 30, 2020, law enforcement authorities arrested three individuals—Stephen T. Parshall, Andrew Lynam, and William L. Loomis—for plotting to throw IIDs at police during a demonstration in downtown Las Vegas.<sup>116</sup> The men were also accused of conspiring to target government buildings and a public utility installation.<sup>117</sup> Police apprehended the suspects while they were en route to the demonstrations, “after filling gas cans at a parking lot and making Molotov cocktails in glass bottles.”<sup>118</sup> On June 17, 2020, a federal grand jury indicted the three men for “conspiracy to damage and destroy by fire and explosive” and “possession of an unregistered destructive device.”<sup>119</sup> They also face various terrorism-related charges at the state level.<sup>120</sup>

Parshall, Lynam, and Loomis subscribed to anti-government and accelerationist extremist ideologies, as evidenced by their social media activity. According to the criminal complaint, the men self-identified as members of the Boogaloo movement and were members of a Nevada Boogaloo Facebook group.<sup>121</sup> Parshall’s purported social media presence also offers insight into his far-right and anti-government positions. For example, he shared images of a Confederate flag, a rainbow swastika, and a flag for “Kekistan”—“a fictional nation created by white nationalists and far-right trolls.”<sup>122</sup> In March 2020, as

---

<sup>116</sup> “Federal Grand Jury Indicts Three Men For Seeking To Exploit Protests In Las Vegas And Incite Violence,” Press Release, Department of Justice, June 17, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-nv/pr/federal-grand-jury-indicts-three-men-seeking-exploit-protests-las-vegas-and-incite>.

<sup>117</sup> Department of Justice.

<sup>118</sup> Ed Komenda, “Men Tied to ‘boogaloo’ Movement Conspired to Spark Protest Violence in Las Vegas, Feds Say,” *USA Today*, June 4, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/06/04/boogaloo-movement-terrorism-related-charges-3-men-feds-say/3147563001/>.

<sup>119</sup> Department of Justice, “Federal Grand Jury Indicts Three Men For Seeking To Exploit Protests In Las Vegas And Incite Violence.”

<sup>120</sup> Department of Justice.

<sup>121</sup> Andrew Blankstein, Tom Winter, and Brandy Zadrozny, “Three Men Connected to ‘boogaloo’ Movement Tried to Provoke Violence at Protests, Feds Say,” NBC News, June 4, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/all/three-men-connected-boogaloo-movement-tried-provoke-violence-protests-feds-n1224231>.

<sup>122</sup> Blankstein, Winter, and Zadrozny.

COVID-19 took hold in the United States, Parshall issued a Facebook post about the federal response to the virus, writing, “Start. Fomenting. Insurrection.”<sup>123</sup>

The three men allegedly explored several targets before ultimately deciding to perpetrate violence at protests linked to Floyd’s murder. According to media sources, prosecutors alleged that the men on multiple occasions discussed plans to “destroy an observation station at Lake Mead, near Las Vegas, destroy power substations, [and] throw a smoke bomb” at a rally to re-open businesses closed due to COVID-19, among other potential attacks.<sup>124</sup> In April 2020, the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force opened its investigation into Lynam and Parshall “based on a report that they were planning terrorist activity,” and an informant with the Bureau met the two at a “ReOpen Nevada” rally in Las Vegas that same month.<sup>125</sup>

While the men allegedly planned for an act of violence or destruction over at least a month, they rapidly adjusted their target selection within days of Floyd’s killing.<sup>126</sup> On May 27, 2020, in direct reaction to Floyd’s murder, Loomis, Parshall, and the informant discussed plans to “incite chaos and possibly a riot.”<sup>127</sup> A day before their arrest, the three men joined demonstrations on the Las Vegas Strip, during which Parshall expressed being “very upset that the protests were not turning violent” and told others that “peaceful protests do not accomplish anything.”<sup>128</sup> In alignment with the Boogaloo movement’s goal of sparking a second civil war, court documents allege that the three sought to “use the momentum” of the death of George Floyd and civil unrest to “hopefully stir enough

---

<sup>123</sup> Blankstein, Winter, and Zadrozny.

<sup>124</sup> Blankstein, Winter, and Zadrozny.

<sup>125</sup> Komenda, “Men Tied to ‘boogaloo’ Movement Conspired to Spark Protest Violence in Las Vegas, Feds Say.”

<sup>126</sup> Department of Justice, “Federal Grand Jury Indicts Three Men For Seeking To Exploit Protests In Las Vegas And Incite Violence.”

<sup>127</sup> Blankstein, Winter, and Zadrozny, “Three Men Connected to ‘boogaloo’ Movement Tried to Provoke Violence at Protests, Feds Say.”

<sup>128</sup> Komenda, “Men Tied to ‘boogaloo’ Movement Conspired to Spark Protest Violence in Las Vegas, Feds Say.”

confusion and excitement” through their attack that others would begin to “riot in the streets out of anger.”<sup>129</sup>

Given their discussions of plots against multiple locations, some of which occurred before the killing of George Floyd, the men would likely have eventually perpetrated an act of violence or destruction in alignment with their extremist beliefs. Nevertheless, Floyd’s murder and subsequent widespread civil unrest appeared to accelerate their decision to conduct an attack and influenced their target selection. Parshall, Lynam, and Loomis likely perceived the mass demonstrations following Floyd’s death as an opportunity to capitalize on public anger and maximize violence and destruction.

#### **D. MOLOTOV COCKTAIL ATTACKS TARGETING THE NYPD**

This section examines two case studies involving IID attacks against law enforcement in Brooklyn, New York, on May 29, 2020. The first attack perpetrated by Samantha Shader targeted officers in a New York City Police Department (NYPD) vehicle, while the second incident, carried out by Colinford Mattis and Urooj Rahman, targeted an unoccupied NYPD vehicle. These incidents represent just two of numerous arson attacks against law enforcement during this period likely catalyzed by Floyd’s killing.

In the midst of protests, Shader of Saugerties, New York, threw a Molotov cocktail into an NYPD van with four officers inside in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn.<sup>130</sup> No one was injured in the attack. Shader ultimately pleaded guilty to a federal arson charge and was sentenced to six years in prison.<sup>131</sup> The same night, Mattis and Rahman, two attorneys based in New York City, targeted an unoccupied NYPD vehicle in

---

<sup>129</sup> Blankstein, Winter, and Zadrozny, “Three Men Connected to ‘boogaloo’ Movement Tried to Provoke Violence at Protests, Feds Say.”

<sup>130</sup> Department of Justice, “Saugerties Woman Sentenced to 72 Months’ Imprisonment for Attempted Arson of NYPD Van Occupied by Four Police Officers,” Press Release, Department of Justice, November 15, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/saugerties-woman-sentenced-72-months-imprisonment-attempted-arson-nypd-van-occupied>.

<sup>131</sup> Department of Justice.

another IID attack at a protest in Brooklyn.<sup>132</sup> They have since pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy to commit arson. Mattis was sentenced to one year and a day in prison, while Rahman was sentenced to 15 months.<sup>133</sup>

Shader's actions prior to the incident indicate that she traveled to the protests in Brooklyn with the intent of perpetrating an act of violence against law enforcement. According to court documents, she invited her co-conspirator Timothy Amerman, from whom she procured numerous glass bottles to use as projectiles against police and counterdemonstrators, to "go down to the City to cause some hell."<sup>134</sup> As she threw the IID, Shader yelled to protesters, "Get out of the [expletive] way," suggesting that law enforcement officers were the sole target of her assault. During Shader's trial, prosecutors elaborated on her lengthy criminal history, noting that she has "traveled the country committing various crimes, which include acts of violence and resisting arrest."<sup>135</sup>

Mattis and Rahman engaged in discussions before their attack demonstrating their grievances surrounding perceived racial injustices and strong anti-law enforcement sentiments. According to a memo submitted by prosecutors in advance of Rahman's sentencing hearing, both individuals participated in a group chat where they talked about the "use of weapons and violence to pursue social change."<sup>136</sup> Additionally, Rahman expressed a belief that "all the police stations" and "probably all the courts" must be "burned down."<sup>137</sup> Both Mattis and Rahman repeatedly referred to law enforcement

---

<sup>132</sup> David Thomas, "Judge Sentences Second New York Lawyer in Molotov Cocktail Case," Reuters, January 26, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/legal/judge-sentences-second-new-york-lawyer-molotov-cocktail-case-2023-01-27/>.

<sup>133</sup> Thomas.

<sup>134</sup> Department of Justice, "Saugerties Woman Sentenced to 72 Months' Imprisonment for Attempted Arson of NYPD Van Occupied by Four Police Officers."

<sup>135</sup> Jonathan Dienst and Tom Winter, "'I Have No Excuse:' Tearful Woman in NYPD Firebombing Apologizes to 'Everybody,'" NBC New York, November 15, 2022, <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/investigations/upstate-woman-sentenced-to-72-months-for-nypd-firebombing-during-2020-protests/3958275/>.

<sup>136</sup> United States Attorney Eastern District of New York Pre-Sentence Investigation Report Memo, *United States v. Urooj Rahman*, September 22, 2022, <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/23314550/prosecutors-rahman-memorandum.pdf>.

<sup>137</sup> United States Attorney Eastern District of New York Pre-Sentence Investigation Report Memo.



officers in a derogatory manner within group chats, writing “f\*\*\* 12”—an anti-police slogan—and calling officers “pigs.”<sup>138</sup>

In addition to grievances emanating from Floyd’s murder, personal stressors may have played a role in Mattis and Rahman’s decision to conduct an act of violence. In March 2020, Mattis was furloughed from his job as an associate at a law firm, and his existing struggles with alcohol abuse worsened. According to court documents, on the day of their attack, Mattis was drinking alcohol throughout the day and exchanging “despairing messages” over Floyd’s murder with his friends, including Rahman.<sup>139</sup> Hours before he joined protests in Brooklyn, Mattis cried while watching the video of Floyd’s murder for the first time. At Rahman’s sentencing, her lawyer told the judge that “her emotions, her anger, her despair, her rage, got the better of her.”<sup>140</sup> He also noted that she has participated in therapy and Alcoholics Anonymous since the incident.

Both cases involved the deliberate targeting of police, as well as expressions of anti-law enforcement sentiments and grievances surrounding the killing of George Floyd—clear indications that the murder acted as a catalytic event. Given a lack of evidence that these individuals were affiliated with extremist groups or were otherwise planning to perpetrate an attack, it appears that Floyd’s killing played a central role in mobilizing them to violence. However, the cases seem to diverge in terms of the way Floyd’s murder catalyzed the perpetrators to violence. Shader’s past criminal activity and stated interest in “causing hell” seems to suggest that she viewed the protests as an opportunity to stir chaos, whereas Mattis and Rahman appeared to act upon deep-seated rage and grievances related to perceived racial injustices and police brutality. Both incidents occurred just three days following Floyd’s killing, underscoring the potential for catalytic events to rapidly drive malicious actors to violence.

---

<sup>138</sup> United States Attorney Eastern District of New York Pre-Sentence Investigation Report Memo.

<sup>139</sup> Hurubie Meko and Rebecca Davis O’Brien, “During George Floyd Protests, 2 Lawyers’ Futures Went Up in Flames,” *New York Times*, January 26, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/26/nyregion/lawyers-sentenced-molotov-police-car.html>.

<sup>140</sup> Meko and O’Brien.

## E. VEHICLE RAMMING AT PROTEST IN VIRGINIA

The final case study of this chapter examines the vehicle ramming attack that occurred at a protest in Virginia following the killing of George Floyd. This incident appears to have been catalyzed by the widespread civil unrest in response to Floyd's murder rather than the murder itself. On June 7, 2020, Harry Rogers drove his pickup truck into Black Lives Matter protesters near Richmond, Virginia.<sup>141</sup> He struck at least two people, but no one was seriously injured. Law enforcement authorities arrested Rogers later that day while he and others were monitoring another group of protesters approximately two miles from the initial incident.<sup>142</sup> He later pleaded guilty to charges, including assault and battery, failing to stop after a crash, and destruction of property, and was sentenced to over three years in prison.<sup>143</sup>

Evidence uncovered during the investigation and his own statements confirmed Rogers' affiliation with REMVE ideologies. According to prosecutors, Rogers admitted to being a "leader of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and a propagandist for Confederate ideology."<sup>144</sup> Rogers' attorney noted that he was "born into" the group and never attempted to hide that fact.<sup>145</sup> During a search of Rogers' truck and residence after the incident, officers discovered multiple weapons and clips of ammunition, patches of the Confederate flag and the local KKK chapter of which he claimed to be a leader, and KKK literature.<sup>146</sup>

In terms of his target selection, Rogers' statements on social media after the incident suggested his desire to target protesters or that, at minimum, he felt a sense of pride in having done so. Before his arrest, Rogers boasted about the vehicle ramming on

---

<sup>141</sup> Azi Paybarah, "K.K.K. Member Who Drove Into Protesters Gets More Than 3 Years in Prison," *New York Times*, February 10, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/09/us/virginia-kkk-harry-rogers-sentenced.html>.

<sup>142</sup> Paybarah.

<sup>143</sup> Paybarah.

<sup>144</sup> Paybarah.

<sup>145</sup> "KKK Member Pleads Guilty to Driving into Crowd of Protesters," AP News, February 5, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/race-and-ethnicity-virginia-crime-583a8059e75175683a61045bc131d1b2>.

<sup>146</sup> Laura Ly, "An 'admitted Leader of the KKK' Is Sentenced to 6 Years in Prison for Driving His Truck through Black Lives Matter Protesters," CNN, August 12, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/12/us/kkk-virginia-man-sentenced-trnd/index.html>.

Facebook live, saying, “This Chevrolet 2500 went up on the curb and through the protest” and “They started scattering like [expletive] cockroaches... It’s kind of funny if you ask me.”<sup>147</sup> In a statement to media sources discussing Rogers’ social media videos following the attack, a prosecutor recalled that he was “regaling in how he revved the engine and drove right on through” the demonstrations.<sup>148</sup>

Rogers’ adherence to REMVE ideologies and his targeting of a Black Lives Matter protest suggest that he was catalyzed to violence, at least in part, by mass demonstrations following Floyd’s murder. Nationwide protests after the killing of Floyd likely exacerbated Rogers’ pre-existing racially motivated grievances and extremist beliefs. While Rogers may have otherwise mobilized to violence in response to a similar catalytic event, the explosion of demonstrations in reaction to perceived racial injustices and police brutality in May 2020 likely played a substantial role in the timing of his actions.

## **F. CONCLUSION**

These case studies demonstrate how a single catalytic event can mobilize individuals espousing a range of different ideologies to violence, as perpetrators expressed REMVE and AGAAVE beliefs. Additionally, like incidents discussed in the previous chapter, these case studies reiterate that catalytic events can play a variety of roles on a perpetrator’s road to violence. While Carrillo and those charged in the plot to incite violence at a protest in Las Vegas sought to exploit Floyd’s murder in furtherance of extremist beliefs, Mattis and Rahman appeared to mobilize primarily based on grievances connected to Floyd’s killing and perceived racial injustices more broadly. These case studies also show that individuals may be triggered to violence based on an occurrence or by the reaction to that occurrence—in this case, the killing of Floyd and subsequent mass demonstrations.

---

<sup>147</sup> AP News, “KKK Member Pleads Guilty to Driving into Crowd of Protesters.”

<sup>148</sup> Ly, “An ‘admitted Leader of the KKK’ Is Sentenced to 6 Years in Prison for Driving His Truck through Black Lives Matter Protesters.”

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

## IV. 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AS A CATALYTIC EVENT

This final set of case studies applies the structured, focused comparison to just two cases linked to the 2020 presidential election to assess the election’s role in sparking plots and acts of violence. The chapter begins with a discussion of hostile online rhetoric, threats, and civil unrest surrounding the election and the corresponding elevation in the threat environment. As in the previous cases, various extremists sought to leverage the contentious nature of the election in online messaging and propaganda. The remaining sections include case studies of the U.S. Capitol riot, focusing specifically on violent incidents that occurred amid the riot, and the plot to target the Democratic Headquarters in Sacramento, California, with an IED in the months following the election.

### A. SETTING THE STAGE

The lead-up to and aftermath of the 2020 presidential election was characterized by divisive, inflammatory, and at times violent rhetoric directed at political opponents, widespread demonstrations occasionally involving unlawful paramilitary or heavily armed actors, and plots and acts of violence, including incidents that occurred amid the U.S. Capitol riot on January 6, 2021. An unprecedented number of election administrators received threats in 2020, leading the Department of Justice to launch a task force to “address the rise in threats against election workers, administrators, officials, and others associated with the electoral process.”<sup>149</sup> Additionally, according to a survey commissioned by the *Brennan Center* published in June 2021, “one in three election officials feel unsafe because of their job, and nearly one in five listed threats to their lives as a job-related concern.”<sup>150</sup>

---

<sup>149</sup> “Justice Department Launches Task Force to Combat Threats Against Election Workers,” Press Release, Department of Justice, July 29, 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/blog/justice-department-launches-task-force-combat-threats-against-election-workers-0>.

<sup>150</sup> Brennan Center for Justice and the Bipartisan Policy Center, “Election Officials Under Attack,” *Brennan Center for Justice and the Bipartisan Policy Center*, June 16, 2021, 4, [https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/BCJ-129%20ElectionOfficials\\_v7.pdf](https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/BCJ-129%20ElectionOfficials_v7.pdf).

In the weeks following the election and before the inauguration, there were “Stop the Steal” events around the country, rallying around baseless allegations that President Joe Biden’s election win was the result of widespread fraud and thus illegitimate.<sup>151</sup> In “The Rise of Political Violence in the United States,” Rachel Kleinfeld asserted that “those who believed the election was fraudulent were far more likely to endorse coups and armed citizen rebellion.”<sup>152</sup> She noted that, by February 2021, “a quarter of Republicans felt that it was at least ‘a little’ justified to take over state government buildings with violence to advance their political goals.”<sup>153</sup>

During this time, various online extremists and malicious actors, including REMVEs and conspiracy-driven malicious actors, sought to exploit the post-election political environment to spread disinformation and incite violence. For example, on November 24, 2020, an anonymous user on 4Chan began a thread on the forum’s far-right “/pol” board regarding the “obvious election fraud,” prompting other users to promote conspiracies and issue violent rhetoric. One user wrote, “Shoot up the inauguration,” before adding “in Minecraft”—a common refrain of online extremists who believe they cannot be prosecuted for violent speech if they insinuate the action should occur within a video game.<sup>154</sup> Separately, an individual on 4Chan implied they were armed and prepared to “go door to door” and perpetrate a mass shooting if Biden won the presidential election.<sup>155</sup> In postings that foreshadowed the violence on January 6, users reacted to former President Trump’s social media post saying the rally that day would be “wild,” making comments

---

<sup>151</sup> Bridging Divides Initiative, *Report: Election 2020 Political Violence Data and Trends* (Princeton University), accessed June 10, 2023, <https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/sites/g/files/toruqf246/files/2021-02/Report-Election2020PoliticalViolenceDataandTrends%20%281%29.pdf>.

<sup>152</sup> Kleinfeld, “The Rise of Political Violence in the United States.”

<sup>153</sup> Kleinfeld.

<sup>154</sup> “Propagating Election Fraud Conspiracies, 4Chan Users Target President-Elect & Inauguration Ceremony in Calls for Violent Attacks,” SITE Intelligence Group, November 24, 2020, <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Far-Right/-Far-Left-Threat/propagating-election-fraud-conspiracies-4chan-users-target-president-elect-inauguration-ceremony-in-calls-for-violent-attacks.html>; “The Far Right’s Fear of ‘Glowies,’” *The Atlantic*, January 25, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/01/what-glowies-mean-online-spies/617717/>.

<sup>155</sup> “4Chan User Threatens to Carry Out, Livestream Mass Shooting If Biden Wins Election,” SITE Intelligence Group, November 11, 2020, <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Far-Right/-Far-Left-Threat/4chan-user-threatens-to-carryout-livestream-mass-shooting-if-biden-wins-election.html>.

like, “He can’t openly tell you to revolt. This is the closet he’ll ever get” and “Armed and ready, Mr. President.”<sup>156</sup> Given this context, it should come as no surprise that the 2020 presidential election served as a catalytic event for violence. In fact, the January 6 riot continues to resonate with extremists years later; On the second anniversary of the riot, at least two online messaging channels shared what they referred to as a “Jan 6<sup>th</sup> hype video” with footage of individuals breaking into the capitol and confronting law enforcement officers. At the end of the video, text on the screen read, “THEY FEAR YOU...BY THE PEOPLE, *FEAR* THE PEOPLE.”<sup>157</sup>

## **B. U.S. CAPITOL RIOT**

In contrast to previous cases included in this study, this case study does not focus on a single plot or attack but instead on the collection of violent incidents that occurred amid the U.S. Capitol riot on January 6, 2021. These incidents involved many perpetrators, all with varying levels of pre-meditation, violent intent, and association with extremist groups and ideologies. While the complex and extensive nature of this case makes it more challenging to analyze within the catalytic events framework, the indisputable role that the 2020 presidential election played in catalyzing individuals to violence that day made it impossible to omit from this study. This section will provide an overview of violent acts that occurred at the U.S. Capitol, as well as cases where there was evidence of planning for violence before the riot. Additionally, it will outline, to the extent possible, how the 2020 presidential election contributed to sparking violent outcomes.

On January 6, 2021, following the “Save America March,” a rally held by former President Trump near the White House ahead of Congress certifying the Electoral College votes in the 2020 presidential election, thousands of people stormed past security barriers and breached the U.S. Capitol building. According to court documents reviewed by media sources, rioters wielded various “deadly or dangerous” weapons, including “Tasers,

---

<sup>156</sup> “‘Armed and Ready, Mr. President’: Demonstrators Urged to Bring Guns, Prepare for Violence at January 6 ‘Stop the Steal’ Protest in DC,” SITE Intelligence Group, December 24, 2020, <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Far-Right/-Far-Left-Threat/armed-and-ready-mr-president-demonstrators-urged-to-bring-guns-prepare-for-violence-at-january-6-stop-the-steal-protest-in-dc.html>.

<sup>157</sup> “January 6th Hype Video,” Telegram, January 6, 2023.

tomahawk axes, crowbars, flagpoles, a knife, an ice axe, a firecracker, a stun gun, baseball bats, fire extinguishers, a wooden club, and chemical spray.”<sup>158</sup> At least three individuals were accused of carrying loaded firearms.<sup>159</sup> By the time law enforcement secured the Capitol, rioters smashed windows and defaced the offices of perceived political enemies, including Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.<sup>160</sup> Several rioters also possessed zip ties and flex cuffs, signaling they were likely intent on capturing or harming members of Congress.<sup>161</sup> Nearly 140 police officers from U.S. Capitol Police and the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department were injured during the riot.<sup>162</sup> As of August 6, 2023, police have arrested over 1,106 defendants in nearly all 50 states on charges in connection with January 6.<sup>163</sup> Approximately 372 individuals have been charged with “assaulting, resisting, or impeding officers or employees,” including 112 individuals charged with “using a deadly or dangerous weapon or causing serious bodily injury to an officer.”<sup>164</sup>

Though many who entered the Capitol on January 6 likely did not have premeditated plans to do so, members of far-right militia groups such as the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers were almost certainly catalyzed to plot deliberate, violent action immediately following the election of President Biden. On May 4, 2023, a jury convicted the leader of the Proud Boys, Enrique Tarrio, and three other members of seditious conspiracy and additional charges for their role in the riot. Court proceedings revealed that in the lead-up to the riot, members exchanged messages that were “overtly violent and

---

<sup>158</sup> Cassidy McDonald, “Handguns, Crowbars, Tasers and Tomahawk Axes: Dozens of Capitol Rioters Wielded ‘Deadly or Dangerous’ Weapons, Prosecutors Say,” CBS News, May 27, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/capitol-riot-weapons-deadly-dangerous/>.

<sup>159</sup> McDonald.

<sup>160</sup> Jaclyn Peiser, “Pelosi Says Staff Hid under a Table for Hours as Rioters Vandalized Her Office: ‘A Terrible, Terrible Violation,’” *Washington Post*, January 11, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/01/11/pelosi-60-minutes-capitol-impeachment/>.

<sup>161</sup> Adam Rawnsley and Kelly Weill, “‘Rush the Police, Hog Tie Them’: Inside the Far Right’s Zip-Tie Fetish,” *The Daily Beast*, January 14, 2021, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/why-were-the-capitol-rioters-carrying-zip-ties>.

<sup>162</sup> Department of Justice, “31 Months Since the Jan. 6 Attack on the Capitol,” Press Release, Department of Justice, August 6, 2023, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/31-months-jan-6-attack-capitol>.

<sup>163</sup> Department of Justice.

<sup>164</sup> Department of Justice.



hinted at action at the Capitol,” including saying they should keep Trump in power “by any means necessary including by force.”<sup>165</sup> On March 20, 2023, in the final trial against members of the Oath Keepers stemming from January 6, a jury found six individuals guilty on various charges, bringing the total number of members convicted on felony charges to 15.<sup>166</sup> Highlighting some group members’ premeditated violent intent, prosecutors alleged that a Florida-based member of the Oath Keepers transported explosives to a Virginia hotel in his recreational vehicle on January 6.<sup>167</sup> During the riot, some group members entered the U.S. Capitol building wearing tactical gear, while others reportedly stayed back at the hotel, where a “quick reaction force” was waiting with firearms that could be transported to the Capitol if deemed necessary.<sup>168</sup> Prosecutors asserted that members of the militia group held training camps focused on military tactics in preparation for the riot.<sup>169</sup>

Amid the riot, law enforcement officers also rendered pipe bombs safe at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee and the Republican National Committee in Washington, DC. No one has been apprehended in connection with the incidents, and the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) are offering a combined reward of up to \$490,000 for information leading to the location, arrest, and conviction of the person(s) responsible for placing the IEDs on January 5, 2021. The suspect wore a face mask, glasses, gloves, and a grey hooded sweatshirt to conceal their identity.<sup>170</sup> While the precise motive of the perpetrator(s) remains unknown,

---

<sup>165</sup> Ryan J. Reilly, “Proud Boys Were ‘thirsting for Violence’ on Jan. 6, DOJ Says in Closing Arguments,” NBC News, April 24, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/proud-boys-thirsting-violence-jan-6-doj-says-closing-arguments-rcna80866>.

<sup>166</sup> “Six Additional Oath Keepers Members and Affiliates Found Guilty of Charges Related to Capitol Breach,” Press Release, Department of Justice, March 21, 2023, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/six-additional-oath-keepers-members-and-affiliates-found-guilty-charges-related-capitol>.

<sup>167</sup> David Morgan, “Oath Keeper Brought Explosives to D.C. Ahead of Jan. 6 Attack, Prosecutor Says,” Reuters, July 11, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/oath-keeper-brought-explosives-dc-ahead-jan-6-attack-prosecutor-says-2022-07-09/>.

<sup>168</sup> Alexander Mallin and Will Steakin, “Oath Keepers Stashed Weapons at Hotel for Potential Jan. 6 Violence, Prosecutors Indicate,” ABC News, April 13, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/oath-keepers-stashed-weapons-hotel-potential-jan-violence/story?id=77048420>.

<sup>169</sup> Morgan, “Oath Keeper Brought Explosives to D.C. Ahead of Jan. 6 Attack, Prosecutor Says.”

<sup>170</sup> “Pipe Bombs in Washington, D.C.,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, January 5, 2021, <https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/seeking-info/suspected-pipe-bombs-in-washington-dc>.

the placement of the devices at two locations associated with U.S. political parties the evening before the certification of the Electoral College votes almost certainly indicates a link to the 2020 presidential election, whether those responsible held political grievances or desired to capitalize on the chaos surrounding the election.

Whether they were triggered to violence on the day of the riot or engaged in pre-planning as part of a militia group, malicious actors charged in connection with the U.S. Capitol riot were fueled by grievances concerning the 2020 presidential election results. Similar to previously highlighted incidents, the Capitol riot reinforces how quickly individuals can mobilize to violence in response to a catalytic event. While the election of President Biden broadly served as a catalytic event, former President Trump’s rally, in conjunction with Congress’s imminent certification of the election results, represented a final trigger point for many. The rally brought together individuals harboring similar grievances, some of whom arrived that day with plans for violence, creating a perfect storm that rendered a violent outcome almost inevitable.

### **C. PLOT TO BOMB SACRAMENTO DEMOCRATIC HEADQUARTERS**

The final case study of this chapter examines a plot to perpetrate an IED attack targeting political opponents in what appears to be an incident directly catalyzed by grievances surrounding the 2020 presidential election. On July 21, 2021, Ian Benjamin Rogers and Jarrod Copeland were indicted in a plot to destroy the John L. Burton Democratic Headquarters in Sacramento, California.<sup>171</sup> Law enforcement authorities arrested Rogers on January 15, 2021, after a tip led to the discovery of approximately 50 firearms, including “at least three fully automatic weapons, thousands of rounds of ammunition, and five pipe bombs” during a search of his residence.<sup>172</sup> He reportedly possessed black powder, pipes, other bomb-making material, and military manuals,

---

<sup>171</sup> Department of Justice, “Second Man Pleads Guilty to Scheme to Attack Democratic Headquarters in Sacramento.”

<sup>172</sup> Indictment, *United States v. Ian Benjamin Rogers and Jarrod Copeland*, July 7, 2021, <https://www.courthousenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/indictmentfirebomb.pdf>.

including the “U.S. Army Improvised Munitions Handbook.”<sup>173</sup> Police arrested Copeland two days later. Both men pleaded guilty, admitting they “conspired together between November 2020 and January 2021” to attack the building by throwing ignited gasoline cans through the front windows.<sup>174</sup> Rogers was sentenced to nine years in prison, while Copeland was sentenced to four and a half years.<sup>175</sup>

Of the incidents included in the case studies, this plot is among the clearest in terms of its link to a catalytic event—the 2020 presidential election and, more specifically, the election of President Biden. Across multiple messages, Rogers suggested a desire to go to “war” when Biden was sworn in as the 46<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. In one message, he stated, “Let’s see what happens after the 20<sup>th</sup> we go to war”—referring to the inauguration—and in another, he said, “I hope 45 goes to war if he doesn’t I will”—referring to Trump, who was the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States.<sup>176</sup> According to prosecutors, Rogers and Copeland were elated after the January 6 U.S. Capitol riot, with Copeland sending a series of text messages, including, “REVOLUTION,” “I’m [expletive] juiced!!!!” and “I’m bout to throw my gear on and drive around and punish sombitces [sic].”<sup>177</sup>

The men’s grievances surrounding the 2020 presidential election directly influenced their target selection. According to the indictment, “prompted by the outcome of the 2020 president election,” Rogers and Copeland began to plot attacks against “targets

---

<sup>173</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, “Two Men Charged With Plotting to Blow Up California Democratic Headquarters,” *New York Times*, July 16, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/16/us/ian-rogers-jarrod-copeland-indicted.html>.

<sup>174</sup> Department of Justice, “Second Man Pleads Guilty to Scheme to Attack Democratic Headquarters in Sacramento.”

<sup>175</sup> Taylor Romine, “Two Men Who Conspired to Attack Democratic Headquarters in Sacramento Sentenced to Prison,” CNN, March 2, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/01/politics/democratic-headquarters-sacramento-plot-sentenced/index.html>.

<sup>176</sup> MacFarquhar, “Two Men Charged With Plotting to Blow Up California Democratic Headquarters.”

<sup>177</sup> Ryan Lucas, “2 California Men Have Been Charged With Plotting To Bomb A Democratic Party Building,” NPR, July 16, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/16/1016844817/2-california-men-have-been-charged-with-plotting-to-bomb-a-democratic-building>.

they associated with Democrats,” believing that they needed to “pay.”<sup>178</sup> The indictment noted that, just four days after the election, the men identified the Sacramento Democratic Headquarters as their potential first target, expressing that they believed an attack on the building would start a “movement.”<sup>179</sup> They explored other targets they associated with Democrats, including the Governor’s mansion and the offices of Twitter and Facebook, before ultimately settling on the Democratic Headquarters.<sup>180</sup> In January 2021, Rogers allegedly told Copeland, “I want to blow up a democrat building bad,” adding, “I’m thinking [Sacramento] office first target.”<sup>181</sup>

Rogers and Copeland belonged to a local anti-government militia affiliated with the Three Percenters, suggesting that their pre-existing ideological beliefs interacted with grievances surrounding the 2020 presidential election to catalyze them to plot an act of violence.<sup>182</sup> According to the indictment, in late December 2020, Copeland told Rogers that he reached out to anti-government paramilitary groups—identified in open source as the Three Percenters and the Proud Boys—to gather support for their “movement” to overthrow the government.<sup>183</sup> After police arrested Rogers on January 15, 2021, Copeland immediately contacted the militia group he belonged to and deleted all his communications in response to their advice.<sup>184</sup> Rogers also appeared to view himself as closely affiliated with the militia; media reporting indicated that he had a sticker referencing the Three

---

<sup>178</sup> Indictment, *United States v. Ian Benjamin Rogers and Jarrod Copeland*.

<sup>179</sup> Indictment.

<sup>180</sup> MacFarquhar, “Two Men Charged With Plotting to Blow Up California Democratic Headquarters.”

<sup>181</sup> Jerry Lambe, “Two Far-Right Trump Supporters Who Sought ‘war’ over 2020 Election Sentenced for Conspiring to Blow up Democratic Headquarters,” Law & Crime, March 4, 2023, <https://lawandcrime.com/crime/two-far-right-trump-supporters-who-sought-war-over-2020-election-sentenced-for-conspiring-to-blow-up-democratic-headquarters/>.

<sup>182</sup> Lucas, “2 California Men Have Been Charged With Plotting To Bomb A Democratic Party Building.”

<sup>183</sup> MacFarquhar, “Two Men Charged With Plotting to Blow Up California Democratic Headquarters.”

<sup>184</sup> Department of Justice, “Second Man Pleads Guilty to Scheme to Attack Democratic Headquarters in Sacramento.”

Percenters on his vehicle.<sup>185</sup> While planning their future acts of violence, Rogers and Copeland discussed being labeled “domestic terrorists.” They asserted that they hoped their actions would “make others get involved,” indicating that they desired their attack to have far-reaching impacts in alignment with their extremist ideological goals.

In addition to extremist ideologies and grievances linked to the presidential election, personal stressors appeared to play a role in the suspects’ pathway to plotting violence. At a sentencing hearing for Rogers in April 2023, the judge concluded that a mental evaluation supported Rogers’ prior assertions that his crimes were “largely driven by a lack of self-restraint caused by alcoholism.”<sup>186</sup> Rogers told the court that his drinking problem worsened with the onset of the pandemic when business at his auto garage dropped 40%.<sup>187</sup> In a letter to the judge, Rogers admitted that, while he was acting upon beliefs that the “election was stolen,” he was “in a dark place” and was “abusing alcohol and acting out.”<sup>188</sup> While there is limited publicly available information surrounding the potential role of personal stressors in Copeland’s case, his arrests on two occasions for desertion of the U.S. military and “other than honorable discharge” in 2016 may also indicate a troubled past that contributed to his radicalization.<sup>189</sup>

Communications between Rogers and Copeland, in which they plotted violence against Democratic targets and expressed a desire for “war” in response to the election of President Biden, illustrate that the 2020 presidential election served as a catalytic event.<sup>190</sup> A lack of evidence that the men planned for an attack before the election, along with their identification of the Democratic Headquarters in Sacramento as a target just four days later,

---

<sup>185</sup> Indictment, *United States v. Ian Benjamin Rogers and Jarrod Copeland*.

<sup>186</sup> Howard Yune, “Update: Napa Resident Ian Rogers, Jarrod Copeland Sentenced in Bomb Plot against Democratic Office,” *Napa Valley Register*, March 1, 2023, [https://napavalleyregister.com/news/local/update-napa-resident-ian-rogers-jarro-copeland-sentenced-in-bomb-plot-against-democratic-office/article\\_4d5b2f66-b86f-11ed-9760-4343d06b4e71.html](https://napavalleyregister.com/news/local/update-napa-resident-ian-rogers-jarro-copeland-sentenced-in-bomb-plot-against-democratic-office/article_4d5b2f66-b86f-11ed-9760-4343d06b4e71.html).

<sup>187</sup> Yune.

<sup>188</sup> Yune.

<sup>189</sup> Lucas, “2 California Men Have Been Charged With Plotting To Bomb A Democratic Party Building.”

<sup>190</sup> MacFarquhar, “Two Men Charged With Plotting to Blow Up California Democratic Headquarters.”

suggests that it played a central role in rapidly sparking them to violence. Rogers' and Copeland's association with militia groups points to the fact that the men likely held pre-existing anti-government extremist beliefs, with the election adding fuel to the fire that ultimately motivated them to undertake violent action. This case also underscores the potential for personal stressors to interact with extremist beliefs and grievances, raising the likelihood of a violent outcome. While it is impossible to know whether the men ultimately would have carried out their plot, their engagement in extensive planning and stockpiling of weapons suggests that such an outcome was more likely than not.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Both case studies similarly illustrate how the 2020 presidential election fueled grievances of malicious actors, acting in conjunction with extremist ideological beliefs and personal stressors to mobilize them to violence. In both cases, these grievances appeared to play a primary role, with an apparent lack of planning for violence before the 2020 presidential election on the part of the perpetrators. Many individuals who espouse extremist ideologies and harbor political grievances likely never reach the threshold of conducting a violent act, rendering the impact of the catalytic event a significant factor in cases such as those highlighted in this chapter.

## **V. ASSESSING THE ROLE OF VARIOUS FACTORS ON THE ROAD TO VIOLENCE**

The structured, focused comparison of cases in this thesis enabled a targeted study of how catalytic events mobilize individuals to violence, as well as how these events interact with other risk factors to produce a violent outcome. This chapter examines the influence of these various risk factors, including links to extremist ideologies and groups; personal stressors and mental health issues; and criminal history. The chapter then turns to an assessment of the influence of the catalytic event—namely, its apparent impact on perpetrators’ target selection and attack timing. Through this comparative analysis of perpetrators on the road to violence, we can begin to anticipate how perpetrators of future acts of catalytic event-driven violence may radicalize and mobilize to violence, as well as how they may approach and plan for their assaults. The overarching themes and key findings presented in this chapter inform the typology of catalytic event-driven violence outlined in the concluding chapter.

### **A. LINKS TO EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES AND GROUPS**

Perpetrators of plots and acts of violence in this analysis had alleged ties to a variety of extremist ideologies, beliefs, and/or mindsets, including REMVE, extremist conspiracies, and AGAAVE, specifically militia violent extremism (MVE) and anarchist violent extremism (AVE). The broad range of extremist ideologies and beliefs among the perpetrators in these cases suggests that catalytic events have the potential to mobilize individuals across the ideological spectrum to violence. Additionally, the cases illustrate that the same catalytic event can trigger malicious actors to plot or conduct attacks in conjunction with vastly different extremist ideologies and beliefs.

Of the 11 cases examined in this study, at least seven involved perpetrators who were assessed to be members of extremist groups based on their own admissions, social media activity, and participation in meetings with other members of the organizations. These groups included NSM, the Wolverine Watchmen, the Three Percenters, local affiliates of the Boogaloo movement, the KKK, the Oath Keepers, and the Proud Boys. In

both cases of IID attacks targeting the NYPD, the suspects appeared to espouse AVE beliefs and expressed strong anti-law enforcement sentiments. While there is no evidence that the perpetrators of these acts of violence were active members of organized extremist groups, they may have informally associated with likeminded individuals similarly prone to or supportive of acts of violence or destruction, as is commonly the case with AVEs. Finally, the individual who carried out the intentional train derailment near the U.S. Navy hospital ship in California engaged with extremist conspiracies online, while the individual who conducted the machete attack in Tennessee had no discernable ties to extremist ideologies or groups. Table 1 summarizes the extremist ideology or belief system associated with each case, as well as groups to which the perpetrators belonged.

Table 1. Perpetrator Affiliations with Extremist Ideologies and Groups

Case	Ideology/ belief systems?	Type	Member of group?	Group
Plot to Bomb Missouri Medical Center	X	REMVE	X	NSM
Train Derailment Near U.S. Navy Hospital Ship	X	Conspiracy		N/A
Plot to Kidnap Michigan Governor	X	AGAAVE (MVE)	X	Wolverine Watchmen, Three Percenters
Machete Attack Targeting Couple in Nashville		N/A		N/A
Targeted Shootings of Officers in California	X	AGAAVE (MVE)	X	Boogaloo
Plot to Incite Violence at Protest in Las Vegas	X	AGAAVE (MVE)	X	Boogaloo
IID Attack on NYPD Officers	X	AGAAVE (AVE)		N/A
IID Attack on Unoccupied NYPD Vehicle	X	AGAAVE (AVE)		N/A
Vehicle Ramming at Protest in Virginia	X	REMVE	X	KKK
US Capitol Riot	X	AGAAVE (MVE)	X	Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, etc.
Plot to Bomb Sacramento Democratic Headquarters	X	AGAAVE (MVE)	X	Three Percenters



## **B. PERSONAL STRESSORS AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES**

It is crucial to consider the role of personal stressors and mental health issues in an individual's trajectory toward violence. In at least four cases, open-source reporting indicated that one or more of the perpetrators suffered from psychological and/or substance abuse problems. Personal stressors and mental health issues may have also played a role in other cases, although such details might not always be publicly disclosed. The presence of these factors does not negate the impact or diminish the significance of the catalytic event. Instead, it reiterates how personal stressors and mental health issues often play a role in radicalization and mobilization processes and how catalytic events may further compound these issues to produce violent outcomes.

Reporting on personal stressors and mental health issues in these cases offers insightful context on the mindset of the suspects as they proceeded down a violent path. For Eduardo Moreno, who conducted the intentional train derailment targeting a U.S. Navy hospital ship, consuming “copious amounts of caffeine” negatively impacted his psychological state, likely rendering him more susceptible to the extremist conspiracies on which he impulsively decided to act.<sup>191</sup> Colinford Mattis and Urooj Rahman—the perpetrators of an IID attack targeting an unoccupied NYPD vehicle amid Floyd protests—and Ian Benjamin Rogers—the suspect arrested in connection with the plot to bomb the Sacramento Democratic Headquarters—all reportedly struggled with alcoholism. Additionally, just months before his targeted assault on law enforcement, Mattis was furloughed from his job. Finally, Kelvin Edwards—the perpetrator of an edged weapon assault in Nashville—was homeless at the time of his attack. This incident represents the single case in this study with no evidence of the influence of extremist ideologies, suggesting that personal stressors, along with the pandemic as a catalytic event, were particularly central to the outcome of violence.

---

<sup>191</sup> Gault, “Man Inspired by QAnon and Hopped Up on Caffeine Purposefully Derailed Train.”

## **C. CRIMINAL HISTORY**

Several of the perpetrators in these case studies had a criminal history prior to their plots and attacks, demonstrating a propensity for criminality and/or violence.<sup>192</sup> Kelvin Edwards, for instance, was convicted on charges of felony vandalism in 2017 and, while serving time in prison, was charged and convicted on two counts of assault.<sup>193</sup> Samantha Shader, who perpetrated an IID attack targeting NYPD officers amid protests following Floyd's murder, had a lengthy criminal history, including acts of violence and resisting arrest.<sup>194</sup> Finally, law enforcement arrested Jarrod Copeland—the second individual charged in connection with the plot to bomb the Sacramento Democratic Headquarters—on two prior occasions for desertion from the U.S. military.<sup>195</sup> These instances suggest a pattern of criminal behavior and a troubled history that may have contributed to their radicalization and susceptibility to being triggered to violence by a catalytic event.

## **D. THE CATALYTIC EVENT**

This section focuses on the factor central to this research—the catalytic event, specifically its influence on perpetrators' target selection and attack timing. This section reviews evidence, or lack thereof, regarding the catalytic event's impact on the target selection of perpetrators. Additionally, it compares the duration of time between the catalytic event and the disrupted plot or act of violence to discern how quickly individuals triggered by a catalytic event mobilize to violence.

---

<sup>192</sup> All of the findings in this thesis are derived from publicly available information. Since no law enforcement database or public records checks were conducted in connection with this research, it is possible that some suspects could in fact have a criminal record that is not referenced in open source.

<sup>193</sup> Haworth, "Man Slashes Married Couple with Machete, Says He Was Angry over Coronavirus Lockdown."

<sup>194</sup> Dienst and Winter, "'I Have No Excuse:' Tearful Woman in NYPD Firebombing Apologizes to 'Everybody.'"

<sup>195</sup> Lucas, "2 California Men Have Been Charged With Plotting To Bomb A Democratic Party Building."

## 1. Target Selection

In all cases but one, the catalytic event clearly impacted the perpetrators' target selection. In a minority of cases, this influence manifested in the adjustment of their existing targeting plans following the catalytic event, while in most of the cases, the perpetrators' initial target selection was directly responsive to the catalytic event. In one case, while the catalytic event seemed to play a role in setting off the act of violence, the actual target of the attack was not linked to the catalytic event itself. Table 2 groups cases according to whether the catalytic event altered, determined, or had no impact on the perpetrators' target selection.

Table 2. Impact of Catalytic Event on Target Selection

Catalytic Event <b>Altered</b> Target Selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plot to Bomb Missouri Medical Center</li><li>• Plot to Incite Violence at Protest in Las Vegas</li></ul>
Catalytic Event <b>Determined</b> Target Selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Train Derailment Near U.S. Navy Hospital Ship</li><li>• Plot to Kidnap Michigan Governor</li><li>• Targeted Shootings of Officers in California</li><li>• IID Attack on NYPD Officers</li><li>• IID Attack on Unoccupied NYPD Vehicle</li><li>• Vehicle Ramming at Protest in Virginia</li><li>• U.S. Capitol Riot</li><li>• Plot to Bomb Sacramento Democratic Headquarters</li></ul>
Catalytic Event <b>Had No Discernable Impact</b> on Target Selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Machete Attack Targeting Couple in Nashville</li></ul>

In at least two cases, the suspects were already intent on conducting violence before the catalytic event and considered other potential locations before settling on their ultimate target. Timothy Wilson, who espoused REMVE views, explored perpetrating an attack against Islamic Centers, a synagogue, a nuclear power plant, and a predominantly black elementary school before deciding to target a hospital at the onset of the pandemic.<sup>196</sup> Similarly, Stephen T. Parshall, Andrew Lynam, and William L. Loomis, who plotted to

---

<sup>196</sup> Vockrodt, "FBI Releases How Man Who Plotted to Bomb KC Area Hospital Died in Battle with Agents."

throw IIDs at officers during Floyd-related protests in Las Vegas, previously discussed plans to “destroy an observation station at Lake Mead, near Las Vegas, destroy power substations, [and] throw a smoke bomb” at a rally to reopen businesses closed due to the pandemic.<sup>197</sup> In both cases, the suspects altered their target selection following the catalytic event, appearing to perceive it as an opportunity to maximize violence—a concept that will be codified as a type of catalytic event-driven violence in the following chapter.

The lack of evidence of pre-operational planning prior to the catalytic event in most cases suggests that a catalytic event often simultaneously sparks a perpetrator’s interest in conducting violence while directly influencing their target selection. For example, Steven Carrillo, who carried out multiple shootings against law enforcement officers in California, explicitly stated on social media that protests following Floyd’s murder represented a “great opportunity” to target law enforcement.<sup>198</sup> In both highlighted cases of IID attacks targeting the NYPD amid Floyd protests, the perpetrators also directly mobilized to violence against law enforcement, who appeared to be the sole target of their violent acts. For Ian Benjamin Rogers and Jarrod Copeland, the outcome of the 2020 presidential election prompted them to consider attacks against various targets they associated with Democrats, including the Democratic Headquarters in Sacramento, the Governor’s mansion, and the offices of two major social media companies.<sup>199</sup>

One case included in this study is an outlier in terms of the catalytic event’s impact on the perpetrator’s target selection. Kelvin Edwards’ denial of access to a homeless shelter because of COVID-19 restrictions appeared to be the final trigger for his edged weapon attack targeting a couple at the office of a Public Storage warehouse. While his statements to investigators following the assault indicated that his frustrations with pandemic-related shutdowns and restrictions pushed him over the edge, the actual target of his violence was

---

<sup>197</sup> Blankstein, Winter, and Zadrozny, “Three Men Connected to ‘boogaloo’ Movement Tried to Provoke Violence at Protests, Feds Say.”

<sup>198</sup> Brett Woolard Affidavit, *United States v. Steven Carrillo*.

<sup>199</sup> MacFarquhar, “Two Men Charged With Plotting to Blow Up California Democratic Headquarters.”

seemingly random.<sup>200</sup> This finding suggests that catalytic events can sometimes trigger individuals suffering from personal stressors without an ideological extremist motive to violence, though such cases lack the same predictive value for law enforcement in anticipating potential targets.

## **2. Timing**

A review of the plots and acts of violence in this thesis reveals that individuals triggered by a catalytic event often rapidly mobilize to violence. This conclusion is based on an analysis of timing for eight of the 11 cases discussed in this thesis. In the three excluded cases, police arrested the suspects before the apparent commencement of their acts of violence, rendering it impossible to know when and if their plots would have ultimately materialized. This assessment included one plot in which the perpetrators were arrested prior to carrying out an act of violence, as it occurred while they were on their way to demonstrations with Molotov cocktails, suggesting an attack was imminent.

Perpetrators in five of the eight cases factored into this analysis mobilized to violence less than two weeks after the catalytic event, and in four of these cases, assailants mobilized in less than five days. Figure 1 depicts the duration of time between the overarching catalytic event—the COVID-19 pandemic, the police murder of George Floyd, and the 2020 presidential election—and the incidents they sparked. For the two cases linked to the pandemic, Figure 1 also notes the final trigger points of the arrival of the USNS Mercy hospital ship in Los Angeles on March 27, 2020, and Edwards’ denial of access to a homeless shelter based on COVID-19 restrictions less than 15 minutes prior to his attack.

---

<sup>200</sup> Mazza and Sparks, “Minutes before Machete Attack, Suspect Denied Access to Nashville Homeless Shelter Due to Coronavirus Restrictions.”

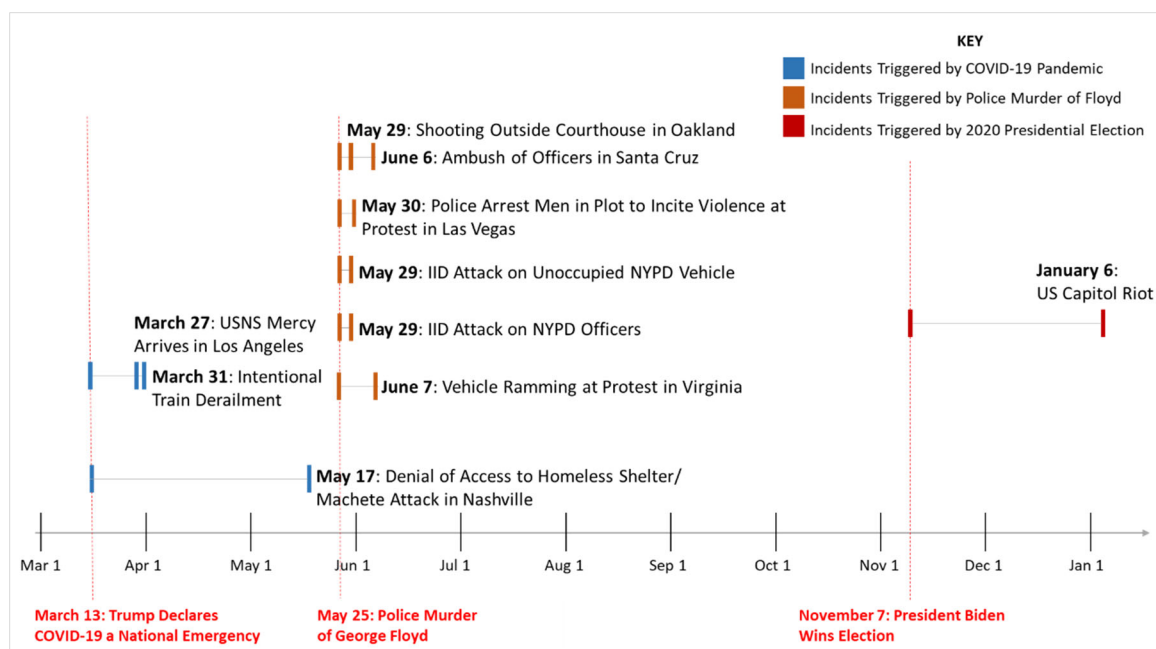


Figure 1. Timeline of Catalytic Events to Violence

While this study examined only a small subset of plots and attacks triggered by a catalytic event, these preliminary findings underscore the challenge for law enforcement in seeking to detect and disrupt acts of catalytic event-driven violence. Given the potentially short duration of time between a catalytic event and an act of violence, there becomes an apparent heightened sense of urgency for law enforcement to proactively identify an occurrence—whether a global crisis, a police-involved shooting, a controversial political outcome, or any other event—that is likely to serve as a catalytic event for a variety of extremists and malicious actors.

## E. CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis affirms that acts of terrorism and targeted violence, including those involving a catalytic event, are often precipitated by a complex interplay of various factors. These factors include, but are not limited to, links to extremist ideologies and groups; personal stressors and mental health issues; and criminal history. As this analysis shows, various malicious actors subject to some combination of these factors can be similarly triggered to violence by a catalytic event.

This chapter also demonstrates that a catalytic event may stimulate a malicious actor's initial desire to carry out an attack, as well as guide them in selecting a target for their deadly acts. The observed speed with which some perpetrators mobilize to violence following a catalytic event highlights the need for early detection and swift action to prevent and mitigate violent outcomes. Ultimately, this analysis demonstrates the need for a more deliberate approach to understanding and anticipating future acts of violence, one that accounts for the influence of catalytic events on the motivation and planning process of the perpetrator. Building upon findings and analyses outlined in this chapter, the final chapter presents an initial typology—or way of conceptualizing—different types of catalytic event-driven violence and their implications for law enforcement.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK



## **VI. CONCLUSION**

This final chapter summarizes the findings of this research before presenting a preliminary typology of catalytic event-driven violence and discussing its implications for law enforcement agencies. The chapter also outlines suggestions for future research intended to build upon this study and offers concluding insights on the value of a continued focus on catalytic events and their role in triggering acts of violence.

### **A. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH**

Through an analysis of plots and acts of violence triggered, at least in part, by the COVID-19 pandemic, the police murder of George Floyd, or the 2020 presidential election, this research has sought to gain insight into the ways in which catalytic events mobilize malicious actors to violence. While existing literature has largely recognized that catalytic events play a role in an individual's radicalization and mobilization to violence, it has also pointed to a lack of understanding regarding the significance of that role, as well as how catalytic events can be formally integrated into prevention and mitigation frameworks. This thesis applied a structured, focused comparison to review and analyze 11 cases, asking standardized questions to collect information on the influence of the catalytic event and its interaction with other risk factors such as adherence to extremist ideologies, membership in violent and/or extremist groups, personal stressors, and criminal history. Perpetrators of the plots and acts of violence in this study had alleged ties to extremist ideologies and groups across the spectrum and varied in terms of their struggle with personal stressors and their prior involvement in criminality—reiterating that catalytic events have the potential to trigger a range of individuals to violence. Most notably, this research illustrated the significance of the catalytic event in altering or determining the perpetrator's target selection and timing of their attack. Taken together, these findings suggest the existence of distinct types of catalytic event-driven violence.

### **B. TYPOLOGY OF CATALYTIC EVENT-DRIVEN VIOLENCE**

This section aggregates the observations and analyses presented throughout this thesis to create a preliminary typology of catalytic event-driven violence, focusing on the

ways in which catalytic events trigger an individual to violence and how law enforcement can use this knowledge to implement tailored prevention and mitigation strategies. The “types” of catalytic event-driven violence presented in this section are directly informed by observations from the case studies, the analysis of various factors on the road to violence covered in the previous chapter, and prior research examined in the literature review.

This thesis proposes that catalytic events trigger an individual to violence in three primary ways: 1) Presenting a perceived opportunity to maximize violence or capitalize on chaos, 2) Exacerbating grievances and contributing to radicalization, or 3) Compounding personal stressors, resulting in violence that may appear impulsive and/or random. These categories are fluid, and some overlap was observed even in this study’s small sample of cases, as is represented in Figure 2. The following sub-sections will articulate the “types” of catalytic event-driven violence, leveraging the case studies as examples.



Figure 2. Typology of Catalytic Event-Driven Violence

### **1. Presenting a Perceived Opportunity to Maximize Violence or Capitalize on Chaos**

The first “type” of catalytic event-driven violence involves a catalytic event that the perpetrator views as an opportunity to maximize violence or capitalize on chaos. The most notable aspect of this “type” is the direct way that the catalytic event guides the target selection and timing of the perpetrators, including those who may have already been on

law enforcement's radar and considering or planning for violence. In fact, some of the perpetrators in the case studies, including those involved in the plots to bomb a Missouri medical center and to incite violence at a protest in Las Vegas, discussed alternative targets before the catalytic event, signaling that they likely would have gone on to conduct an act of violence absent the catalytic event.<sup>201</sup> Additionally, one of the perpetrators of an IID attack targeting the NYPD had a lengthy criminal history and "traveled the country" perpetrating similar crimes, suggesting that she would have continued to engage in such acts of criminality and destruction irrespective of the killing of George Floyd.<sup>202</sup> Two cases that fall into this category involved adherents of the accelerationist Boogaloo movement; this should come as no surprise given that the goal of the movement itself is opportunistic in nature, with followers seeking to spark a civil war and bring about the collapse of society. Despite multiple cases falling into this category, existing literature reviewed as part of this thesis did not reference this "type" of catalytic event-driven violence, instead focusing more on the intersection between triggering events and grievances or personal stressors.

## **2. Exacerbating Grievances and Contributing to Radicalization**

The next "type" of catalytic event-driven violence involves a catalytic event that exacerbates the grievances of malicious actors and contributes to their radicalization. Unlike the previous category, catalytic events appear to be the primary determinant of violence for this "type," potentially triggering those with no prior links to extremist ideologies or plans for violence. In contrast with the existing literature, this "type" draws a direct link between catalytic events and grievances rather than presenting them as two separate factors on the road to violence. The second IID attack targeting the NYPD fits well in this category, as the perpetrators had no known prior involvement in acts of violence or criminality but possessed grievances concerning perceived racial injustices and police

---

<sup>201</sup> Vockrodt, "FBI Releases How Man Who Plotted to Bomb KC Area Hospital Died in Battle with Agents"; Blankstein, Winter, and Zadrozny, "Three Men Connected to 'boogaloo' Movement Tried to Provoke Violence at Protests, Feds Say."

<sup>202</sup> Dienst and Winter, "'I Have No Excuse:' Tearful Woman in NYPD Firebombing Apologizes to 'Everybody.'"

brutality.<sup>203</sup> The U.S. Capitol riot and the plot to bomb the Democratic Headquarters in Sacramento similarly stemmed from grievances, this time surrounding the 2020 presidential election. While some of the suspects subscribed to extremist ideologies, anger over the election of President Biden appeared to play a more direct role in sparking their violent actions. The plot to kidnap Governor Whitmer is one that crosses this category and the preceding one; while the Governor's pandemic-related policies exacerbated the suspects' grievances and intensified their extremist beliefs, there was also an opportunistic element, with some viewing the plot as lending itself to sparking a second civil war.<sup>204</sup>

### **3. Compounding Personal Stressors**

The final “type” of catalytic event-driven violence involves a catalytic event that compounds the personal stressors of the perpetrator, resulting in violence that may appear impulsive and/or random. These acts of violence in particular result from a complex interaction between internal and external triggers. This “type” codifies observations from the existing literature, further bolstered by analyses from the case studies. As Meloy and Pollard noted in their article examining the psychology of “lone actor terrorism,” a perpetrator may act impulsively following a triggering event, mobilizing to violence absent any preparation or planning.<sup>205</sup> The machete attack in Nashville is the only case in this study that falls squarely in this category. The perpetrator, a homeless individual, expressed frustrations with pandemic-related restrictions, not because of broader grievances or extremist ideologies, but because of the impact they had on him personally.<sup>206</sup> For others, the catalytic event appeared to simultaneously compound personal stressors while exacerbating grievances and intensifying extremist beliefs. The intentional derailment of the train near a U.S. Navy hospital ship, for example, was deemed somewhat of a

---

<sup>203</sup> Meko and O'Brien, “During George Floyd Protests, 2 Lawyers' Futures Went Up in Flames.”

<sup>204</sup> CBS News, “Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer Kidnapping Aimed at Stopping Biden Win and Being ‘Ignition’ for U.S. Civil War, Witness Says.”

<sup>205</sup> Meloy and Pollard, “Lone-Actor Terrorism and Impulsivity.”

<sup>206</sup> Mazza and Sparks, “Minutes before Machete Attack, Suspect Denied Access to Nashville Homeless Shelter Due to Coronavirus Restrictions.”

“psychotic episode,” with no evidence of pre-planning for violence.<sup>207</sup> While the perpetrator subscribed to extremist conspiracies, these beliefs appeared born out of paranoia and were directly connected to personal stressors and mental health issues.

### C. IMPLICATIONS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

By offering a preliminary typology for conceptualizing how catalytic events trigger individuals to violence, this thesis aims to empower law enforcement agencies to incorporate catalytic events into prevention and mitigation frameworks in a deliberate and targeted manner. Using the typology, this section discusses likely targets for violence and potential countermeasures, as each “type” requires a tailored approach (see Table 3). As observed through the case studies, catalytic events have a significant impact on the target selection of perpetrators, and what constitutes a desirable, high-value target appears to differ across the “types.”

Table 3. Countermeasures by “Type” of Catalytic Event-Driven Violence

Law Enforcement Prevention & Mitigation Measures	“Type” of Catalytic-Event Driven Violence		
	Opportunistic	Grievance-Based	Personal Stressors
Assess resonance of catalytic event with current subjects of concern	X	X	
Implement or enhance protective measures at certain locations or for specific individuals	X	X	
Enhance situational awareness and preparedness of relevant stakeholders	X	X	
Emphasize partnerships with entities likely to frequently interact with individuals of concern			X
Track online threats and violent extremist propaganda linked to catalytic event	X	X	X

The opportunistic “type” of catalytic event-driven violence necessitates a combination of various prevention and mitigation measures. Since an individual falling in

<sup>207</sup> Gault, “Man Inspired by QAnon and Hopped Up on Caffeine Purposefully Derailed Train.”

this category was likely already planning for violence, it may be beneficial for law enforcement to scrutinize subjects of open investigations linked to concerns surrounding terrorism or targeted violence to discern the resonance of a recent catalytic event. Additionally, individuals associated with this “type” of catalytic event-driven violence would logically prioritize targets with the potential for many casualties and/or significant publicity in the form of media coverage and chatter on social media platforms. Thus, in the immediate aftermath of a potential catalytic event, law enforcement agencies may consider strategically implementing or enhancing protective measures at certain locations or for specific individuals to detect and deter a potential attack. Such measures could include counterterrorism deployments or protective details. Law enforcement agencies may also pursue initiatives to increase the situational awareness of relevant stakeholders, including disseminating intelligence products and providing threat briefings and training on suspicious activity reporting.

The grievance-based “type” of catalytic event-driven violence calls for similar law enforcement prevention and mitigation measures, though the divergence in motivation for violence means these efforts may be focused on slightly different targets and stakeholders. Targets of grievance-based, catalytic event-driven violence may be more symbolic rather than designed to inflict the largest number of casualties. For example, grievance-based malicious actors may seek to target groups or communities that lie at the center of their rage or public officials they perceive as responsible for policies or other developments linked to their grievances. As in the previous “type,” law enforcement agencies may consider implementing protective measures after identifying a potential catalytic event—this time focused on “symbolic” targets. However, given the wide range of potential targets of this “type” of violence, it may be worthwhile to prioritize efforts aimed at enhancing the situational awareness and preparedness of affected stakeholders.

The final “type” of catalytic event-driven violence, wherein the catalytic event compounds personal stressors, presents a particular challenge for law enforcement. Since this “type” of violence appears to be somewhat impulsive or random, the ability of law enforcement to anticipate, prevent, and mitigate it is severely limited. It is no coincidence that both case studies that touched this category were linked to the COVID-19 pandemic,

which in addition to sparking anger and fueling extremist beliefs, resulted in substantial personal hardships (i.e., internal triggers). While this “type” may lack the same opportunities for prevention and mitigation as the previous two, there is still value in taking note of catalytic events that are also likely to spark violence based on personal stressors and mental health issues. Law enforcement agencies may consider further investing in partnerships with organizations and entities likely to frequently interact with individuals of concern to identify high-risk persons and offer safety-related training and resources for relevant personnel.

In addition to measures already highlighted, law enforcement agencies may consider formalizing an approach to tracking online threats and violent extremist propaganda following the identification of potential catalytic events. The three catalytic events examined in this thesis all similarly sparked numerous online threats and violent rhetoric, in addition to triggering acts of violence. Law enforcement agencies can leverage an awareness of this chatter to generate investigative leads when warranted and assess the current threat level. Extremist propaganda referencing catalytic events may also offer tactical and targeting guidance, which law enforcement can use to identify potential high-value targets, particularly for the first two “types” of catalytic event-driven violence.

This typology enables law enforcement to conceptualize the impact of catalytic events and implement prevention and mitigation measures accordingly. However, since it remains difficult to predict which “type” of catalytic event-driven violence is most likely to emerge, an optimal approach would involve identifying likely targets of each “type” within an agencies’ area of responsibility. This exercise could allow law enforcement agencies to more effectively prioritize and allocate resources to confront potential threats.

#### **D. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

While this thesis serves as a starting point for enhancing our understanding of catalytic event-driven violence and corresponding prevention and mitigation efforts, the complexity of the subject necessitates considerable further research and continuous refinement of the proposed typology. The scope of this study was limited, and future research may examine a larger sample of incidents assessed to have been triggered by a

catalytic event to expand upon the typology and modify it as needed. The overarching goal of this research is to eventually leverage the typology to develop or formalize relevant policies and procedures within a law enforcement agency and evaluate, to the extent possible, the success of its application. Additionally, while this thesis focused specifically on plots and attacks assessed to have been triggered by a catalytic event, researchers may find value in examining an exhaustive dataset of acts of terrorism and targeted violence that occurred in recent years to discern the frequency with which an external catalytic event played a role in radicalization and mobilization to violence. The findings of this research may provide law enforcement and other homeland security practitioners with additional insight into the value of a focus on catalytic events.

## **E. LOOKING FORWARD**

Over the last year, targeted acts of violence and a flood of online threats in reaction to specific developments reiterated the significance of research on the role of catalytic events. In response to the Supreme Court’s ruling on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, which overturned *Roe v. Wade*—the 1973 ruling that the Constitution protects a woman’s right to an abortion—there were numerous acts of property destruction and arson across the United States. One such incident involved the Madison, Wisconsin, headquarters of Wisconsin Family Action, where malicious actors threatened in graffiti on the building, “If abortions aren’t safe then you aren’t either.”<sup>208</sup> A group calling itself “Jane’s Revenge” claimed responsibility for the incident, stating in an online posting that “Wisconsin is the first flashpoint, but we are all over the U.S., and we will issue no further warnings.”<sup>209</sup>

Separately, the four criminal indictments brought against former President Trump in New York City, Miami, Washington, D.C., and Fulton County, Georgia, between March and August 2023 coincided with a surge in online threats and calls for violence in response

---

<sup>208</sup> “Fire at Wisconsin Anti-Abortion Office Investigated as Arson,” NBC News, May 8, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/fire-wisconsin-anti-abortion-office-investigated-arson-rca27858>.

<sup>209</sup> Richard Luscombe, “Pro-Choice Group Claims Arson Attack on Wisconsin Anti-Abortion Office,” *The Guardian*, May 10, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/10/abortion-arson-attack-wisconsin-pro-choice-janes-revenge>.



to what some individuals perceived as a miscarriage of justice or the political persecution of Trump.<sup>210</sup> While there have yet to be any acts of violence catalyzed by the indictments, recent history validates such concerns. On August 11, 2022, Ricky W. Shiffer, who was wearing body armor and armed with a nail gun and an AR-15, attempted to breach security at the FBI's field office in Cincinnati, before he fled the scene and was killed following a standoff with law enforcement officers.<sup>211</sup> Before the incident, Shiffer reportedly posted a "call to arms" on social media in response to the FBI's execution of a search warrant at the former president's residence.<sup>212</sup>

While recent incidents confirm the significance of this research, forthcoming developments, including the 2024 presidential election, signal a sense of urgency. As discussed in this thesis, the 2020 presidential election spurred divisive, inflammatory, and at times violent rhetoric directed at political opponents, widespread civil unrest, and plots and acts of violence—most notably, the U.S. Capitol riot. Given the persistent political polarization in the United States, there is little reason to believe that the threat environment surrounding the 2024 presidential election will be markedly different. This thesis has set out to provide law enforcement with an initial set of tools for understanding the role of catalytic events and incorporating them into violence prevention and mitigation frameworks—ideally, before the next event ignites a flame.

---

<sup>210</sup> Pat Milton, Jeff Pegues, and Caitlin Yilek, "'Significant Increase' in Threats Online Ahead of Possible Trump Indictment," CBS News, March 20, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-arrest-possible-significant-increase-threats/>.

<sup>211</sup> Keegan Hamilton and Tess Owen, "FBI Standoff Suspect Posted 'Call to Arms' on Trump's Truth Social," *Vice* (blog), August 11, 2022, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/z34mz4/fbi-ricky-walter-shiffer-truth-social>.

<sup>212</sup> Hamilton and Owen.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

## LIST OF REFERENCES

- Ackerman, Gary, and Hayley Peterson. "Terrorism and COVID-19: Actual and Potential Impacts." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 3 (June 2020). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26918300>.
- Anti-Defamation League. "Al Qaeda Releases 'America Burns' Video, Framing U.S. as Nation in Crisis." Anti-Defamation League, July 27, 2021. <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/al-qaeda-releases-america-burns-video-framing-us-nation-crisis>.
- . "Feuerkrieg Division (FKD)." Anti-Defamation League, October 7, 2019. <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/feuerkrieg-division-fkd>.
- . "QAnon." Anti-Defamation League, October 28, 2022. <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/qanon>.
- . "Three Percenters." Anti-Defamation League, June 26, 2017. <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/three-percenters>.
- . "White Supremacists Respond to Coronavirus With Violent Plots and Online Hate." Anti-Defamation League, March 26, 2020. <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/white-supremacists-respond-coronavirus-violent-plots-and-online-hate>.
- AP News. "FBI: Government's Response to Virus Spurred Would-Be Bomber." AP News, April 15, 2020. <https://apnews.com/article/ad891a0e69f0e3d285c397a1626d1e0d>.
- . "KKK Member Pleads Guilty to Driving into Crowd of Protesters." AP News, February 5, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/race-and-ethnicity-virginia-crime-583a8059e75175683a61045bc131d1b2>.
- Beckett, Lois. "Armed Protesters Demonstrate against Covid-19 Lockdown at Michigan Capitol." *The Guardian*, April 30, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/30/michigan-protests-coronavirus-lockdown-armed-capitol>.
- Blankstein, Andrew, Tom Winter, and Brandy Zadrozny. "Three Men Connected to 'boogaloo' Movement Tried to Provoke Violence at Protests, Feds Say." NBC News, June 4, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/all/three-men-connected-boogaloo-movement-tried-provoke-violence-protests-feds-n1224231>.
- Brennan Center for Justice and the Bipartisan Policy Center. "Election Officials Under Attack." *Brennan Center for Justice and the Bipartisan Policy Center*, June 16, 2021, 4. [https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/BCJ-129%20ElectionOfficials\\_v7.pdf](https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/BCJ-129%20ElectionOfficials_v7.pdf).

- Bridging Divides Initiative. *Report: Election 2020 Political Violence Data and Trends*. Princeton University. Accessed June 10, 2023. <https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/sites/g/files/toruqf246/files/2021-02/Report-Election2020PoliticalViolenceDataandTrends%20%281%29.pdf>.
- Cappelletti, Joey, and Ed White. “Lengthy Prison Terms for 3 Who Aided Whitmer Kidnap Plotter.” AP News, December 15, 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/crime-michigan-government-and-politics-f6ed3d5b2546dbe9c60bb34b9ee8ddb4>.
- CBS Bay Area. “Boogaloo Militia Extremist Steven Carrillo Gets Life Sentence for Murdering Santa Cruz Co. Sheriff’s Sgt. Damon Gutzwiller.” CBS Bay Area, August 27, 2022. <https://www.cbsnews.com/sanfrancisco/news/steven-carrillo-boogaloo-militia-extremist-life-sentence-damon-gutzwiller-david-patrick-underwood/>.
- CBS Los Angeles. “Train Engineer Gets 3 Years for Intentional Derailment in Los Angeles.” CBS Los Angeles, April 13, 2022. <https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/train-engineer-sentenced-3-years-intentional-derailment-los-angeles/>.
- CBS News. “Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer Kidnapping Aimed at Stopping Biden Win and Being ‘Ignition’ for U.S. Civil War, Witness Says.” CBS News, March 24, 2022. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/gretchen-whitmer-kidnapping-plot-trial-ty-garbin-testifies-civil-war/>.
- Counter Extremism Project. “Accelerationism.” Counter Extremism Project. Accessed July 17, 2023. <https://www.counterextremism.com/content/accelerationism>.
- Department of Homeland Security. *Department of Homeland Security Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence*. Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, 2019. [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19\\_0920\\_plcy\\_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19_0920_plcy_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf).
- . *U.S. Department of Homeland Security Soft Targets and Crowded Places Security Plan Overview*. Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, 2018. [https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/DHS-Soft-Target-Crowded-Place-Security-Plan-Overview-052018-508\\_0.pdf](https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/DHS-Soft-Target-Crowded-Place-Security-Plan-Overview-052018-508_0.pdf).
- Department of Justice. “31 Months Since the Jan. 6 Attack on the Capitol.” Press Release. Department of Justice, August 6, 2023. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/31-months-jan-6-attack-capitol>.
- . “Federal Grand Jury Indicts Three Men For Seeking To Exploit Protests In Las Vegas And Incite Violence.” Press Release. Department of Justice, June 17, 2020. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-nv/pr/federal-grand-jury-indicts-three-men-seeking-exploit-protests-las-vegas-and-incite>.

- . “Final Defendant in Michigan Governor Kidnapping Plot Sentenced to Over 19 Years in Prison.” Press Release. Department of Justice, December 28, 2022. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/final-defendant-michigan-governor-kidnapping-plot-sentenced-over-19-years-prison>.
- . “Former Fort Riley Soldier Sentenced for Distributing Info on Napalm, IEDs.” Press Release. Department of Justice, August 19, 2020. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ks/pr/former-fort-riley-soldier-sentenced-distributing-info-napalm-ieds>.
- . “Former San Pedro Train Engineer Sentenced to 3 Years in Prison for Intentionally Derailing Locomotive Near U.S. Navy Hospital Ship.” Press Release. Department of Justice, April 13, 2022. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-cdca/pr/former-san-pedro-train-engineer-sentenced-3-years-prison-intentionally-derailing>.
- . “Justice Department Launches Task Force to Combat Threats Against Election Workers.” Press Release. Department of Justice, July 29, 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/blog/justice-department-launches-task-force-combat-threats-against-election-workers-0>.
- . “Santa Cruz County Resident Pleads Guilty To Murder And Attempted Murder After Drive-By Shooting At Federal Courthouse.” Press Release. Department of Defense, February 11, 2022. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndca/pr/santa-cruz-county-resident-pleads-guilty-murder-and-attempted-murder-after-drive>.
- . “Saugerties Woman Sentenced to 72 Months’ Imprisonment for Attempted Arson of NYPD Van Occupied by Four Police Officers.” Press Release. Department of Justice, November 15, 2022. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/saugerties-woman-sentenced-72-months-imprisonment-attempted-arson-nypd-van-occupied>.
- . “Second Man Pleads Guilty to Scheme to Attack Democratic Headquarters in Sacramento.” Press Release. Department of Justice, May 27, 2022. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndca/pr/second-man-pleads-guilty-scheme-attack-democratic-headquarters-sacramento>.
- . “Self-Described Member of ‘Boogaloo Bois’ Sentenced to Prison for Riot Conviction.” Press Release. Department of Justice, April 5, 2022. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-mn/pr/self-described-member-boogaloo-bois-sentenced-prison-riot-conviction>.
- . “Six Additional Oath Keepers Members and Affiliates Found Guilty of Charges Related to Capitol Breach.” Press Release. Department of Justice, March 21, 2023. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/six-additional-oath-keepers-members-and-affiliates-found-guilty-charges-related-capitol>.

- . “Six Arrested on Federal Charge of Conspiracy to Kidnap the Governor of Michigan.” Press Release. Department of Justice, October 8, 2020. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/six-arrested-federal-charge-conspiracy-kidnap-governor-michigan>.
- . “Steven Carrillo Sentenced to 41 Years in Prison for Murder and Attempted Murder for Role in Drive-By Shooting at Federal Courthouse in Oakland.” Press Release. Department of Justice, June 3, 2022. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndca/pr/steven-carrillo-sentenced-41-years-prison-murder-and-attempted-murder-role-drive>.
- Dhongde, Shatakshee, and Brian Glassman. “Multidimensional Hardship in the U.S. during the COVID-19 Pandemic.” Working paper, U.S. Census Bureau, 2021. <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2021/demo/SEHSD-WP2021-16.html>.
- Dienst, Jonathan, and Tom Winter. “‘I Have No Excuse:’ Tearful Woman in NYPD Firebombing Apologizes to ‘Everybody’.” NBC New York, November 15, 2022. <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/investigations/upstate-woman-sentenced-to-72-months-for-nypd-firebombing-during-2020-protests/3958275/>.
- Falk, Gene. *Unemployment Rates During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. CRS Report No. R46554. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2021. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R46554.pdf>.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation. “Pipe Bombs in Washington, D.C.” Federal Bureau of Investigation, January 5, 2021. <https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/seeking-info/suspected-pipe-bombs-in-washington-dc>.
- Gais, Hannah. “Far Right Exploits Racial Justice Protests to Further an Agenda of Hate.” Southern Poverty Law Center, June 18, 2020. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/06/18/far-right-exploits-racial-justice-protests-further-agenda-hate>.
- Ganor, Boaz. “Understanding the Motivations of ‘Lone Wolf’ Terrorists: The ‘Bathtub’ Model.” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2023): 23–32. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007294>.
- Gault, Matthew. “Man Inspired by QAnon and Hopped Up on Caffeine Purposefully Derailed Train.” *Vice*, April 15, 2022. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/7kb38q/man-inspired-by-qanon-and-hopped-up-on-caffeine-purposefully-derailed-train>.
- George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennet. “Chapter 3: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison.” In *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 67–72. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005.

- Hamilton, Keegan, and Tess Owen. "FBI Standoff Suspect Posted 'Call to Arms' on Trump's Truth Social." *Vice* (blog), August 11, 2022. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/z34mz4/fbi-ricky-walter-shiffer-truth-social>.
- Hamm, Mark, and Ramon Spaaj. "Lone Wolf Terrorism in America: Using Knowledge of Radicalization Pathways to Forge Prevention Strategies, 1940–2013: Version 1." *Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research*, November 2017. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36107.V1>.
- Hanna, John. "'Satanist' Ex-Soldier Sentenced to 2 ½ Years in Bomb Plot." *Army Times*, August 19, 2020. <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2020/08/19/satanist-ex-soldier-sentenced-to-2-years-in-bomb-plot/>.
- Haworth, Jon. "Man Slashes Married Couple with Machete, Says He Was Angry over Coronavirus Lockdown." ABC News, May 18, 2020. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/man-slashes-married-couple-machete-angry-coronavirus-lockdown/story?id=70739374>.
- Hummel, Kristina. "The QAnon Conspiracy Theory: A Security Threat in the Making?" *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* 13, no. 7 (July 2020). <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-qanon-conspiracy-theory-a-security-threat-in-the-making/>.
- Jones, Sam. "US Crisis Monitor Releases Full Data for 2020." ACLED, February 5, 2021. <https://acleddata.com/2021/02/05/us-crisis-monitor-releases-full-data-for-2020/>.
- Khazan, Olga. "The Far Right's Fear of 'Glowies.'" *The Atlantic*, January 25, 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/01/what-glowies-mean-online-spies/617717/>.
- Kleinfeld, Rachel. "The Rise of Political Violence in the United States." *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 4 (October 2021): 106–76. <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-rise-of-political-violence-in-the-united-states/>.
- Komenda, Ed. "Men Tied to 'boogaloo' Movement Conspired to Spark Protest Violence in Las Vegas, Feds Say." *USA Today*, June 4, 2020. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/06/04/boogaloo-movement-terrorism-related-charges-3-men-feds-say/3147563001/>.
- Kosnar, Michael, and Phil Helsel. "FBI Says Man Killed in Missouri Wanted to Bomb Hospital amid Coronavirus Epidemic." NBC News, March 25, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/fbi-says-man-killed-missouri-wanted-bomb-hospital-amid-coronavirus-n1169166>.

- Lambe, Jerry. "Two Far-Right Trump Supporters Who Sought 'war' over 2020 Election Sentenced for Conspiring to Blow up Democratic Headquarters." *Law & Crime*, March 4, 2023. <https://lawandcrime.com/crime/two-far-right-trump-supporters-who-sought-war-over-2020-election-sentenced-for-conspiring-to-blow-up-democratic-headquarters/>.
- Levine, Mike. "FBI Learned of Coronavirus-Inspired Bomb Plotter through Radicalized U.S. Army Soldier." *ABC News*, March 26, 2020. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/fbi-learned-coronavirus-inspired-bomb-plotter-radicalized-us/story?id=69818116>.
- Lucas, Ryan. "2 California Men Have Been Charged With Plotting To Bomb A Democratic Party Building." *NPR*, July 16, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/16/1016844817/2-california-men-have-been-charged-with-plotting-to-bomb-a-democratic-building>.
- Luscombe, Richard. "Pro-Choice Group Claims Arson Attack on Wisconsin Anti-Abortion Office." *The Guardian*, May 10, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/10/abortion-arson-attack-wisconsin-pro-choice-janes-revenge>.
- Ly, Laura. "An 'admitted Leader of the KKK' Is Sentenced to 6 Years in Prison for Driving His Truck through Black Lives Matter Protesters." *CNN*, August 12, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/12/us/kkk-virginia-man-sentenced-trnd/index.html>.
- MacFarquhar, Neil. "Two Men Charged With Plotting to Blow Up California Democratic Headquarters." *New York Times*, July 16, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/16/us/ian-rogers-jarrold-copeland-indicted.html>.
- Macklin, Graham. "The Conspiracy to Kidnap Governor Gretchen Whitmer." *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* 14, no. 6 (August 2021). <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-conspiracy-to-kidnap-governor-gretchen-whitmer/>.
- Mallin, Alexander, and Will Steakin. "Oath Keepers Stashed Weapons at Hotel for Potential Jan. 6 Violence, Prosecutors Indicate." *ABC News*, April 13, 2021. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/oath-keepers-stashed-weapons-hotel-potential-jan-violence/story?id=77048420>.
- Marone, Francesco. "Hate in the Time of Coronavirus: Exploring the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the West." *Security Journal* 35, no. 1 (March 1, 2022): 205–25. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41284-020-00274-y>.
- Martin, Nick R. "Heartland Terror." *The Informant*, March 25, 2020. <https://www.informant.news/p/heartland-terror>.



- Mazza, Sandy, and Adam Sparks. "Minutes before Machete Attack, Suspect Denied Access to Nashville Homeless Shelter Due to Coronavirus Restrictions." *The Tennessean*, May 18, 2020. <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/crime/2020/05/17/nashville-storage-facility-stabbing/5210034002/>.
- McDonald, Cassidy. "Handguns, Crowbars, Tasers and Tomahawk Axes: Dozens of Capitol Rioters Wielded 'Deadly or Dangerous' Weapons, Prosecutors Say." CBS News, May 27, 2021. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/capitol-riot-weapons-deadly-dangerous/>.
- Meko, Hurubie, and Rebecca Davis O'Brien. "During George Floyd Protests, 2 Lawyers' Futures Went Up in Flames." *New York Times*, January 26, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/26/nyregion/lawyers-sentenced-molotov-police-car.html>.
- Meloy, J. Reid, and Jeffrey W. Pollard. "Lone-Actor Terrorism and Impulsivity." *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 62, no. 6 (November 2017): 1643–46. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.13500>.
- Milton, Pat, Jeff Pegues, and Caitlin Yilek. "'Significant Increase' in Threats Online Ahead of Possible Trump Indictment." CBS News, March 20, 2023. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-arrest-possible-significant-increase-threats/>.
- Morgan, David. "Oath Keeper Brought Explosives to D.C. Ahead of Jan. 6 Attack, Prosecutor Says." Reuters, July 11, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/oath-keeper-brought-explosives-dc-ahead-jan-6-attack-prosecutor-says-2022-07-09/>.
- Mossburg, Cheri, and Theresa Waldrop. "A Man Allegedly Linked to the Boogaloo Movement Accused of Going to a BLM Protest with a Homemade Machine Gun to Kill Cops." CNN, June 16, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/16/us/steven-carrillo-california-officers-deaths-suspect-boogaloos/index.html>.
- National Council for Mental Wellbeing. *Mass Violence in America*. Washington, DC: National Council for Mental Wellbeing, 2019. [https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Mass-Violence-in-America\\_8-6-19.pdf](https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Mass-Violence-in-America_8-6-19.pdf).
- NBC Bay Area. "Ex-Air Force Sergeant Pleads Guilty in Killing of Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Sergeant." NBC Bay Area, June 28, 2022. <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/ex-air-force-sergeant-pleads-guilty-in-killing-of-santa-cruz-county-sheriffs-sergeant/2931686/>.
- NBC News. "Fire at Wisconsin Anti-Abortion Office Investigated as Arson." NBC News, May 8, 2022. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/fire-wisconsin-anti-abortion-office-investigated-arson-rcna27858>.

- News Channel 5 Nashville. "Plea Deal Reached in Nashville Machete Attack." News Channel 5 Nashville, April 1, 2021. <https://www.newschannel5.com/news/plea-deal-reached-in-may-2020-machete-attack-that-critically-injured-2-in-nashville>.
- Paybarah, Azi. "K.K.K. Member Who Drove Into Protesters Gets More Than 3 Years in Prison." *New York Times*, February 10, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/09/us/virginia-kkk-harry-rogers-sentenced.html>.
- Peiser, Jaclyn. "Pelosi Says Staff Hid under a Table for Hours as Rioters Vandalized Her Office: 'A Terrible, Terrible Violation.'" *Washington Post*, January 11, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/01/11/pelosi-60-minutes-capitol-impeachment/>.
- Pereira, Ivan. "Protesters, Some Armed, Spill into Michigan Capitol Building Demanding End to Stay-at-Home Order." ABC News, April 30, 2020. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/michigan-rally-shelter-place-order-spills-capitol-building/story?id=70432928>.
- Rawnsley, Adam, and Kelly Weill. "'Rush the Police, Hog Tie Them': Inside the Far Right's Zip-Tie Fetish." *The Daily Beast*, January 14, 2021. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/why-were-the-capitol-rioters-carrying-zip-ties>.
- Reilly, Ryan J. "Proud Boys Were 'thirsting for Violence' on Jan. 6, DOJ Says in Closing Arguments." NBC News, April 24, 2023. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/proud-boys-thirsting-violence-jan-6-doj-says-closing-arguments-rcna80866>.
- Romine, Taylor. "Two Men Who Conspired to Attack Democratic Headquarters in Sacramento Sentenced to Prison." CNN, March 2, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/01/politics/democratic-headquarters-sacramento-plot-sentenced/index.html>.
- Schallhorn, Kaitlyn. "Missouri's Response to Coronavirus: A Timeline." *Missouri Times*, June 30, 2020. <https://themissouritimes.com/missouris-response-to-coronavirus-a-timeline/>.
- Silber, Mitchell D, and Arvin Bhatt. "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat." *The New York City Police Department*, 2007. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/radicalization-west-homegrown-threat>.
- SITE Intelligence Group. "4Chan User Threatens to Carry Out, Livestream Mass Shooting If Biden Wins Election." SITE Intelligence Group, November 11, 2020. <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Far-Right/-Far-Left-Threat/4chan-user-threatens-to-carryout-livestream-mass-shooting-if-biden-wins-election.html>.

- . “‘Armed and Ready, Mr. President’: Demonstrators Urged to Bring Guns, Prepare for Violence at January 6 ‘Stop the Steal’ Protest in DC.” SITE Intelligence Group, December 24, 2020. <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Far-Right/-Far-Left-Threat/armed-and-ready-mr-president-demonstrators-urged-to-bring-guns-prepare-for-violence-at-january-6-stop-the-steal-protest-in-dc.html>.
- . “IS Urges Jihadists Capitalize on Paralysis and Fear Amid COVID-19 Pandemic in Enemy Lands.” SITE Intelligence Group, March 19, 2020. <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/is-urges-jihadists-capitalize-on-paralysis-and-fear-amid-covid-19-pandemic-in-enemy-lands.html>.
- . “Propagating Election Fraud Conspiracies, 4Chan Users Target President-Elect & Inauguration Ceremony in Calls for Violent Attacks.” SITE Intelligence Group, November 24, 2020. <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Far-Right/-Far-Left-Threat/propagating-election-fraud-conspiracies-4chan-users-target-president-elect-inauguration-ceremony-in-calls-for-violent-attacks.html>.
- . “The Far-Right’s Online Discourse on COVID-19 Pandemic.” SITE Intelligence Group, March 24, 2020. [https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/index.php?option=com\\_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=20576&tmpl=component](https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/index.php?option=com_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=20576&tmpl=component).
- Smith, Allison G. *How Radicalization to Terrorism Occurs in the United States: What Research Sponsored by the National Institute of Justice Tells Us*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2018. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/250171.pdf>.
- Taylor, Melanie A. “A Comprehensive Study of Mass Murder Precipitants and Motivations of Offenders.” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 62, no. 2 (February 2018): 427–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X16646805>.
- Thomas, David. “Judge Sentences Second New York Lawyer in Molotov Cocktail Case.” Reuters, January 26, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/legal/judge-sentences-second-new-york-lawyer-molotov-cocktail-case-2023-01-27/>.
- United Nations Office of Counterterrorism. *Protecting Vulnerable Targets from Terrorist Attacks*. United Nations, 2022. [https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/2118451e-vt-mod1-introduction\\_final-web.pdf](https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/2118451e-vt-mod1-introduction_final-web.pdf).
- Vergun, David. “USNS Mercy Arrives in Los Angeles to Aid COVID-19 Response.” Department of Defense, March 27, 2020. <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2129077/usns-mercy-arrives-in-los-angeles-to-aid-covid-19-response/>.

- Vitali, Joshua D. "Fueling the Fire: An Examination of Right-Wing Extremism in the United States Over the Last Decade." Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2020. <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/65460>.
- Vockrodt, Steve. "FBI Releases How Man Who Plotted to Bomb KC Area Hospital Died in Battle with Agents." *Kansas City Star*, May 15, 2020. <https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article242763241.html>.
- White, Ed. "Man in Gov. Whitmer Kidnap Plot: No One Twisted Our Arms." AP News, March 24, 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/whitmer-kidnap-plot-trial-biden-covid-health-michigan-aff035ce3331139a029b052a77279962>.
- White House. *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism*. Washington, DC: White House, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/National-Strategy-for-Countering-Domestic-Terrorism.pdf>.
- Yune, Howard. "Update: Napa Resident Ian Rogers, Jarrod Copeland Sentenced in Bomb Plot against Democratic Office." *Napa Valley Register*, March 1, 2023. [https://napavalleyregister.com/news/local/update-napa-resident-ian-rogers-jarro-copeland-sentenced-in-bomb-plot-against-democratic-office/article\\_4d5b2f66-b86f-11ed-9760-4343d06b4e71.html](https://napavalleyregister.com/news/local/update-napa-resident-ian-rogers-jarro-copeland-sentenced-in-bomb-plot-against-democratic-office/article_4d5b2f66-b86f-11ed-9760-4343d06b4e71.html).

## INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST

1. Defense Technical Information Center  
Ft. Belvoir, Virginia
2. Dudley Knox Library  
Naval Postgraduate School  
Monterey, California



## DUDLEY KNOX LIBRARY

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

[WWW.NPS.EDU](http://WWW.NPS.EDU)

---

WHERE SCIENCE MEETS THE ART OF WARFARE