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NATIONAL THREAT ASSESSMENT CENTER

MASS ATTACKS IN PUBLIC SPACES: 2016 - 2020

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

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Mass Attacks in Public Spaces: 2016 - 2020

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



For 25 years, the U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) has enhanced the agency's protective and investigative operations and supported our no-fail mission to safeguard this nation's highest elected officials. NTAC's pioneering research and expertise continue to inform the development of prevention and protection strategies employed by the Secret Service and have further assisted our public safety partners in their efforts to prevent targeted violence impacting communities across the United States. This important work continues with the release of NTAC's most recent publication, *Mass Attacks in Public Spaces: 2016 - 2020*.

This five-year study analyzes 173 targeted attacks that occurred from 2016 to 2020 in public or semi-public locations in the United States, including businesses, schools, houses of worship, open spaces, and other locations where we live our daily lives. This is the latest entry in a series of reports that examine attacks during which three or more individuals were injured or killed. By applying NTAC's unique behavioral analysis to incidents of targeted violence occurring over a five-year period, *Mass Attacks in Public Spaces: 2016 - 2020* represents NTAC's most comprehensive examination to date of mass violence and its perpetrators.

The prevention of mass violence in America remains as critical as ever. Far too often, communities and families have been devastated by the impact of these tragedies, and public safety professionals continue to work toward preventing future attacks. The information revealed in this report is intended to guide those prevention efforts. NTAC's exploration of each attacker's background, motivation, and pre-attack behavior will assist the Secret Service and our partners in our shared violence prevention efforts. We encourage our public safety partners to review the information within this report and apply it to their own practices for providing a safe environment in communities across the country.

Everyone has a role to play in keeping our communities safe. Law enforcement officers, mental health professionals, workplace managers, school personnel, faith-based leaders, and many others share the responsibility of prevention. The Secret Service continually stands ready to support these efforts to enhance the safety of communities across our nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Cheatle".

Kimberly A. Cheatle
Director

The U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) was created in 1998 to provide guidance on threat assessment both within the U.S. Secret Service and to others with criminal justice and public safety responsibilities. Through the Presidential Threat Protection Act of 2000, Congress formally authorized NTAC to conduct research on threat assessment and various types of targeted violence; provide training on threat assessment and targeted violence; facilitate information-sharing among agencies with protective and/or public safety responsibilities; provide case consultation on individual threat assessment investigations and for agencies building threat assessment units; and develop programs to promote the standardization of federal, state, and local threat assessment processes and investigations.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Behavioral threat assessment is a proactive approach pioneered by the U.S. Secret Service to prevent acts of targeted violence, including mass violence in communities across the United States. This report builds upon a 25-year history of targeted violence research from the U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) and demonstrates how mass attackers display a range of *observable* concerning behaviors across a variety of community systems as they escalate toward violence. In short, NTAC's examination of the attacks contained in this report indicates that **targeted violence is preventable when communities are equipped with the appropriate tools, training, and resources** to intervene before violence occurs. Behavioral threat assessment programs are critical components of these community violence prevention efforts. These programs are not designed to predict who will become violent, but rather to identify, assess, and intervene with individuals who display threatening or other concerning behaviors that indicate they may pose a risk of harm to themselves or others.

As law enforcement agencies, workplaces, and other community organizations implement behavioral threat assessment programs, the approach should be guided by the research findings contained in this report. When conducted properly, a behavioral threat assessment will involve promoting bystander reporting to identify warning signs of potential violence, systematically gathering information about the circumstances and behaviors of concern, assessing the possibility of violence as an outcome, and implementing preventive management strategies to make positive and safe outcomes more likely.

The 173 attacks contained in this report impacted a variety of locations, *including businesses/workplaces, schools, houses of worship, military bases, nonprofit service providers, residential complexes, public transportation, and open spaces*. In many cases, the attacker had a known affiliation with the site of the attack. The analysis is intended to provide critical information to a cross-sector of community organizations that have a role in preventing these types of tragedies. Key findings include:¹

- Most of the attackers had exhibited behavior that *elicited concern* in family members, friends, neighbors, classmates, co-workers, and others, and in many cases, those individuals *feared for the safety of themselves or others*.
- Many attackers had a history of physically aggressive or intimidating behaviors, evidenced by prior *violent criminal arrests/charges, domestic violence, or other acts of violence toward others*.
- Half of the attackers were motivated by grievances, and were *retaliating for perceived wrongs related to personal, domestic, or workplace issues*.
- Most of the attackers used firearms, and many of those firearms were *possessed illegally* at the time of the attack.
- One-quarter of the attackers *subscribed to a belief system involving conspiracies or hateful ideologies*, including anti-government, anti-Semitic, and misogynistic views.
- Many attackers experienced *stressful events across various life domains, including family/romantic relationships, personal issues, employment, and legal issues*. In some of these cases, attackers experienced a specific triggering event prior to perpetrating the attack.
- Over half of the attackers experienced mental health symptoms prior to or at the time of their attacks, including *depression, psychotic symptoms, and suicidal thoughts*.



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Many of the pre-attack behaviors described in this report are not suspicious on their own, and some involve constitutionally protected activity. Most individuals who exhibit these types of behaviors will not commit acts of targeted violence. NTAC's research continues to affirm that there is no profile for the type of person who will commit an attack. The U.S. Secret Service recognizes behavioral threat assessment as the best practice for targeted violence prevention because it does not utilize profiles, but focuses on identifying and assessing threatening and concerning behavior in context, and identifying the most appropriate strategies for reducing any risk of violence, while also maintaining individual civil and constitutional rights.

Based on this study examining mass attacks in public spaces from 2016 to 2020, and building on NTAC's extensive history of studying all forms of targeted violence, the following operational implications are presented in support of developing policies and protocols for behavioral threat assessment programs.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

- **Communities must encourage and facilitate bystander reporting and be prepared to respond when reports of concern are received.** Three-quarters of the attackers exhibited concerning behaviors and communications. Those who observed these behaviors had varying degrees of association with the attacker. They included family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, school staff, mental health professionals, and local officials, as well as members of the public, both online and in person. The breadth of people who observed these behaviors highlights the necessity of bystander reporting and behavioral threat assessment programs to assess and manage the risk posed by those individuals. Communities have made great strides in facilitating and encouraging bystander reporting of concerning behavior, and many environments have adopted behavioral threat assessment programs as part of their safety approach, including workplaces, schools, universities, government agencies, and police departments. These organizations should continue to promote open and receptive communication between themselves and the public, ensuring that bystanders know what, when, and how to report behavior that elicits concerns for safety.
- **Communities should not wait for a direct and specific threat before taking action.** While many attackers made direct or indirect threats prior to their attacks, the statements often lacked specificity. Of those who made threats against the person or group they ultimately targeted, few specified where or when the attack would take place. This demonstrates why waiting for an explicit threat that names the target, location, and timing of an intended attack will result in missed opportunities to prevent violence. Such specificity, something that is often thought of as *required* to justify a response, should not be viewed as a threshold for taking preventive action when other warning signs of violence are present. *Early intervention* is key to prevention and can be accomplished using existing community resources, including crisis intervention programs, social services, mental health treatment, and, if warranted, a criminal justice response.



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- **Individuals displaying an unusual interest in violent topics, especially past attackers, should elicit concern.** One-fifth of attackers had an excessive, inappropriate, or concerning interest in a violent topic, evidenced by such behaviors as repeatedly viewing footage of beheadings, writing and recording songs with violent themes, posting online about previous attacks, and keeping a journal about wanting to physically harm others. As part of their planning, seven attackers conducted research specifically into prior mass attacks, including the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, the Oklahoma City bombing, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, and the Christchurch mosque shootings in New Zealand. This is consistent with prior NTAC findings from *Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence* (2019), which found that half of K-12 school attackers from 2008 to 2017 had displayed an unusual or concerning interest in violent topics, including the Columbine High School shooting and Nazism. Public safety professionals should recognize an unusual interest in violent topics as worthy of concern, especially an interest in previous mass attackers.
- **Businesses should consider establishing workplace violence prevention plans to identify, assess, and intervene with current employees, former employees, and customers who may pose a risk of violence.** In this study, half of the attacks involved one or more business locations and the attackers often had a prior relationship with the business, either as a current or former employee, or as a customer. What's more, some in this study were motivated in whole or in part by a workplace grievance. Workplaces should establish behavioral threat assessment programs as a component of their workplace violence prevention plans, and businesses should also establish proactive relationships with area law enforcement so that they may work collaboratively to respond to incidents involving a concern for violence, whether that concern arises from a current employee, a former employee, or a customer.
- **Public safety, school, workplace, and community service professionals should consider strategies for resolving interpersonal grievances.** In this study, attackers displayed a range of motives for carrying out acts of violence, and in half of the incidents, attackers were motivated by some type of grievance. These grievances were most often related to a personal issue, such as bullying, ongoing feuds with neighbors, or issues with family members. In other attacks, grievances were related to a current or former domestic relationship or workplace issues. By understanding an individual's motive to perpetrate a violent act, public safety and other professionals will be better equipped to employ management strategies and resources that will help de-escalate situations involving interpersonal conflicts.
- **Individuals tasked with community violence prevention must understand the impact of violent and hateful rhetoric while protecting the constitutional right to free speech.** One-quarter of the attackers in this study subscribed to a hate-focused, conspiratorial, or topic-specific belief system. These beliefs were often directed toward a protected class, with biases expressed against others based on race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity. Hate-based beliefs included anti-Semitism, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTQ+, anti-Asian, anti-White, misogyny, and race-based supremacy. Other beliefs involved anti-government and anti-police views. Government agencies and community organizations should continue directing resources, training, and public messaging toward countering hate and other extremist belief systems that have historically been associated with violence.



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- **Misogyny and domestic violence deserve increased attention from those tasked with mass violence prevention.** Nearly half of the attackers were found to have had a history of domestic violence, misogynistic behaviors, or both. Though not all who possess misogynistic views are violent, viewpoints that describe women as the enemy or call for violence against women remain a cause for concern. Nearly all of those who displayed misogynistic behaviors were found to have concerned others at some point prior to their attacks. These findings, along with those highlighted in NTAC's case study, *Hot Yoga Tallahassee: A Case Study on Misogynistic Extremism (2022)*, illustrate that misogyny can play a central role in motivating an attacker to perpetrate mass violence, as well as engage in more prevalent acts of violence, including stalking and domestic abuse. No matter the context, responding to the threat posed by hatred toward women requires collaboration across multiple community systems, including law enforcement, courts, mental health providers, and domestic violence and hate crime advocacy groups.
- **Online platforms may be utilized by individuals to make violent communications and to share violent rhetoric and ideas.** The Internet allows individuals to come together and share common interests across online platforms and communities; however, these online communities can provide a place for violent and concerning ideas to manifest. Nearly one-quarter of attackers were found to have conveyed concerning communications online, such as threats to harm others and posts referencing suicidal ideations, previous mass shootings, violent content, and hate toward a particular ethnic group. One attacker was a member of an online chat group where members discussed plans to carry out school attacks. The attacker told the group that he planned to kill his father and that he would initiate a school attack the next day, which he did. Another attacker had subscribed to anonymous radical online imageboards over a year prior to his attack, and he later told officers this was when he started to adopt hatred toward Jewish people. These findings demonstrate the continued need for encouraging the public to report concerning, threatening, and violent content observed across online platforms.
- **Individuals sharing final communications or engaging in other final acts may warrant immediate intervention.** Behavioral threat assessment is a means for early identification and intervention to prevent targeted violence long before an act of violence could occur. However, some individuals may come to attention only when violence appears *imminent*, by sharing final communications or engaging in acts that indicate an attack is fast approaching. Public safety professionals should understand these behaviors so they are able to recognize and intervene quickly and appropriately when a person is nearing violence. Nearly one-quarter of attackers shared final communications before their attack, including calling people to say goodbye, authoring suicide notes, and posting manifestos online. Thirteen attackers made communications indicating that an attack was imminent, including one attacker who posted a photo of a gun online and sent a text message to a friend saying "it begins" minutes before initiating his attack. Further, 18 attackers engaged in final acts, such as selling or giving away their personal possessions, canceling a cable subscription, and transferring ownership of a home to family members.



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- **Community violence prevention efforts require identifying and promoting appropriate resources for individuals who are managing stressful life circumstances, experiencing mental health issues, or facing a personal crisis.** Nearly all attackers experienced at least one significant personal stressor in their lives within five years of the attack, and for most the stressors occurred within one year. Stressors experienced by the attackers were most often related to things like financial instability, family issues, romantic relationships, court proceedings, employment, personal health issues, victimization, and homelessness. Further, over half of the attackers experienced mental health symptoms prior to or at the time of their attacks, with many experiencing symptoms of multiple types of mental health disorders. The most common symptoms included depression, psychotic symptoms, and suicidal thoughts. Those tasked with violence prevention will often encounter individuals requiring crisis intervention, as well as community resources and supports, to overcome challenging circumstances. Communities should make available a variety of mental health and social services for those experiencing such challenges.
- **Mass shootings have been perpetrated by those who were legally prohibited from possessing firearms.** One-third of attackers in this study were prohibited by federal law from purchasing or possessing a firearm, including those with a prior felony or domestic violence conviction, fugitives from justice, those previously adjudicated incompetent or involuntarily committed to a mental health institution, and those who were currently the subject of a domestic-related protection order. Despite these prohibitions, 38 of these attackers used firearms during their attacks, including those that were acquired through straw purchases, theft, purchases from private sellers, and purchasing parts online. Government agencies, courts, and law enforcement all have a role to play in ensuring weapons are not accessed by those individuals who are legally prohibited from gun ownership. Local communities may have additional avenues for keeping weapons out of the hands of individuals at risk of causing harm. For example, some states have passed laws establishing extreme risk protection orders, sometimes referred to as “red flag laws.” These state laws maintain due process and protect the rights of gun owners, while also allowing for the temporary court-ordered removal of firearms from a person who poses an articulable risk of hurting other people or themselves.



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INTRODUCTION

Acts of targeted violence affect cities and towns of all sizes, impacting the places where we work, learn, worship, and otherwise carry out our daily activities. The response to this problem, like many others, requires a community-based approach. Many of our fellow citizens play a central role in preventing targeted violence, including government officials and policy makers, law enforcement, educators, employers, mental health providers, faith-based leaders, and the public.

Since 1998, the U.S. Service's National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) has supported our federal, state, and local partners in the shared mission of violence prevention. The research and guidance produced by NTAC informs not only the Secret Service's approach to preventing targeted violence, called *behavioral threat assessment*, but further enhances the violence prevention capabilities of public safety professionals across the country. In addition to making this vital information available in print, NTAC has shared our research findings by delivering over 2,500 trainings and briefings to over 250,000 public safety professionals since our founding. These events greatly benefit the work of multidisciplinary organizations, including law enforcement, mental health professionals, school officials, and other community safety stakeholders, and provide the foundational information for establishing community-level behavioral threat assessment programs.

This publication is the latest release in a series of reports that examine mass casualty attacks carried out in public or semi-public locations in the United States. Prior reports in this series include *Mass Attacks in Public Spaces - 2017*, *Mass Attacks in Public Spaces - 2018*, and *Mass Attacks in Public Spaces - 2019*. This latest report is the first to analyze multiple years of data and provides a more in-depth analysis of the thinking and behavior of mass attackers, including newly identified background variables and operationally relevant factors.² The study examines 173 mass attacks—in which three or more people, not including the attacker(s), were harmed—carried out by 180 attackers in public or semi-public locations between January 2016 and December 2020. In total, 513 people were killed and an additional 1,234 people were injured during these attacks.

NTAC's research on targeted violence has spanned 25 years, consistently demonstrating observable themes that should be assessed as part of comprehensive targeted violence prevention efforts. These themes include an individual's history of concerning or threatening communications, criminal and violent behavior, mental health symptoms, unusual or concerning interests in violent topics, access to weapons, stressors, and more. While not all themes were apparent in the backgrounds of every attacker, all attackers in this study experienced or displayed at least one, and *many attackers showed evidence of several themes*. These investigative themes are useful in understanding the pre-attack motivations, planning, communications, and behaviors of individuals who engage in acts of targeted violence, and therefore can be leveraged as part of larger community violence prevention strategies. These behaviors cannot be used to predict violence, but when recognized early, community members can intervene before a violent act occurs.

What is Behavioral Threat Assessment?

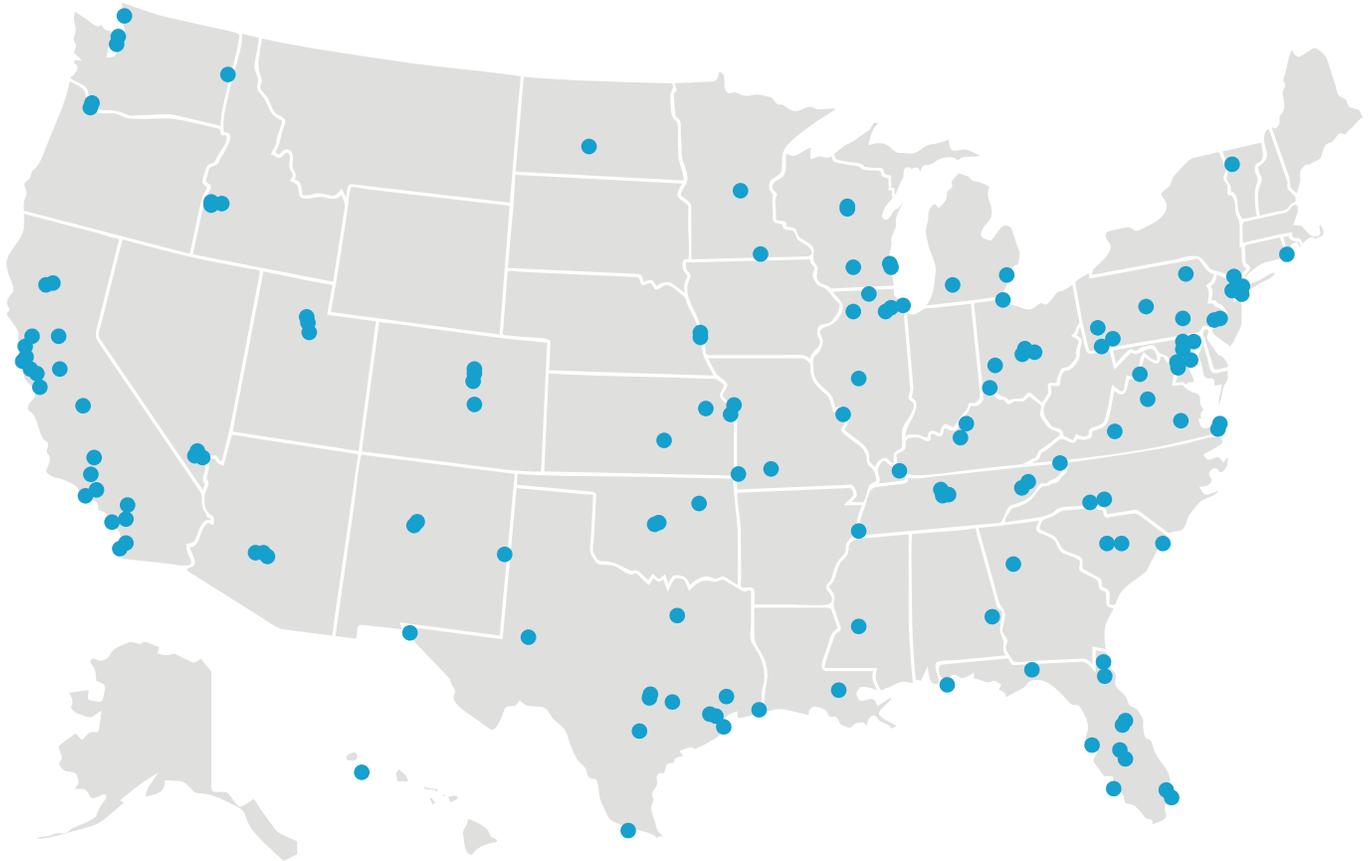
In the 1990s, the U.S. Secret Service pioneered the field of behavioral threat assessment by conducting research on the targeting of public officials and public figures. The agency's behavioral threat assessment model offers law enforcement and others with public safety responsibilities a systematic investigative approach to identify individuals who exhibit threatening or concerning behavior; gather information to assess whether they pose a risk of harm; and identify the appropriate interventions, resources, and supports to manage that risk.



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We have all seen firsthand the devastating impact that the violent attacks in this report have had on families, communities, and our entire nation. With the proper training to recognize and intervene when concerning behaviors emerge, public safety professionals can redirect them before the behaviors escalate to violence. The Secret Service's behavioral threat assessment model involves identifying these concerning behaviors, assessing each situation as it arises, and applying the appropriate interventions to manage the risk. These types of interventions often include the involvement of family members and friends, social services, mental health professionals, faith-based organizations, and law enforcement when appropriate. The information contained in this report is intended to inform the efforts of all relevant community stakeholders with a role in public safety.

Locations of the 173 Mass Attacks in the U.S., 2016 - 2020





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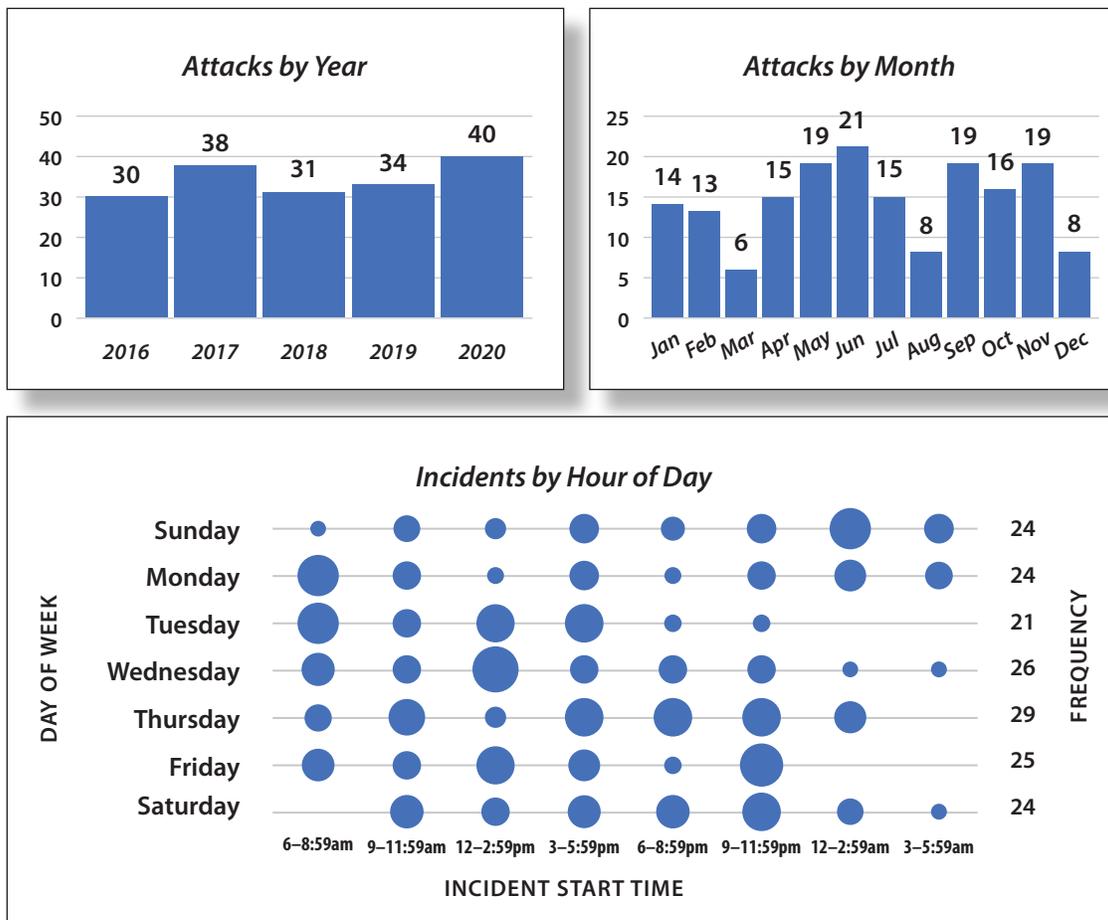
OVERVIEW OF THE ATTACKS

NTAC identified 173 incidents in which three or more people, not including the perpetrator, were harmed during an attack in a public or semi-public space in the United States over the five-year period from January 2016 through December 2020. Nearly all of these attacks ($n = 168, 97\%$) were carried out by lone perpetrators. Of the remaining five attacks, three were perpetrated by two attackers, and two were carried out by three people.

Unless otherwise indicated, percentages in this section are calculated based on all 173 attacks.

TIMING

Across the five-year period, attacks took place year-round, on every day of the week, and at all hours of the day. At least one mass attack took place during all but 4 of the 60 months. Of the months with mass attacks, March, August, and December showed lower incident rates of one mass attack every 19 to 26 days, while the rest of the year showed average monthly rates of one mass attack every 11 days or less. Though attacks took place at all hours of the day, the three-hour timeframe of 3:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. was when the fewest attacks occurred ($n = 8, 5\%$).





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Date significance

Twenty-two of the attacks (13%), all of which involved lone attackers, were chosen to occur on dates that held some meaning, including holidays, dates of planned public events, and more personal dates on which something important to the attacker was to take place. For example, the holiday of Halloween was chosen to maximize casualties, while the choice of Valentine's Day was related to the attacker's inability to find companionship. The day before Memorial Day was chosen by one attacker because, according to a conspiracy theory at the time, this was the day before society would collapse. The chosen public events included such things as festivals and a military charity run, while the more personal events included scheduled court dates, a board meeting, and a funeral. The remaining dates of significance included attackers' birthdays and returns from school suspensions, as well as more idiosyncratic choices. One attacker chose November 11 due to his fascination with the number 11, and another chose a date that held meaning in a book he liked.

On October 31, 2017, a 29-year-old man reportedly drove a rented flatbed pickup truck onto a bike path at speeds of over 60 miles per hour, striking pedestrians and cyclists before colliding with an occupied school bus. Eight people were killed and at least 12 were injured before the man was shot by police and arrested. Cell phones recovered from the truck revealed that the man allegedly conducted Internet searches for Halloween in his city. According to court records, he chose Halloween as the date of his attack because he believed there would be more pedestrians and cyclists on the street, making his attack consistent with ISIS messaging as well as tactical and targeting guidance about bolstering the "kill count."

Duration

Over one-third of the attacks ($n = 65$, 38%) ended quickly, including those that were explosions or arsons, attacks involving only vehicles as weapons, attacks that ended within one minute, and those described as limited to the attacker firing their weapon and immediately ending the attack. For example, one attacker fired 12 shots in five seconds, harming his estranged wife, her friend, and the friend's boyfriend, before walking away.

One-quarter of the attacks ($n = 45$, 26%) were longer in duration, lasting over 15 minutes. This included 22 that lasted an hour or more. Many of these incidents involved standoffs with law enforcement or were spree attacks across multiple locations. In one case, an attacker conducted a series of drive-by shootings over approximately seven hours, targeting individuals he believed had wronged him. Another attacker held some of his wounded victims hostage, preventing them from receiving medical attention. Officers attempted to negotiate with him for 40 minutes before shooting and disarming him.

LONGEST ATTACK AT A SINGLE SITE: *On November 29, 2020, a 21-year-old man opened fire from the window of his third-floor apartment. The attacker had called police and falsely reported hearing gunshots or fireworks nearby. When responding officers arrived on scene, the attacker opened fire, injuring one officer and two neighbors. After an eight-hour standoff, the attacker surrendered when he was injured by a police sniper. He later told police that he was specifically targeting police and did not intend to harm bystanders.*



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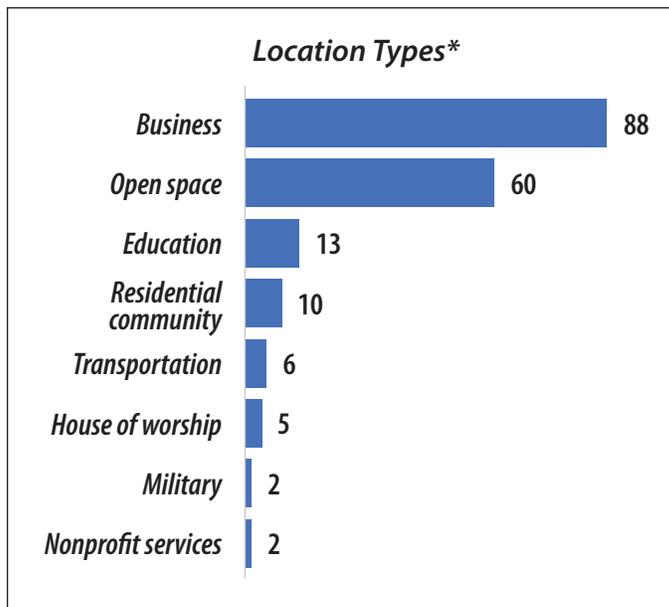
LOCATIONS

The 173 attacks occurred in a variety of public and semi-public spaces across 37 states and the District of Columbia. The communities impacted ranged from a small town with a population of 390 to a major city of 8.6 million residents.

ATTACK SPANNING MULTIPLE STATES: On November 26, 2020, a 30-year-old man, his 25-year-old wife, and his 28-year-old brother reportedly drove around two different states, shooting at cars and individuals. Officials reported that attacks occurred over several hours, including on the interstate and in a convenience store parking lot. The group is alleged to have killed one person and injured six others before being apprehended following a police pursuit. The 30-year-old man and 25-year-old woman were married 19 days prior to the attacks, and officials reported that they planned the attacks with the groom's brother while on a road trip after the wedding.

While the majority of attacks took place in public locations that are freely accessible to the general population ($n = 119, 69\%$), one-third occurred in sites considered semi-public ($n = 58, 34\%$), including certain workplaces, educational institutions, and houses of worship.

The most common types of locations were businesses ($n = 88, 51\%$), including the places where we eat, shop, work, heal, or receive services, followed by open spaces ($n = 60, 35\%$) such as outdoor events, streets, sidewalks, and parking lots. The rest included the schools and universities where we learn, the shared communal areas where we live, and the places where we worship. Of the 13 that took place at educational institutions, 3 occurred at elementary schools, 7 at high schools, and 3 at universities. The two attacks impacting nonprofit services occurred at homeless shelters.



BUSINESS TYPES**	n
Restaurant/bar	25
Retail	21
Service	20
Manufacturing/distribution	10
Healthcare	9
Government	4

*The total number of location types will exceed 173 as 14 attacks took place at more than one type of location.

**One attack took place at two different business types.

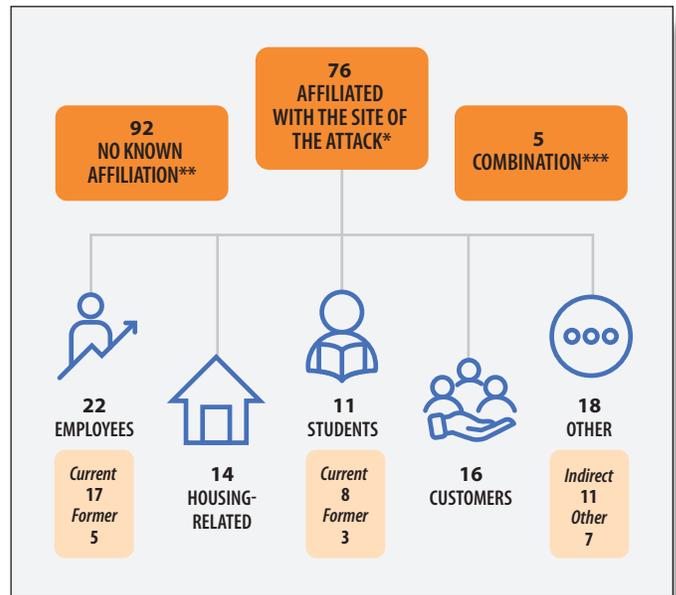


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TARGETING & HARM CAUSED

Attackers' affiliations with the sites

In just over half of the attacks ($n = 92$, 53%), the attacker(s) had no known affiliation with the location(s) where the attack took place. Some appeared to open fire in random locations, while others selected their target location(s) for what it represented or offered. In the remaining 81 cases, the perpetrator had a known affiliation with the site of the attack. Most often, this affiliation was that of a current or former employee ($n = 22$, 13%) or as a customer or client ($n = 16$, 9%). Other affiliations included being a current or former resident at a housing-related site and being a current or former student at a school or university. In some cases, attackers were affiliated with a site indirectly through another person, for example, by selecting a family member's restaurant or the workplace of a former romantic partner. Four of these attacks began at an affiliated site and continued with the attacker causing harm at additional unaffiliated locations. A fifth attacker opened fire while driving to his workplace, where he then attacked co-workers.



* 76 attacks involved only sites with which the attacker was affiliated
** 92 attacks involved only sites with which the attacker was unaffiliated
*** 5 attacks (three housing-related and two with current employees) involved the affiliated site and other sites with which the attacker had no affiliation

INDIRECT AFFILIATION: On March 22, 2017, a 45-year-old man fatally shot four individuals in a shooting spree across three locations. Angry about their ongoing divorce proceedings, the attacker first drove to his wife's workplace at a bank to demand she sign divorce papers. After his wife refused and fled the bank, the attacker shot and killed two of her co-workers. The attacker then drove to a law firm where he shot and killed his wife's divorce attorney, before fleeing to his home as police pursued. From his apartment, the attacker shot and killed a responding officer. He remained in a standoff with law enforcement for over three hours before officers breached his apartment. The attacker was injured during a shootout with law enforcement and later died from his injuries.





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Random vs. specific targeting

The 173 attacks resulted in physical harm to 1,747 people (513 killed and 1,234 injured). In over two-thirds of the incidents ($n = 118$, 68%), attackers did not appear to direct harm toward particular individuals; rather, they directed harm toward random persons. In some of these cases, the random targeting was based on gender, religion, race, or ethnicity. In others, victims were targeted for belonging to specific groups, such as police officers or members of the homeless community. One attacker targeted random couples at an outdoor shopping complex because he was frustrated by his inability to find a romantic partner.

On May 20, 2020, a 20-year-old man shared a video on social media saying he was going to be the 2020 shooter at the specific mall he targeted. Shortly after, he began walking around the shopping center shooting randomly at people, injuring three, while recording video on his phone. Police arrived within 10 minutes, and the attacker put down his weapon and was arrested. About 30 minutes before the attack, he arrived at the site and looked for targets. As a self-identified incel, or involuntarily celibate person, he wanted to target people his age, as well as couples, because of his frustration with failing to date women. He thought the shooting would earn him respect. He later told police that he wanted at least 10 victims from his attack.

In the remaining one-third of the incidents ($n = 55$, 32%), attackers had one or more specific targets in mind. In nearly all these cases ($n = 54$), the attack was motivated, at least in part, a grievance that was related to a domestic situation, a workplace, or other personal issue. In nearly all of these attacks ($n = 51$), at least one pre-selected target was harmed, and in most ($n = 45$), at least one random victim was harmed. The specific targets included current or former romantic partners, current or former co-workers, and family members. In some cases ($n = 10$, 6%), the attackers targeted people who were connected to one of these individuals, such as their ex-girlfriend's current boyfriend, their wife's divorce attorney, or their in-laws. Other specific targets included bullies at school and other individuals with whom the attackers had a grievance, such as neighbors.





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RESOLUTION

In over half of the attacks ($n = 97$, 56%), the attacker(s) stopped causing harm on their own. Most of these attackers ($n = 53$) were then arrested, including five who remained at the site waiting for law enforcement response. Many also committed suicide ($n = 42$) either as part of the attack or after they left the site.

On January 29, 2017, a 40-year-old man fatally shot the two co-owners and his manager in the back office of a restaurant where he worked. He destroyed a computer that he falsely believed contained surveillance video of the incident and fled the scene. He was later spotted near his home and, approximately nine hours after the attack, the attacker shot himself twice in the chest as police closed in. He survived the suicide attempt and was later sentenced to prison.

In nearly one-quarter of the incidents ($n = 38$, 22%), the attacker ceased causing harm due to law enforcement intervention, including 24 in which the attackers were killed by law enforcement at the site. Other incidents ended due to bystander intervention ($n = 18$, 10%) or when the weapon became inoperable ($n = 19$, 11%). This included 11 vehicular attacks (6%) that ended in crashes.

REASONS ATTACKS ENDED	n	%
Attackers stopped on their own, then...	97	56%
Arrested at/away from the scene	53	
Committed suicide as part of the attack	30	
Committed suicide away from the scene	12	
Killed by law enforcement away from the scene	2	
Law enforcement intervened, then...	38	22%
Killed by law enforcement	24	
Arrested at/away from the scene	14	
Weapon rendered inoperable, then arrested	19	11%
Bystander intervened, then...	18	10%
Arrested at/away from the scene	13	
Killed by bystander(s)	3	
Killed by law enforcement away from the scene	2	
Circumstances unclear	1	1%

Attackers Calling 911

Thirteen attackers called 911 during or after the incident and identified themselves as the perpetrator. One of these attackers departed the scene and, when he was unable to get through to a dispatcher, returned to the scene to turn himself in.

A significant relationship was identified between how attacks ended and who was being targeted. Most attackers who targeted specific individuals ended the attack on their own (78% vs. 42% of attackers without named targets). Also, the vast majority of attackers who were stopped by law enforcement or bystanders were targeting random individuals (86% vs. 60% of attacks ended by other means).



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MOTIVES

Motives for acts of targeted violence are often multifaceted. For some attacks included in this study, NTAC identified as many as three or more components to the attackers' motives for carrying out an attack. Across the 173 incidents, the most common components of motive were related to 1) grievances; 2) ideological, bias-related, or political beliefs; and 3) psychotic symptoms. In total, 130 attacks (75%) were motivated in whole or in part by one or more of these top three motives. While oftentimes overlapping, each of these represents a distinct type of motivation for violence, requiring distinct community resources for prevention.

COMPONENTS TO MOTIVE*	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	TOTAL
Grievances	40%	50%	68%	35%	60%	51%
<i>Personal</i>	5	9	11	8	13	46
<i>Domestic</i>	6	6	8	1	8	29
<i>Workplace</i>	2	6	3	4	3	18
Ideological, bias-related, or political beliefs	30%	24%	10%	21%	10%	18%
Psychotic symptoms	13%	26%	10%	15%	8%	14%
Desire to kill	13%	8%	3%	9%	3%	7%
Fame or notoriety	7%	8%	3%	6%	5%	6%
Other	3%	3%	10%	9%	8%	6%
Undetermined	20%	8%	10%	29%	23%	18%

* The percentages for each year do not total 100% as some attackers had multiple motives.

Grievances

Half of the attacks ($n = 88$, 51%) were motivated in whole or in part by a perceived grievance. These grievances most often related to a personal factor ($n = 46$, 27%), such as bullying, stress related to health and finances, ongoing feuds with neighbors, or feelings of victimization (e.g., being robbed or harassed). In other cases, grievances were related to issues with a current or former domestic relationship ($n = 29$, 17%) or the workplace ($n = 18$, 10%).

Grievances have remained the most common component to the motives of mass attackers from 2016 to 2020.

On July 13, 2020, a 24-year-old man reportedly set fire to a motel using gasoline, killing two and injuring five others, in an effort to seek retribution for the theft of his laptop. Two days before the incident, a laptop was stolen from the man and his girlfriend. The two traced their stolen laptop to the motel and knocked on doors demanding residents return it. The man also called 911 at least twice to report the theft and his belief that someone at the motel had the laptop. He was arrested 15 days after the fire.



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Ideological, bias-related, or political beliefs

Extreme or hate-based views played a prominent role in the motivation for one-fifth of the attacks ($n = 32$, 18%). These attackers held beliefs or biases against a variety of groups, including members of racial, ethnic, religious, or political groups, as well as women and police officers. In one case, an attacker was motivated to commit an attack against a predominantly White church in retaliation for an earlier attack that targeted a predominantly Black congregation. In at least three cases, attackers were motivated to kill police officers in response to perceived racial injustice. For six beliefs-related incidents, the attackers also experienced mental health symptoms that influenced their motives.

On March 14, 2020, near the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, a 19-year-old man reportedly used two knives to attack a family at a superstore. Four people were injured, including an employee who tried to stop the attack. Officials reported the attacker entered the store behind an Asian family and upon entry to the store asked an employee where he could find the utensil aisle, where he is believed to have acquired the knives used in the incident. Upon his arrest, the man told investigators that he attacked the family because he thought they were Chinese and spreading the coronavirus.

Related to psychotic symptoms

In 25 incidents (14%), the attackers' symptoms of psychosis played a role in their motivation to carry out the attack. At least 12 experienced auditory or visual hallucinations, and several others held delusional or paranoid beliefs. One attacker believed he had been possessed by the devil and heard voices telling him to kill the victims; another believed the government was controlling him via secret online communications and was placing terrorist propaganda on his computer.

On May 1, 2017, a 21-year-old student stabbed four other male students at a university, killing one and injuring three. Less than a month before the incident, the attacker was committed for nine days to a hospital for observation and mental health treatment. According to friends and family, around this time the attacker's behavior began to change and he was paranoid, delusional, and suffering from visual and auditory hallucinations. At times the attacker believed he was Jesus Christ, that others were trying to kill him, and that the world was not real. He also heard voices telling him to die. Five days before the incident, the attacker was hospitalized again for suicidal ideation and was released hours later. The morning of the incident, the attacker walked around campus and, according to later testimony by a mental health professional, believed what he did in his attack was not real.





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Other motives included attackers having a desire to kill ($n = 12, 7\%$), including one who indicated killing was on his bucket list, as well as those who sought fame or notoriety ($n = 10, 6\%$). At times, these two motives were held together. For example, one attacker told others he wanted to carry out a mass shooting in which he killed more people than past attackers. He also claimed he would be on the news soon, and recorded a video of himself styling his hair to look “fabulous” for his attack. The remaining motives included several attackers who wanted to commit suicide-by-cop or were motivated by more individualized goals, including one attacker who opened fire at his high school, killing 2 and injuring 10, as an experiment to see how society would react, and because he was curious about life in prison.

In one-fifth of attacks ($n = 33, 19\%$), attackers made statements or engaged in prior behaviors that indicated they did not plan to survive the attack. Among these, 18 attackers died by suicide after committing the attack, including 2 who counted their shots and saved the final bullets for themselves. Others authored suicide notes or other writings indicating they would not be around to see the impact of their actions.

PLANNING

All 173 attacks included in this study were deliberate acts of violence. For almost one-third of the incidents ($n = 53, 31\%$), some information describing the specific steps taken to prepare was found in open sources. This section outlines these planning behaviors, categorizing them across seven broader themes. For some attackers, their planning began years prior, while for others the distinct preparations began the same day as the attack. The attack preparation behaviors included:

- **Target-related planning ($n = 32$)**, such as following, visiting, photographing, or researching the target or potential targets. When researching the target, attackers did so both online and offline. For example, attackers searched online for information on targeted schools, looked for addresses of police officers, looked up expected attendance numbers at events, accessed online maps, called the targeted site for schedules, and asked others to find out information for them.
- **Weapons-related planning ($n = 29$)**, to include failed attempts to acquire a weapon, the acquisition or manufacture of weapons or components (outside of those used in the attack, which are described elsewhere), researching the kinds of weapons to use or where and how to get them, practicing with weapons, and securing firearms permits in advance.

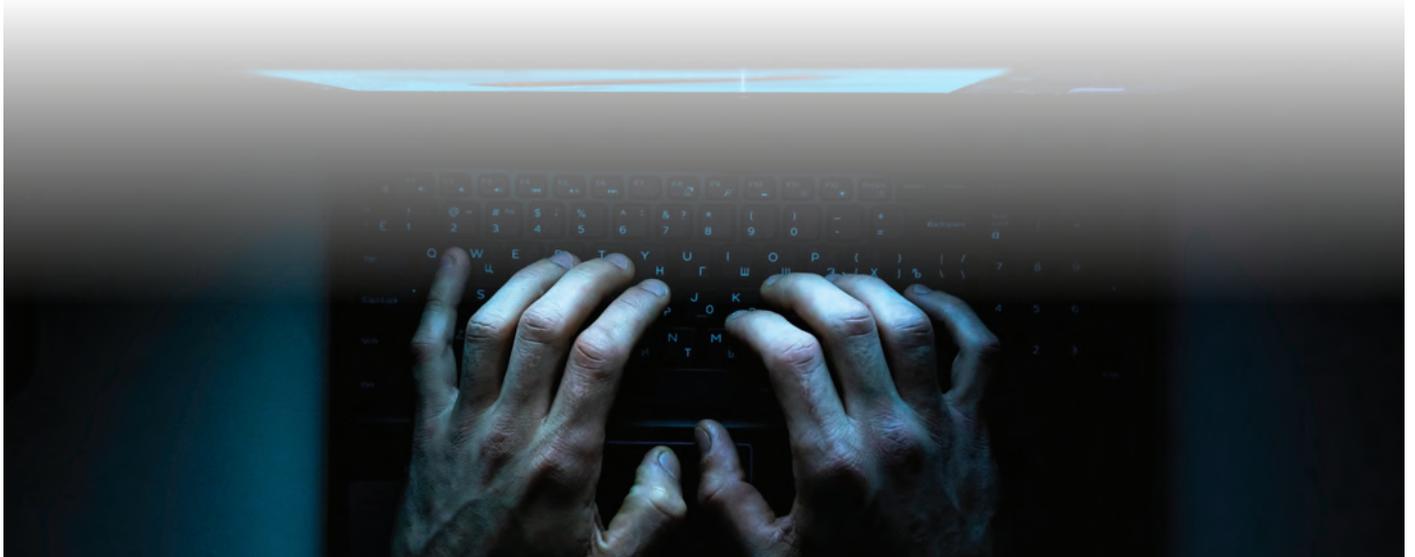
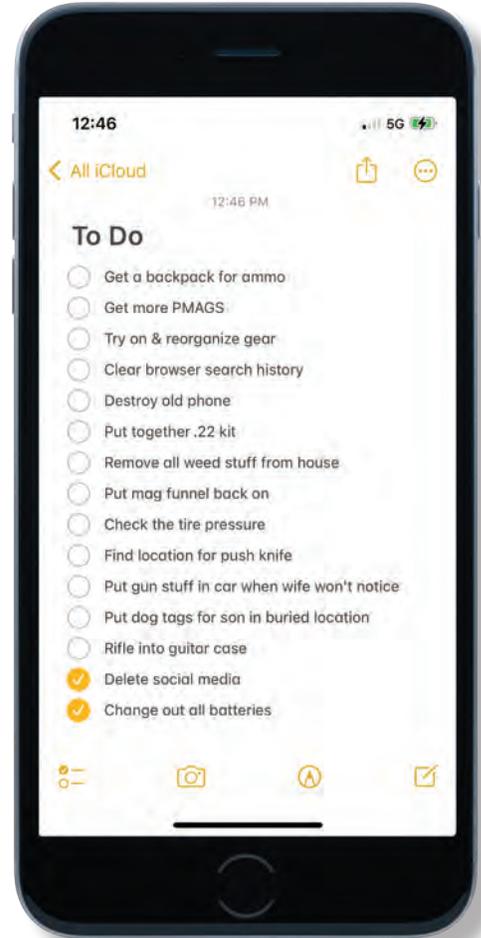
PLANNING THEMES	<i>n</i>
Target-related	32
Weapons-related	29
Documentation	9
Develop an attack plan	8
Research prior attacks	7
Research logistical concerns	6
Other planning behaviors	31

On September 23, 2016, a 20-year-old man opened fire in a department store and fatally shot five people. Hours before carrying out his attack, he entered a gun store and asked if they had “.45s and stuff.” When the attacker asked the owner about background checks and was told one would be required, he “puffed up.” When he asked about buying from a gun show, the owner told him that the state requires checks for private sales as well. Believing there was something “off” with him, the store owner decided he would not sell the attacker a firearm. The attacker left the store without making a purchase. At the time, a court order prohibiting the attacker from owning firearms would likely have appeared on a background check. The attacker went on to use a firearm belonging to a family member in his attack.



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- **Documentation ($n = 9$)**, including preparing to-do lists, hit lists, and maps of the targeted site.
- **Development of an attack plan ($n = 8$)**, which involved detailing steps they would take while conducting their attacks, such as blocking exits or employing combat techniques; analyzing the location within the building and the timing of the attack to maximize casualties based on observed patterns; and calculating trajectory of bullets. Some attackers described these plans in journals or videos. Five days before his attack, one attacker described his plan online, telling others that he planned to kill his father, then steal his father's keys or ride his own bike to the targeted school. He told them who he would target first, that he intended to use pipe bombs, and that he planned to commit suicide during the attack.
- **Researching prior attacks ($n = 7$)**, to include school shootings and international terrorist incidents. Attackers also studied past attackers' tactics for the purpose of learning what they did, what worked, and what did not.
- **Researching logistical concerns ($n = 6$)** pertaining to issues that could impact their attack plan, such as law enforcement response times and capabilities, military tactics, and whether car doors can stop bullets. One attacker researched rules about gun stores reporting suspicious behaviors, whether Google searches are monitored, and reporting of unusual credit card spending.





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Other preparations ($n = 31$) included planning what they would wear, making financial arrangements for family, purchasing other equipment, renting vehicles, setting up new profiles for online purchases, and changing scheduled appointments or plans.

On June 28, 2018, a 38-year-old man opened fire in a newsroom, killing five employees. The attacker had a long-standing grudge against the newspaper that involved extensive litigation. Three years prior, he initially considered targeting the Court of Appeals, even surveying the building and acquiring building schematics from a floorplan posted in an elevator. He decided against targeting the court, however, due to the police presence. A year before the attack at the newsroom, he visited the building and took video of the exits, noted the dimensions of the offices, downloaded pictures of the office space, and researched the employees and their families. He considered different scenarios as to how he would execute the attack and chose the date of the attack to coincide with the board meeting and state primaries in order to maximize the number of potential victims who would be in the office. Within the month before the attack, he sold his car. Days prior to the attack, he purchased a lifetime chess membership to prepare for his future incarceration and rented a car to drive to the site. On the day of the attack, he used a locking device to block the doors from the outside and brought a timer to track the police response.

Final communications and acts

Over one-quarter of the 180 attackers ($n = 51$, 28%) made final communications and/or displayed final act behaviors that indicated a level of imminence to the attack. Final communications included farewell videos, journals or manifestos that detailed their plans and motives, social media posts, goodbye calls or messages to friends and family, suicide notes, and cryptic statements to others indicating they would not see them again. Final acts, some of which were part of planning, included attackers terminating a lease, giving away personal possessions, no longer buying food for a pet, verifying or changing life insurance, and securing finances for family members.

On December 25, 2020, a 63-year-old man detonated an explosive inside his RV, killing himself, in a downtown area of a major city. The attacker displayed numerous final acts and final communications prior to the attack. Within a month before the bombing, the attacker gave his house to someone else and told a client he was retiring. In the days before the bombing, the attacker gave his car to a friend and mailed writings and videos of his conspiracy beliefs with no return address. In the hours leading up to his bombing, the attacker broadcast announcements from his RV warning people in the area that an explosion was imminent, including a countdown before the detonation.





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WEAPONS

Nearly three-quarters of the attacks ($n = 126$, 73%) involved the use of one or more firearms, including rifles, handguns, and shotguns. Most attacks involving firearms were fatal ($n = 105$), while fewer than half of the non-firearm attacks were fatal. Other types of weapons used included bladed weapons ($n = 28$, 16%), vehicles ($n = 18$, 10%), blunt objects ($n = 6$, 3%), explosives ($n = 3$, 2%), and incendiaries or arson ($n = 3$, 2%). The other weapons included attackers assaulting victims using their fists or other manual means in combination with other weapons. Fourteen attacks involved more than one type of weapon, such as attacks with a vehicle and firearm or a bladed weapon and firearm.

On May 15, 2018, the owner of a day spa opened a package that exploded, killing her and severely injuring two customers. According to officials, the 59-year-old attacker was the owner's former boyfriend and co-owner of the spa, and reportedly committed the attack out of jealousy after the victim began dating another man. The victim had told friends prior to the attack that she feared the attacker because he had threatened her.

In some incidents ($n = 37$, 21%), attackers brought additional weapons to the site that were not used during the attack, including additional firearms, knives, and pipe bombs. In others, attackers acquired the weapons at the site of the attack, such as a knife or blunt object that was found or a vehicle stolen at the scene.



* Totals more than 173 because 14 attacks involved more than one weapon type

Attacks involving firearms

Percentages in this section are calculated based on the 126 attacks involving firearms.

Types of firearms used

Attackers used a variety of firearm types and calibers, including handguns ($n = 93$, 74%) and long guns ($n = 40$, 32%).³ In some attacks, both handguns and long guns were used ($n = 16$). Of the known handgun types, most were semiautomatic ($n = 65$) and some were revolvers ($n = 10$). Of the known long guns, most were also semiautomatic ($n = 33$), several were shotguns ($n = 8$), and there was only one attack involving firearms that were capable of firing fully automatic ($n = 1$). The most frequently used bullet caliber was 9mm ($n = 37$, 29%).

In some attacks, the firearms used had been modified ($n = 27$). These modifications included the addition of laser sights, bump stocks, and silencers; the use of high-capacity magazines; the addition of slings or bipods to support a rifle while firing; shortening the firearm barrel; and adding stock handles.



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How the firearms were acquired

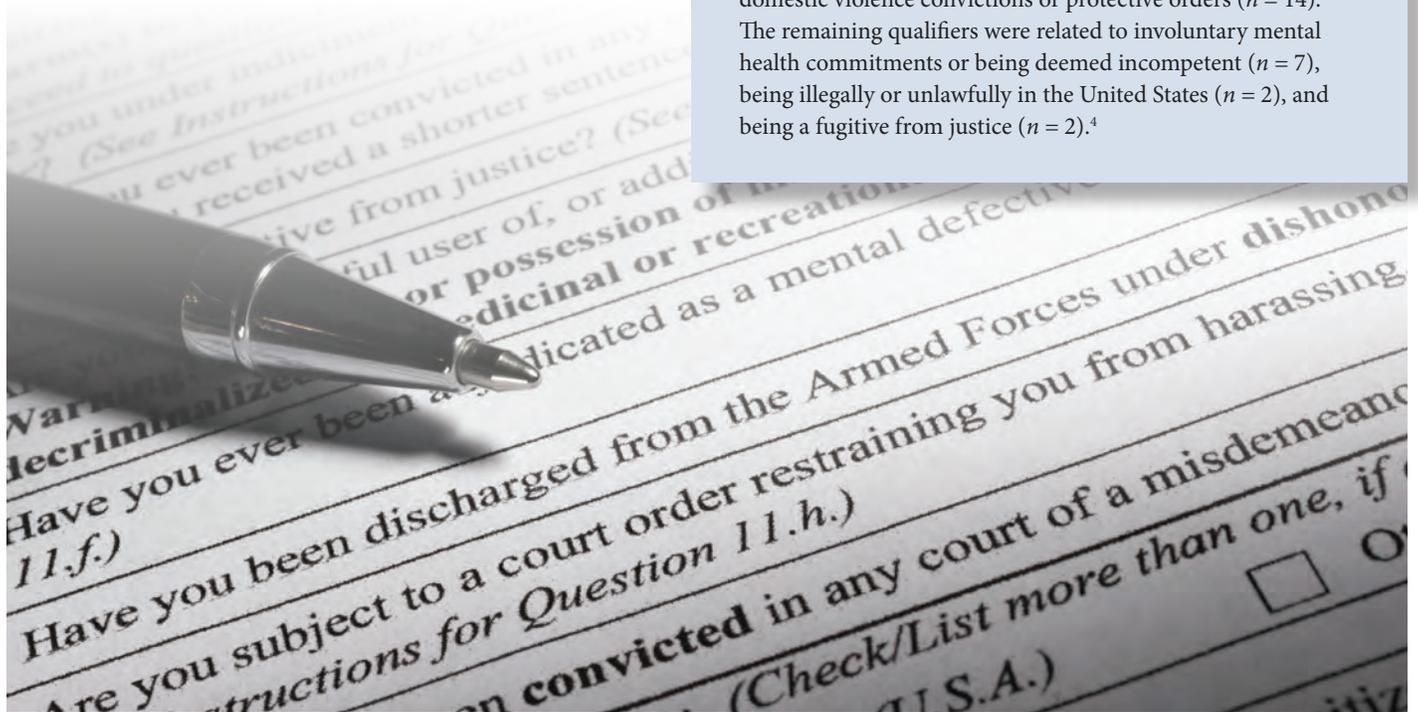
In over half of the attacks involving firearms ($n = 70$, 56%), the attackers themselves owned at least one of the firearms used. They were acquired through a variety of means, including being purchased by the attacker ($n = 46$) or for the attacker ($n = 1$), stolen by the attacker ($n = 9$), gifted to the attacker ($n = 3$), built by the attacker ($n = 2$), and provided by an employer ($n = 1$). In 10 cases, at least 1 of the attackers was subject to an age restriction prohibiting possession. For six, the attacker was known to have used online communications to facilitate the acquisition of the firearm or magazines in some way. This included three attackers who purchased their firearms online and picked them up at local stores; one who ordered parts online to build a 9mm semiautomatic handgun; another who purchased high-capacity magazines, gun sights, and smoke grenades online; and one who contacted a seller through a website using an alias.

National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS)

NICS is the system federally licensed firearms dealers are required to use to determine whether a person is legally disqualified from purchasing or possessing a firearm under federal law. To be entered into this system, one must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- ✓ Felony conviction or being under felony indictment
- ✓ Fugitive from justice
- ✓ Unlawful drug use within a given timeframe
- ✓ Adjudicated incompetent or involuntarily committed to a mental health institution
- ✓ Illegally or unlawfully present in the United States
- ✓ Dishonorably discharged from the United States Armed Forces
- ✓ Renounced one's United States citizenship
- ✓ Being subject to a domestic-related protective order
- ✓ Misdemeanor domestic violence conviction

Of the 133 attackers who used firearms, over one-quarter ($n = 38$, 29%) met at least one criterion that federally disqualified them from purchasing or possessing firearms at the time of their attacks. While most would have been disqualified for prior felony convictions or an active felony indictment ($n = 27$), many would have been disqualified for domestic violence convictions or protective orders ($n = 14$). The remaining qualifiers were related to involuntary mental health commitments or being deemed incompetent ($n = 7$), being illegally or unlawfully in the United States ($n = 2$), and being a fugitive from justice ($n = 2$).⁴





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Legality of acquisition

In nearly one-quarter ($n = 29$, 23%) of the attacks involving firearms, at least one of the firearms was acquired illegally by the attacker(s). In these cases, the acquisition was illegal because a) the attacker was legally prohibited by law from possessing a firearm, b) the firearm itself, or modifications thereof, was prohibited by state or local restrictions, or c) the transaction to acquire it was illegal as the attacker's required license was not yet active or someone else knowingly purchased it for an attacker who was legally prohibited from doing so themselves.⁵ Attackers who were legally prohibited from purchasing or possessing a firearm included those who were below the minimum legal age, had been previously convicted of a felony or domestic violence offense, had a prior involuntary mental health commitment, had an active domestic protective order, or lacked the proper permits for the weapon in their city or state.

On February 25, 2016, a 38-year-old man killed three and injured fourteen others in a shooting spree that began with him firing on other cars while driving and ended at his place of employment. The attacker had prior convictions for felonies and domestic violence. At the time of the attack, he was under the influence of methamphetamine. Earlier that day, the attacker was served a civil protection order from his ex-girlfriend at his place of employment. About six months before the incident, the attacker obtained the pistol and rifle used in his attack from a different ex-girlfriend, who purchased the weapons for him after he threatened her with violence.

Firearms confiscated or licenses revoked

Twelve attackers (10%) previously had a firearm confiscated, had a weapons-related permit or license revoked, or were required by officials to relinquish a weapon. Some of these attackers were court-ordered to relinquish firearms as part of a protection order or case related to domestic violence. One attacker was ordered to surrender his firearms following a domestic violence incident; however, instead of relinquishing his firearms to law enforcement, he gave them to a friend. Some attackers did not comply with the orders and failed to surrender their weapons entirely. One attacker had firearms confiscated on two separate occasions—during a child pornography investigation and after a psychotic episode in a law enforcement office. In both cases, the firearms were later returned to the attacker. Most of the attackers who were ordered to relinquish guns or had them confiscated later went on to use firearms in their attacks ($n = 9$).

On February 15, 2019, a 45-year-old man fatally shot five and injured six others at his workplace after being informed he would be fired. Years earlier, he was approved for a firearm license and purchased a handgun after lying about a prior felony conviction. While subsequently applying for a concealed carry license, authorities uncovered his past felony conviction. He was ordered to relinquish his firearm and his firearm license was revoked. The attacker did not comply with the order and remained in possession of the handgun, which he later used in his attack.

Most Recent Firearms Acquisition

For 50 attacks, the timing of the acquisition of at least one firearm used was found. In 19, the firearm was acquired within one month of the attack; in 3, it was acquired the same day as the attack.



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ADDITIONAL ITEMS BROUGHT FOR THE ATTACK

Many attackers prepared for the attacks by bringing extra items beyond their weapons. In one-third of the incidents ($n = 58$, 34%), they brought equipment or extra ammunition. In addition to armored vests brought in ten attacks, other equipment included binoculars, eye and ear protection, handcuffs, and tactical clothing like masks or non-armored vests with pockets to hold ammunition. In one incident, a pair of attackers sewed handcuff keys into their underwear prior to the attack. These attackers also wore military-style body armor, dressed in black, and created a homemade device to catch discharged shell casings.

In at least one-quarter of the incidents ($n = 44$, 25%), the attackers brought excess ammunition with them. Though the exact amount of extra ammunition brought was unclear in 11 of these cases, the others ranged from up to 100 additional rounds to over 1,000. Those who brought the most included one who brought approximately 1,000 hollow point rounds, another who brought over 2,500 rounds, and one who brought over 5,280 rounds.





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THE ATTACKERS

The 173 attacks in this study were carried out by 180 attackers. Though most involved lone attackers ($n = 168, 97\%$), five attacks involved two or three attackers that were family members, friends, and/or romantic partners.

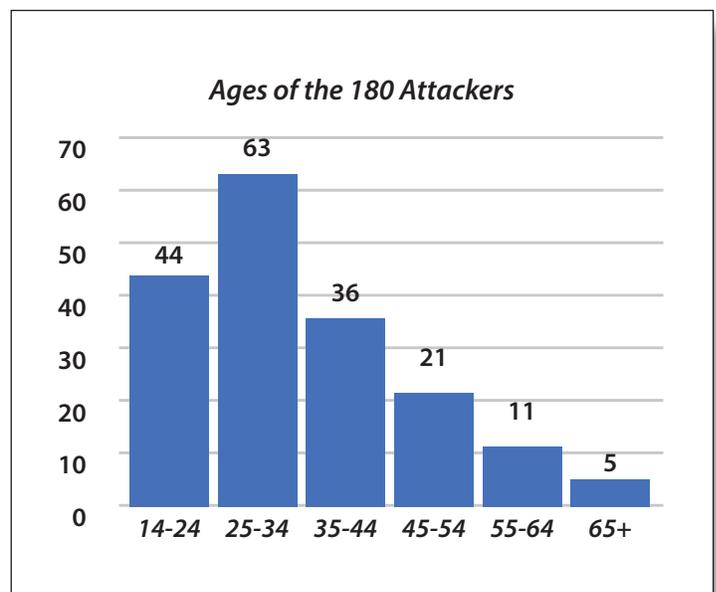
For the remainder of this report, unless otherwise indicated, all percentages are calculated based on the 180 attackers.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Consistent with previous Secret Service analyses of mass attacks, nearly all the 180 attackers ($n = 172, 96\%$) in the study were male. Three attackers were transgender, assigned female at birth but known to identify as male at the time of their attacks. The remaining five attackers were female. The attackers' ages ranged from 14 to 87, with an average of 34.

OLDEST ATTACKER: *On February 20, 2020, an 87-year-old man, using a walker, crossed a second-floor balcony and opened fire on his victims as they sat below in a common area, killing one and injuring two others at a senior apartment complex where the attacker and two of the victims were residents. The attacker then went to a nearby common room and fatally shot himself. He had a history of disputes with the three victims and had made threatening and suicidal comments in the past. One of the victims had obtained a temporary protection order against the attacker in September 2019; it had expired by the time of the attack.*

Nearly half of the attackers were White non-Hispanic ($n = 84, 47\%$), and one-third were Black ($n = 62, 34\%$). Lower percentages are seen across the other racial/ethnic categories including White Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, and multiracial attackers.⁶



RACE	n	%
White	103	57%
White (non-Hispanic/ethnicity unknown)	84	47%
Black/African American	62	34%
Hispanic	19	11%
Asian	7	4%
American Indian	1	1%
Multiracial	1	1%
Undetermined	5	3%
Hispanic ethnicity	22	12%



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EMPLOYMENT

One-third of the attackers ($n = 58$, 32%) were known to be employed at the time of the attack, while one-fifth ($n = 37$, 21%) were known to be unemployed. The employment status of the remaining 85 attackers (47%) could not be determined based on publicly available information.

Those who were employed held a variety of positions, including retail, food service, or grocery clerk, as well as software developer, insurance adjuster, electrician, lawyer, security guard, and active military. In some cases, attackers were self-employed, offering services as a car mechanic, HVAC professional, chiropractor, private investigator, or an online life coach.

On July 17, 2016, a 29-year-old man fatally shot four police officers and wounded two others in the parking lot of a convenience store. He was fatally shot by responding officers. The attacker actively targeted the officers. In 2015, the attacker, a former U.S. Marine, became active on multiple social media platforms, maintained two websites, and sold self-help books through a major website. His posts touched on nutrition, health, and fitness; self-awareness and empowerment; personal life stories; and calls for revolution. He was a self-described “freedom strategist, mental game coach, nutritionist, author and spiritual advisor.” He also claimed to give advice on how to reach “complete and full masculinity.” The attacker charged \$119 an hour to give advice as a life coach.

Fifty-three attackers (29%) experienced at least one voluntary or involuntary job loss prior to their attacks, most ($n = 34$) within five years of the attack and some ($n = 8$) within one month. For three attackers, their employment ended the same day as the attack. One of these attackers was fired from his truck driving position two hours prior to initiating his attack. Another quit his job as a security guard that morning, hours before he perpetrated his attack at a church. The third attacker opened fire during a disciplinary meeting after being told he was going to be fired.

On June 30, 2017, a 45-year-old doctor opened fire inside a hospital where he was formerly employed, killing one and injuring six others. As police were responding, he set himself on fire and fatally shot himself. Beginning in his 20s, the attacker had worked as a pharmacy technician. In his 30s, he was arrested three times for crimes against persons. These arrests included being charged with attempted burglary after kicking down his girlfriend’s door, pleading guilty to a lesser crime of misdemeanor unlawful imprisonment after sexually assaulting a woman on the street, and being charged with unlawful surveillance after being caught using a mirror to look up women’s skirts. After receiving his medical degree, he found it difficult to find employment, so he continued to work as a pharmacy tech. In 2012, he quit a hospital job after being disciplined for mishandling medication. There, he was known to be argumentative with the nursing staff. He was subsequently denied unemployment benefits. He was later hired as a resident at the hospital where the attack would later occur. He passed the background check as he had pled to lesser charges related to the sexual assault. Six months later, he quit in lieu of being fired due to harassing and threatening behavior. At one point he explicitly threatened to come back and shoot others. Just months before the attack, he was hired as a city case worker to visit patients with HIV and AIDS. Again, his sexual abuse crime did not come up in a background check. In April 2017, he stopped coming to work, and was ultimately fired nine days before the attack.





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CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

Nearly two-thirds of the attackers ($n = 115$, 64%) had a prior criminal history, not including minor traffic violations. While over half ($n = 103$, 57%) had been arrested or faced charges for non-violent offenses, over one-third of the attackers ($n = 68$, 38%) faced prior charges for violent offenses. Additionally, 11 attackers (6%) had prior arrests or charges for sex crimes. The violent offenses included such acts as domestic violence, aggravated assault, robbery, and animal cruelty. The non-violent offenses involved a range of charges, including:

- Drug-related crimes;
- Property crimes (e.g., theft, burglary, driving a stolen vehicle, shoplifting, fraud, hit and run);
- Weapons offenses (e.g., possession by a felon or carrying a concealed firearm);
- Conduct crimes (e.g., public intoxication, criminal mischief, trespassing, disorderly conduct, obstruction);
- Crimes against persons (e.g., harassment, home invasion, tampering with witnesses, threatening others).

Nearly 2/3 had
criminal histories



Over 1/2 charged
with non-violent crimes



Over 1/3 charged
with violent crimes



11 charged with sex
crimes





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While half of the attackers ($n = 89$, 49%) had **criminal histories that began over five years** prior to the attack, two-fifths of the attackers had faced at least one charge within five years ($n = 74$, 41%) and one-fifth ($n = 35$, 19%) did so within one year. Two attackers were arrested within the week prior to their attacks.

RECENT ARREST RELATED TO THE ATTACK: *On November 21, 2020, a 23-year-old man parked a rental truck at a fast food restaurant, set fire to the truck, and threw what appeared to be explosives into the restaurant's outdoor eating area. Wearing military gear, he then entered the restaurant and opened fire, killing two employees and injuring two others. Three days prior to the shooting, the attacker fraudulently purchased 11 burgers and 12 corn dogs for \$57 using a smartphone at the same location. Employees soon received a call from a man from out-of-state whose account was used to make the unauthorized purchase. They then used the transaction records to identify the vehicle associated with the purchase and provided the license plate to police when reporting the incident. The attacker was arrested that night but posted \$150 bail the next day.*

RECENT ARREST NOT RELATED TO THE ATTACK: *On May 18, 2017, a 26-year-old man drove onto the sidewalk at a busy landmark in a major city, killing 1 and injuring 18 others. He then crashed his vehicle and was held by a bystander until police arrived. The attacker had prior charges for battery, communicating a threat, and resisting an officer, but some of these charges had been dropped. Seven days prior to the attack, he was arrested for menacing and criminal possession of a weapon. In that incident, he had grabbed the neck of a notary who was meeting him at his home. He then pointed a kitchen knife at the notary and accused him of stealing the attacker's identity. He also asked the notary if he felt safe. The following day, the attacker pled guilty to harassment, was ordered to pay a fine, and was released from custody.*

Prior Investigations Conducted on Attackers

- Child pornography
-
- Strong arm robbery
-
- Terrorist ties & radicalization
-
- Destruction of property
-
- Inappropriate contact with women
-
- Hate crime assault
-
- Threats against a school

Criminal Behavior Unknown to Law Enforcement

Outside of their documented criminal histories, many attackers ($n = 77$, 43%) exhibited criminal behavior for which they were never charged, arrested, or contacted by law enforcement. This included attackers who had engaged in acts of domestic violence ($n = 41$, 23%), other violent crimes ($n = 42$, 23%), and non-violent crimes ($n = 40$, 22%).



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Other law enforcement contact

Almost one-third of the attackers ($n = 56, 31\%$) had at least one contact with law enforcement that did not result in arrest. For 22 of the attackers (12%), these types of non-arrest contacts with law enforcement were the only ones identified prior to their attack. Knowing the context of these contacts can provide important insights into the range of behaviors and situations that may be observed by law enforcement and others, some of which would inform prevention efforts. Contacts that did not involve an arrest included when law enforcement:

- Investigated the attackers for possible crimes for which they were not ultimately charged;
- Responded to reports of concerning behaviors (see *Concerning Behaviors* section);
- Served protection orders or eviction notices;
- Served as a police standby during an employment termination or the retrieval of belongings from a cohabitant;
- Issued formal or informal warnings;
- Interviewed attackers as victims or witnesses of a crime;
- Aided attackers by getting them emergency medical assistance, conducting welfare checks, or transporting them for mental health evaluations.

Some attackers initiated contact with law enforcement themselves by calling to report a crime, filing minor complaints about others, protesting an eviction, asking for mental health assistance, or discussing their beliefs, which were often paranoid or delusional.

Histories of Domestic Violence⁷

When conducting a behavioral threat assessment, it is important that investigators consider additional sources of information regarding an individual's history of domestic violence beyond criminal records, including interviews with the individuals or people who know the individual well.

Across all attackers included in this report, **73 attackers (41%) were found to have had a history of engaging in at least one incident of domestic violence.** Though 43 attackers did experience a contact with law enforcement related a situation involving domestic violence in which they were the aggressor, only 28 (16%) faced domestic violence charges while 15 (8%) either faced no charges or were charged with non-domestic crimes. In these cases, a criminal records check would not have shown any arrests for domestic violence.





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SUBSTANCE USE AND ABUSE

One-third of the attackers ($n = 62$, 34%) had a history of using illicit drugs (e.g., cocaine, methamphetamine, LSD, Ecstasy), misusing prescription medications (e.g., Xanax, Adderall, Vyvanse, Clonazepam, steroids), or abusing any substance including alcohol or marijuana. Attackers often experienced negative consequences because of their substance use, including criminal charges, professional or academic failures, court-ordered programs, and evictions.

Though in most cases the substance use occurred prior to the attacks, in 21 cases (12%), the attackers were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of their attacks. For example, one of the attackers had a history of alcohol-related charges and was under the influence of marijuana laced with PCP on the day of his attack.

MENTAL HEALTH

The vast majority of individuals in the United States who experience the mental health issues discussed in this section do not commit acts of crime or violence. The symptoms described in this section constitute potential contributing factors and should not be viewed as causal explanations for why the attacks occurred.

According to estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), over half of the population in the United States will be diagnosed with a mental health disorder at some point in their lifetime, with 20% of adults experiencing mental health symptoms each year.⁸ Of the 180 attackers included in this report, over half ($n = 105$, 58%) experienced mental health symptoms prior to or at the time of their attacks, with many experiencing symptoms of multiple types of mental health disorders. The age of symptom onset varied, with some attackers first experiencing symptoms in adolescence while others' symptoms began later in life. The symptoms exhibited by the attackers were observed by others, including family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, mental health professionals, and even those with less frequent contact. For one-quarter of the attackers ($n = 47$, 26%), others expressed or demonstrated concern over their mental health, having observed behaviors that appeared indicative of depression, paranoia, delusions, anxiety, or a deterioration of their general mental or emotional well-being (see *Concerning Behaviors* section).





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Symptoms observed

Depression and suicidal thoughts

One-third of the attackers ($n = 62$, 34%) experienced symptoms of depression at some point in their lives, and one-quarter ($n = 45$, 25%) had suicidal thoughts prior to their attacks. Other symptoms of depression experienced by the attackers included feelings of sadness, hopelessness, anger, irritability, and anxiety. Attackers also demonstrated difficulty sleeping, withdrawal or isolation from others, decline in academic or work performance, loss of appetite or weight gain, low energy, and deteriorating self-care.

On November 15, 2016, a 16-year-old student entered the boys' locker room at his high school with a bo staff and five knives. He hit one student over the head with the bo staff and non-fatally stabbed four others. As the attacker held the knife to his own throat, he was confronted by school staff and a school resource officer (SRO) and told to drop the knife. Though the SRO used a Taser, the attacker was able to stab and injure himself in the neck before he was detained. The attacker had been a straight-A student, but as he became depressed he began failing classes, lost his appetite, had trouble sleeping, and struggled with suicidal thoughts. He described his life as spinning out of control, each day feeling hopeless. He later stated, "School is where all the pain seemed to come from. I had to go there every day.... Every day I would go there and I would hate it." He hid his depression from his parents, later commenting, "It didn't seem like it would matter... Nobody noticed. Nobody cared. Not even my parents. I was really lost. And I felt like nothing mattered." He said, "I had been thinking of killing myself for a while but I just, I couldn't do it."

MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS	n	%
Any mental health history	105	58%
Depression	62	34%
Psychotic symptoms*	51	28%
Paranoia	36	20%
Delusions	33	18%
Hallucinations	23	13%
Suicidal thoughts	45	25%

* The numbers reported for the subtypes of psychotic symptoms do not equal the total number of attackers with psychotic symptoms as attackers often had multiple types of these symptoms.

Psychotic symptoms

Over one-quarter of the attackers ($n = 51$, 28%) experienced psychotic symptoms prior to or at the time of their attacks. When experiencing these symptoms, an individual's thoughts and perceptions of reality are disturbed and they typically have difficulty distinguishing between what is real and what is not. The most common psychotic symptoms experienced by the attackers included paranoia ($n = 36$, 20%), delusions ($n = 33$, 18%), and hallucinations ($n = 23$, 13%).

- **Paranoia** involves feelings of pervasive distrust and suspicion that one is being harmed, deceived, persecuted, or exploited by others.

On February 20, 2016, a 45-year-old man conducted a series of three separate attacks around a city over a four-hour timeframe. The attacker fatally shot six people and injured two others. The attacker drove for a rideshare company, though none of his victims were his direct fares that night. The attacker was arrested by law enforcement several hours later when he was located dropping off a passenger. Though the motive for his attack remains unclear, he stated that the rideshare company's app had taken control of his body and mind and forced him to shoot people. In the months leading up to his attack, neighbors noticed that the attacker became increasingly paranoid. They also noticed that he had a persistent fear that someone was breaking into his house, causing him to fire warning shots on one occasion, and that he bought an additional firearm and installed a fence because of his paranoia. Police later said they were not aware of any burglaries at the attacker's house.

Rates of psychotic disorders in the general population are relatively low. It is estimated that around 3.5% of the population experiences psychotic disorders.⁹



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- **Delusions** are false, idiosyncratic beliefs that are firmly maintained despite evidence to the contrary. The most common type of delusions experienced by the attackers in this study was paranoid delusions.

On August 31, 2019, a 36-year-old man drove across two cities shooting at pedestrians and vehicles with a semiautomatic rifle, killing 7 and injuring 24, including 3 law enforcement officers. He was fatally shot by pursuing police. The attacker had a history of mental health issues, paranoia, and violent acts against himself and others, which resulted in him being hospitalized for mental health evaluations and treatment on several occasions. The attacker's mother stated that he would unplug the television and other appliances because he believed that the government was spying on him. His other beliefs were that there were cameras in his house through which his relatives could watch him, he was being held against his will, and a cult planned to kill him. He also believed several companies were involved in child pornography and were cyberstalking him.

- **Hallucinations** are sensory perceptions that seem real but occur without any external stimulation. The most common type of hallucination is auditory (e.g., hearing voices).

On November 12, 2018, a 30-year-old man opened fire at a food distribution warehouse, injuring three people. As a teenager, he was transported to a psychiatric center for an evaluation and treatment for psychosis and schizophrenia. At the time, he was hearing voices. Three months before the attack, a shooting occurred at another distribution warehouse owned by the same company and the attacker believed his co-workers thought he had something to do with the shooting because of his telepathic abilities. He later told a crisis negotiator that voices were apologizing for directly targeting him and telling him to get help before he did something.

Treatment and diagnosis

One-third of the attackers ($n = 58$, 32%) had received some sort of mental health treatment prior to their attacks. This treatment varied widely and was often not sustained. The types ranged from medication management, counseling, and therapy sessions to involuntary hospitalization. At least one-quarter of the attackers ($n = 43$, 24%) were formally diagnosed with a mental health condition, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), intermittent explosive disorder, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder.





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BELIEF SYSTEMS

Public safety professionals tasked with violence prevention must operate with an understanding of, and adherence to, the individual rights protected by the U.S. Constitution. While planning or committing acts of violence in the name of a belief system is a crime, simply expressing or holding extreme beliefs is protected by the First Amendment.

Outside of the personal delusions that represented a symptom of mental illness, one-quarter of the attackers ($n = 47$, 26%) maintained or subscribed to a conspiratorial, topic-specific, or hate-focused belief system. Those captured as part of this study represented beliefs that were based on a distortion of facts (e.g., conspiracy theories) or advocated distrust, hatred, or the use of violence against others based on biases against a particular race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity. To be included in this report, the attackers must have overtly demonstrated their belief through their communications or behaviors, beyond a passing occurrence, prior to the attack. Of note, these beliefs were not always related to the attacker’s motive for carrying out the attack.

Often the attackers held beliefs that were topic-specific and multifaceted, bringing together biases against more than one group. Bias-based beliefs included anti-Semitism, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTQ+, anti-Asian, misogyny, and race-based supremacy. Other beliefs included those that were based on anti-government, anti-police, and jihadist ideologies. Some attackers were known to subscribe to single-issue topics such as anti-abortion views, gun rights, antifa, and animal rights.

On June 12, 2016, a 29-year-old man opened fire in a nightclub, killing 49 and injuring another 53 people. He fatally shot himself after negotiations failed and police gained entry into the club. Prior to the attack, he had exhibited behaviors indicative of several belief systems, including anti-Semitism, jihadism, and misogynistic or anti-female views. He was also known to make derogatory comments about women and Jewish people. The attacker called 911 and a news station during his attack to claim that the attack was on behalf of the Islamic State and demand the United States stop its airstrikes in Syria and Iraq. He had previously been investigated by law enforcement, initially for making terroristic statements and again for having been acquainted with someone who later carried out a terrorist attack.

Belief Systems Among Attackers

Anti-government

—

Anti-Semitism

—

Jihadism

—

Misogyny

—

Anti-police

—

White supremacy

—

Anti-immigrant

—

Anti-LGBTQ+

—

Black supremacy

—

Conspiracy theories

—

Anti-Asian

—

Anti-White

—

Other issue-specific



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Thirteen of the attackers (7%) endorsed or held beliefs involving common conspiracy theories. For some, their biases were embedded within these beliefs. Conspiracy theories observed among the attackers included beliefs that the moon landing was staged by the government, Jewish people were trying to take over the world, aliens or lizard people were preparing to take over, people of Chinese descent were responsible for the spread of coronavirus, and the U.N. was plotting to disarm U.S. citizens. Several also believed that the U.S. government orchestrated the September 11 terrorist attacks.

On May 26, 2017, a 35-year-old man fatally stabbed two and injured one after being confronted for shouting anti-Muslim slurs and other bigoted comments at two teenage girls on a light rail train. He was arrested 20 minutes later, one mile from the site. The previous night, while aboard a different train, he ranted about his racist and paranoid beliefs, threatened to stab people, and threatened and followed a Black woman who had asked him to stop. Years prior, while in prison for robbery and kidnapping, he developed an interest in Christian Identity extremism, which combines Christianity with White supremacy, anti-Semitism, and other beliefs against people of color. Closer to the time of the attack, outside of a bookstore where he sold and traded comic books from his extensive collection, he would “preach” to passersby about his beliefs, trying to “educate” them, which caused police to intervene. As part of his beliefs, the attacker refused to pay taxes, denounced circumcision, and believed in alien visitations, Viking mythologies, secret societies, human-reptile creatures, and shape-shifting aliens. An acquaintance would later state that the attacker “had gone down the conspiracy theory rabbit hole.” The attacker’s online activity grew increasingly provocative in the year prior to the attack. Online, he posted racist content, complaints about government overreach and police brutality, attacks on people born by Caesarean section, and threats of violence toward specific political figures. One month prior to the attack, he attended a march for free speech, where he drew the attention of others due to his combative behaviors and advocacy of violence. Police confiscated a bat he brought to assault counter-protesters.

At least six attackers (3%) became radicalized in their beliefs through online engagement. Approximately a year and half before his attack, one attacker subscribed to anonymous radical online imageboards. Following his attack, he told officers this was when he started to adopt hatred toward Jewish people. Another attacker allegedly began conducting his own online research into Salafi-jihadi violent extremism and eventually the Islamic State (ISIS). He viewed ISIS-related photographs and videos and listened to audio recordings on his cell phones. According to court documents, his cell phones contained approximately 90 videos and 3,800 photographs, many of which appeared to be ISIS propaganda. The videos included footage of beheadings and instructions to make a homemade explosive device.

Online Presence

Most of the 180 attackers had an identified presence online ($n = 114$, 63%) as they posted on blogs, uploaded music they created, and commented on and engaged with other social media posts and interests. They created accounts on many of the major social media platforms. Some of these attackers had a limited online presence, while others had an extensive footprint. Nearly one-quarter ($n = 42$, 23%) were found to have **conveyed concerning communications** online, such as threats to harm others and posts referencing suicidal ideations, previous mass shootings, violent content, and hate toward a particular ethnic group.



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Misogyny

Gender-based biases and extreme misogyny continue to pose a threat to women. As stated earlier, though not all who possess misogynistic views are violent, viewpoints that describe women as the enemy or call for violence against women remain a cause for concern. At least 35 attackers (19%) displayed misogynistic behaviors prior to their attacks, including calling women derogatory names, engaging in sexual harassment, and threatening sexual violence. Several attackers engaged in harassing and stalking behaviors toward former romantic partners, including calling or sending repeated text messages after a no-contact order was issued and repeatedly driving by the woman's home or workplace. Eight attackers had a known history of touching women in a sexual manner without their consent. One attacker was disciplined at work because he repeatedly touched a female co-worker inappropriately, ultimately leading to a workplace investigation and the attacker quitting before he could be fired. Another attacker had a history of groping women on the street. In addition to in-person acts, 14 attackers (8%) engaged in online misogynistic behavior. For example, while communicating through a social media platform messaging app, one attacker threatened to rape a female acquaintance. This same attacker went on to steal underwear from a female colleague while in the military.

On September 23, 2016, a 20-year-old man fatally shot five people with whom he had no connection at a mall department store. Since middle school, the attacker would make sexist and degrading comments toward female classmates, slap and grab their backsides, and at one point entered the home of a female classmate uninvited. In high school, while dating a co-worker, the attacker became violent toward her. Fellow employees warned her to avoid him because he would talk about killing people when he became angry. Later, when his girlfriend broke up with him over the violence, he threatened to rape and kill her. He also continued to contact her and share disturbing and bizarre information to include claims that he abused his dog. Several months later, the attacker was expelled from high school just weeks before graduation after classmates reported that he had sexually assaulted them. The following year, when the attacker had his own apartment, his female neighbor, who had known him in high school, kept a Taser by her front door. She complained to the property manager that she feared the attacker and would alter her route to her apartment when she saw him.

As described in prior NTAC publications, including *Hot Yoga Tallahassee: A Case Study of Misogynistic Extremism* (2022), those who subscribe to extreme misogynistic belief systems often communicate about, promote, and consume these views across various online communities. In some instances, some of these community members go beyond simply advocating on behalf of men, expressing extreme ideologies involving the sexual objectification of women and calls for violence against women. Four attackers displayed behaviors associated with the incel (i.e., involuntarily celibate¹⁰) movement, including posting praise for a prior incel mass attacker. One of these attackers self-identified as an incel, telling police after the incident that he perpetrated his attack because he was frustrated at his inability to get a girlfriend. Two attackers developed and posted related content online, including sharing tips on how to seduce women, discussing how to keep a woman "in check" at all times, and using language that objectified and demeaned women.

In addition to participating in misogynistic online communities, two attackers engaged in a form of harassment often directed toward women called "revenge porn," or nonconsensual pornography. This describes the act of sharing explicit photographs of an individual with others without the person's consent.¹¹ One attacker engaged in revenge porn when he posted photographs of his ex-girlfriend on her son's soccer team's online profile after she ended the relationship. Another threatened to post intimate photos he took of a former partner when she was 13, years after the relationship ended.



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INTEREST IN VIOLENCE OR WEAPONS

Thirty-seven (21%) of the attackers had an excessive or inappropriate interest in violence evidenced through consuming or producing violent content, demonstrating an interest in harming others, or an inappropriate interest in or obsession with weapons, often causing concern in others. One attacker referred to his firearms as “his family” in an online post, while another spent an excessive amount of time researching, manufacturing, and practicing with weapons. These violent interests were noted through a variety of behaviors, including repeatedly viewing footage of beheadings, writing lyrics and novellas about violent fantasies, sketching gory scenes, and keeping journals detailing desires to perpetrate mass violence. Similar to previous NTAC research examining targeted violence, 26 of the attackers showed an intense and inappropriate interest in prior mass attacks and serial killers, often identifying with the perpetrators, studying their methodology, and wanting to outdo their attacks.

On September 28, 2016, a 14-year-old boy opened fire outside of his former elementary school using his father’s handgun, killing one and injuring two others. After his gun jammed, he threw down his weapon and was held until law enforcement arrived. The attacker had a history of torturing small animals, including birds and frogs. A few months before his attack, he heard a song that mentioned the 1999 Columbine High School attack and became infatuated, researching Columbine and other incidents of mass shootings. Around this time, the attacker took a machete and hatchet to school, and, when asked why, he told police he was going to “do Columbine better.” The attacker was expelled for this action, after which his fixation on violent fantasies intensified. He spent long periods of time alone playing first-person shooter video games and scouring the Internet for information regarding the quality of different weapons and prior mass attacks. He also communicated online with a group of other individuals who were interested in serial killers and mass murders, telling them of his plans to commit a school shooting.

The military or law enforcement

Fifty attackers (28%) demonstrated an interest in the military, law enforcement, or similar careers. Though this included those who served in the military or were employed as a law enforcement officer or security guard ($n = 31$, 17%), it also included those who previously had a focused interest in these institutions ($n = 19$, 11%), often failing to develop careers in these fields despite their efforts. One attacker enrolled in a police academy track internship program while a community college student, worked as a corrections officer, worked as a security guard for a private security company, applied to be a highway patrol state trooper, and applied for enrollment in a public safety training program at a local college. Despite repeated efforts, the attacker failed to become a law enforcement officer.





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SOCIAL ISOLATION

Fifty-two attackers (29%) were identified as withdrawn, loners, or anti-social. This included those who self-identified or were described as such by others, or who engaged in behaviors that went beyond simply not having many friends or choosing not to participate in various social activities. Most of those who were socially isolated showed a clear and consistent discomfort around other people in different contexts or generally acted as an outsider. For others, the isolating behaviors were more overt and included such things as actively avoiding others, withdrawing from them, and engaging in repellent behaviors that were offensive or aggressive, leading the attacker to be outcast or ostracized. In some cases, the attackers expressed a desire to connect with others, but still kept to themselves. The youngest of the attackers, a 14-year-old who injured two and killed one at an elementary school, desired to interact with others but spent most of his time alone in his room. The online community he connected with over the shared interest in carrying out a school attack offered him the connection he sought, and he would later state that his participation in this group represented the first time people wanted to talk to him.

BULLYING AND HARASSING OTHERS

Over one-third of the attackers ($n = 64$, 36%) had a history of bullying or harassing others. This involved a pattern of conduct that willfully and maliciously caused another to feel bullied, stalked, persecuted, threatened, injured, or attacked. The attackers in this study who displayed these behaviors targeted individuals they interacted with across different areas of their lives, including in their schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods. They focused on current or former romantic partners, classmates, co-workers, family members, friends, neighbors, social media contacts, and others. Examples included engaging in repeated unwanted or vulgar calls, following the victim, hacking the victim's email, and rattling the door to the victim's home. Also included here are misogynistic actions, including patterns of sexually harassing behavior, such as making derogatory comments toward females, staring at females in a way that caused notable discomfort, inappropriate touching or groping, and sexual assault.

On November 14, 2017, after killing his wife the night before, a 44-year-old man shot several targeted and randomly selected people across multiple crime scenes in his neighborhood, through town, and at the elementary school, killing 4 and injuring 13. He committed suicide during an ensuing gun battle with police. In the year prior, the attacker had engaged in harassing behaviors toward his neighbors which included unprovoked physical assaults, brandishing and firing his gun in their direction, and stabbing one of them during an altercation. Police were called to the neighborhood numerous times by the neighbors and the attacker. The neighbors reported that the attacker was firing guns near homes at all hours, while the attacker claimed the neighbors were manufacturing methamphetamine, producing chemical fumes that hurt his nine dogs. The attacker, who had a history of mental illness that included delusions and paranoia, watched his neighbors closely with binoculars. In a restraining order petition, the neighbor reported that the attacker was verbally abusive, was "going to do all kinds of perverted things to harm everyone," and that he was unstable. He reportedly threatened to kill the neighbor and to kill her son while he was at school. Under the advice of police, the neighbor tried to get assistance from the homeowner's association, which was not responsive. Eventually, the attacker was served with a civil harassment restraining order that prohibited him from owning firearms.



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STRESSORS WITHIN FIVE YEARS

Nearly all attackers ($n = 167$, 93%) experienced at least one significant stressor in their lives within five years of the attack, and for 139 attackers (77%), the stressor(s) occurred within one year.¹² While some of these stressors included persistent life circumstances that were ongoing at the time of the attack—such as health issues, concerns about the well-being of family members, or having strained interpersonal relationship—others were acute situations that occurred as recently as the day of the attack. Not including the arrests and criminal charges discussed earlier, stressors are categorized here across different life domains, including:

- **Family/romantic relationships ($n = 92$)**, including concerns over the physical or mental health of family, death of a loved one, major familial conflicts, child custody or support issues, divorce, protective orders filed against them, domestic abuse, break-ups, and familial disputes.
- **Personal issues ($n = 91$)**, including the loss of a pet, being the victim of a crime, struggles with gender identity, car accidents, evictions, and homelessness.
- **Contact with civil courts ($n = 60$)**, including personal injury suits, filings regarding housing code violations, and protective orders outside of those filed by romantic partners.
- **Employment issues ($n = 58$)**, including disciplinary actions, demotions, terminations, conflicts with colleagues, and poor performance.
- **Social interactions ($n = 34$)**, including being bullied in school, online, or at work; being denied membership in a social organization; the loss of friendships due to rejection or death; and ongoing disputes with neighbors.
- **Health-related ($n = 24$)**, including being diagnosed with a brain tumor or having sustained a traumatic brain injury, different forms of cancer, major surgeries or hospitalizations, having a physical condition that required numerous surgeries and interfered with employment, and chronic back pain.
- **Contact with law enforcement that did not result in arrests or charges ($n = 19$)**, including being a suspect in an assault, being investigated for making threats, and law enforcement responding to neighborhood disputes. Though, as previously reported, nearly one-third of the attackers ($n = 56$, 31%) had at least one contact with law enforcement that did not result in arrest (see *Criminal Behavior* section), those captured here demonstrated discomfort or distress as a result of the interaction.
- **Education-related challenges outside of social pressures ($n = 17$)**, including poor academic performance, suspensions or expulsions from school, transitioning from home-schooling to public school, revocation of acceptance into an institution, failure to receive a scholarship, and removal from school activities or a college program.

STRESSORS	<i>n</i>	%
Family issues	92	51%
<i>Family</i>	64	36%
<i>Romantic relationships</i>	56	31%
Personal issues	91	51%
Courts (non-criminal)	60	33%
Employment	58	32%
Social interactions	34	19%
Health-related	24	13%
Police contacts (non-arrest)	19	11%
Education-related	17	9%
Other	3	2%

Childhood Trauma

At least one-fifth of the attackers ($n = 36$, 20%) experienced trauma during childhood, such as physical or sexual abuse, entering foster care, living in a refugee camp, or the death of a parent.

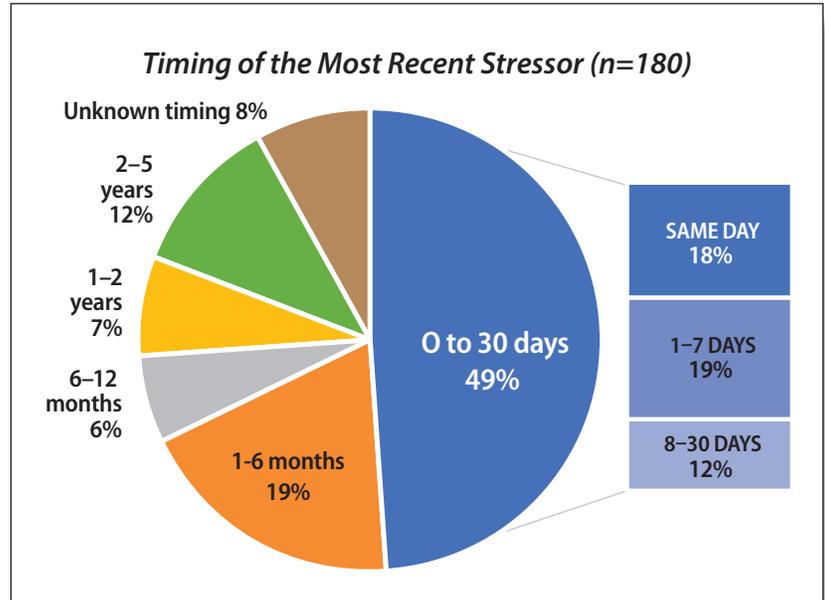


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Timing and triggering events

For half of the attackers ($n = 88$, 49%), the most recent stressor, including criminal charges and arrests, occurred within one month, with many on the same day as the attack.

Though not always close in time, over one-third of the attackers ($n = 63$, 35%) appeared to experience a specific triggering event prior to perpetrating an attack. This included events such as a spouse saying they were filing for divorce, being served an eviction notice, learning that a lawsuit they filed was dismissed, and being fired from a job. For some, the triggering event itself was the primary motive, as the attack was carried out in direct retaliation for that event, for example, when an attacker targeted an establishment from which he was banned. For others, the triggering event acted as an accelerant. In these situations, there was a pre-existing motive that was exacerbated by the triggering event.



EXACERBATING TRIGGER: On July 19, 2017, a 64-year-old man drove his car into a crowd of mourners after a graveside service, injuring 12. The attacker had a decades-long vendetta against the state department of mental health regarding its treatment of his late daughter, who had developed a mental illness 27 years prior to the attack. While she was in the care of state hospitals, the attacker had many confrontations with medical staff as he felt that she was being mistreated. He reportedly called police and the media to expose what he believed was happening. Doctors would report that he was unable to understand his daughter's condition, adding to the difficulties. Meanwhile, her prescribed medications resulted in brain damage. Twice he was investigated for abuse, resulting in him losing custody once. After five or six years, the attacker removed his daughter from the hospital and quit his job to care for her at home. He also sued the department of mental health for malpractice, but the suit was dismissed. For 20 years, he cared for her in his home. One year prior to the attack, his daughter, at age 38, died of smoke inhalation from an electrical fire in the house. Neighbors described him as distraught. Two days before the attack, the attacker read the obituary of a former department of mental health employee and learned of the planned funeral, where the attack would occur. Neither the deceased nor those he struck had anything to do with his daughter's case.



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Financial Instability

While nearly three-quarters ($n = 130$, 72%) of the attackers experienced a financial stressor sometime prior to their attack, over half ($n = 100$, 56%) did so within five years. These financial stressors, which occurred across life domains, included an inability to sustain employment, loss of civil judgments, bankruptcies, evictions, foreclosures, and losses of income. For some, the financial stressor was experienced by family members whose financial stability affected the attacker directly.

On October 8, 2016, while driving the wrong direction on the interstate, a 36-year-old man intentionally crashed his truck into another car, killing all five passengers. He then stole a responding police officer's vehicle and used it to ram his previously disabled truck, pushing it into seven additional vehicles, injuring another 11 people. In the three years prior to the incident, the attacker became increasingly concerned about his finances, beginning when his girlfriend became pregnant. Following the birth of their child, the attacker and his girlfriend were "unable to make ends meet," causing stress in the home. The attacker repeatedly told friends and neighbors that he was stressed about his finances. Beginning four days prior to the incident, the attacker received repeated phone calls from debt collectors. He also received a foreclosure notice, a letter from the utility company saying services would be discontinued, and a notice from his homeowner's association that a lien was being placed on his home due to unpaid association fees. The day before the incident, the attacker placed a call to a tax relief company for people who owed more than \$10,000 to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and he received additional calls from debt collectors.

Unstable Housing

Over one-third of the attackers ($n = 70$, 39%) had experienced unstable housing within 20 years of their attacks. This included those who had experienced homelessness at some point, as well as those who had faced foreclosure proceedings, had an impending eviction, or had stayed in temporary housing after being kicked out by family or romantic partners. Of the 31 attackers (17%) who were experiencing these tenuous situations at the time of the attack, 22 of them were homeless, including 3 who targeted other members of the homeless population in their attacks.

On October 5, 2019, a 24-year-old homeless man reportedly used a 15-pound piece of scrap metal to attack five other homeless men while they slept. He was arrested about half a mile from the location of the last victim. According to his family members, approximately two to three years before the attack, in two separate incidents, the attacker punched his grandfather and mother, with whom he lived. Following the altercation with his mother, she kicked him out of the home and the man lived on the streets, in shelters, in an abandoned building next to his mother's building, and in the stairwell of her building.



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BEHAVIORAL CHANGES

Nearly half of the attackers ($n = 82, 46\%$) exhibited a change in their behavior at some point prior to the attack. For over one-third of them ($n = 69, 38\%$) their most recent change was noted within five years prior, and for most within one year ($n = 54$). The types of changes fell within the following categories:

- **Mental well-being/mood ($n = 56$):** Changes to the attackers' mental well-being and stability as well as notable changes to their mood. This included:
 - *Withdrawing* from or cutting ties with family/friends or becoming less sociable or more detached ($n = 28$);
 - Onset or increased signs of *depression*, sadness, or suicidal statements or gestures ($n = 19$);
 - Onset or increased level of *anger or aggressive, violent, or threatening* behavior ($n = 17$);
 - Notable changes in the intensity or frequency of *paranoia* and/or *delusional* statements ($n = 15$);
 - Other changes to the attackers' general *mental state or mood*, such as declining overall mental health, appearing more troubled or anxious, darkening moods, and becoming emotionally erratic ($n = 18$).

TYPES OF CHANGES WITHIN FIVE YEARS	<i>n</i>
Mental well-being/mood	56
General behavior	20
Uncharacteristic actions	14
Appearance	14
Work- or school-related	14
Religiosity or beliefs	10
Substance use	8
Positive change	5





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- **General behavior (n = 20):** More general changes in behavior that may or may not be connected to changes in mental health, such as insomnia or sleeping more; lethargy; loss of appetite; being more secretive, argumentative, stern, or bitter; and decreased affection. This also included when an attacker was generally described as becoming unhinged; becoming increasingly disturbed or irrational; and acting strange, crazy, or otherwise different from their normal behavioral baseline.
- **Uncharacteristic actions (n = 14):** Specific actions undertaken by the subject that demonstrated a distinct change from their baseline behaviors, such as no longer paying their bills, giving away valued items, spontaneously ending a valued relationship, excessive spending, and purchasing or carrying weapons.
- **Appearance (n = 14):** Changes in an attacker's appearance, dress, or hygiene evidenced by notable weight gain or loss, starting to wear a trench coat or dressing in all black, changing their hair color, growing a beard, shaving their head, or appearing unkempt.
- **Work- or school-related (n = 14):** Changes in the attacker's performance or attendance at work or school including abruptly quitting, leaving work early, and starting to make uncharacteristic errors.
- **Religiosity or beliefs (n = 10):** Notable changes in the attacker's interest or participation in religious, social, or political beliefs, evidenced by becoming more outspoken than before, increasingly hate-filled communications, increased consumption of radical content, and increased religiosity outside of their behavioral baseline.
- **Substance use (n = 8):** Increased use of alcohol and drugs indicative of a pattern beyond just one use.
- **Positive changes (n = 5):** Changes that appeared to be an improvement in the attacker's demeanor or behavior that was noted by others, such as inexplicably becoming more mellow, improving their grades, reaching out to others after a long break in contact, becoming nicer, starting to attend recovery groups, and seeming more positive, with a plan for their life.

While most (n = 53) exhibited one or two **types of behavioral changes**, 16 exhibited three to five types within the five years before the attack.

MOST TYPES OF CHANGES: *On November 7, 2018, a 28-year-old man entered a bar and fired on the patrons attending a college country night event, resulting in 1 injured and 12 killed, including 1 officer who died in the law enforcement response. The attacker then fatally shot himself after the ensuing gun battle with responding law enforcement. Since returning from deployment nearly six years prior, friends and family observed changes in his demeanor and behavior. They noted that he was less sociable and distanced himself from family; seemed more short-tempered, angry, and aggressive; demonstrated less empathy; and showed signs of depression. More changes were noted just over three years before the attack after he was hospitalized for injuries related to a motorcycle accident. Not only did his personality and demeanor change, but he also would not leave his house, gained weight, and his personal hygiene declined, all of which were described as drastic changes from his norm. His withdrawal from others was more pronounced when he cut ties with many of his friends, changed his phone number, and appeared to have retreated from social media. More recent to the attack, one friend noted a different kind of change. Seen as a positive shift, he appeared to be less angry and aggressive, and was more mellow.*



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CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

Three-quarters of the 180 attackers ($n = 136$, 76%) exhibited behaviors that elicited concern in others and/or shared concerning communications prior to their attacks. For over half the attackers ($n = 102$, 57%), the behaviors they engaged in caused others to be concerned to the point that the observer feared for the safety of the attackers, themselves, or others.

- Nearly two-thirds of the 180 attackers ($n = 116$, 64%) exhibited behaviors or shared communications that were so concerning, they should have been met with an immediate response. These behaviors can be described as **objectively concerning** or **prohibited**, and include threatening, harassing, and violent behaviors. Though these behaviors were often reported to law enforcement, they were also reported to other responsible parties such as employers, school staff, or parents. However, for over one-fifth of the attackers ($n = 39$, 22%), the behavior or communication was not reported to anyone in a position to respond, demonstrating a continued need to promote and facilitate bystander reporting.
- Half of the 180 attackers ($n = 93$, 52%) also displayed a range of concerning behaviors or communications that would require additional information about the attacker and the situation to understand their truly concerning nature. These contextually concerning behaviors can be described as part of a **constellation** of lower-level behaviors. While these behaviors may not warrant an immediate public safety response, they should elicit some level of concern. Examples include unusual statements, erratic behaviors, increased anger, interest in violence, and uncharacteristic changes in appearance, demeanor, or other behavior.

Behaviors that elicited responses from others

The following sections describe 1) the specific behaviors that elicited concern, 2) who was concerned, and 3) how they responded to the behavior.
For these sections, percentages will be of the 125 attackers who elicited concern.

Many of the following behaviors would be considered objectively concerning. Others could also be considered constellation behaviors that require further context to determine their significance. Differentiating the types of behaviors revealed the following categories:





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- **Demeanor and mental well-being (n = 73, 58%):**
These included displays of intense or escalating anger, evidenced by quick tempers or confrontational natures, as well as erratic behaviors or concerns over mental well-being. The latter involved delusional or paranoid behavior, depression, anxiety, and general mental instability. Other behaviors in this category included perceptions of the attacker’s demeanor as seeming mean, detached, menacing, or otherwise disconcerting.

- **Disturbing communications and direct threats (n = 61, 49%):**
This category included attackers who made threats to harm others, threats of domestic violence, references to an impending attack, talking about building or acquiring weapons, and other communications described as generally concerning or disturbing. Examples of the more general communications that caused concern included online posts that the attacker was not thinking right, a statement that the attacker felt he was losing his mind, disturbing writings or drawings, unwelcome sexual materials, and inappropriate photos of others. One attacker sent a message to others through social media a year prior to his attack stating that he found watching documentaries of school shootings to be “cleansing.”

- **Physical violence (n = 57, 46%):** The acts of physical violence that elicited concern from others included assaults on strangers, violence against property, and numerous acts of domestic violence on partners, children, or parents. It also included several attackers who were known to have engaged in animal cruelty.

On July 17, 2020, a 40-year-old man entered a bar and began attacking people at random using a large knife, killing one and injuring three. A security guard, who was one of the injured, fatally shot the attacker. The attacker was a frequent patron until a few weeks prior when he was told by staff that he was no longer welcome there due to his erratic behavior. Nine years prior, while living with his parents, he stabbed the family cat, causing his parents to give him one week to leave their home. Two days later, he went to work to talk with his boss, who he thought was going to fire him. When the boss was not there, the attacker went outside and caused damage to his own vehicle. Seeing him lying on the pavement next to his car, a co-worker asked the attacker if he needed help, to which he responded that both of his parents were dead. Later that morning, the co-worker reported the encounter to police, who then called the attacker’s parents to verify they were unharmed. When the attacker arrived home, he retrieved a firearm, causing his parents to fear he would kill them. His father tried to take the weapon and a shot was fired, though no one was injured. His father then restrained him until police arrived. The attacker pled guilty to assault with a deadly weapon and aggravated animal cruelty. Though sentenced to 16 years, the sentence was later reduced to 5 years of incarceration and 2 years of probation.

BEHAVIORS THAT ELICITED CONCERN*	n	%
Demeanor and mental well-being	73	58%
Disturbing communications or threats	61	49%
Physical violence	57	46%
Stalking/harassment	28	22%
Weapons-related actions	26	21%
Violent or unusual interests	26	21%
Self-harm	22	18%
Behavior changes	20	16%
Isolating or withdrawing	12	10%
Substance use/abuse	11	9%
Unspecified behaviors	30	24%
Other behaviors	38	30%

*The percentages do not total 100 as some attackers exhibited multiple types of concerning behaviors.



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- **Stalking and harassing ($n = 28$, 22%):** Harassing behaviors involved a pattern of conduct that willfully and maliciously caused another to feel bullied, stalked, persecuted, threatened, injured, or attacked. Patterns were evidenced by stalking or harassing one person or by exhibiting the same types of behaviors toward multiple people. As reported earlier, over one-third ($n = 64$, 36%) of the attackers in total displayed these types of behaviors directed at current or former romantic partners, classmates, co-workers, family members, friends, neighbors, social media contacts, and others. For the 28 attackers (22%) highlighted in this category, other people had demonstrated or expressed concern over the stalking or harassing behaviors they witnessed.
- **Weapons-related actions ($n = 26$, 21%):** These behaviors went beyond simply talking about or acquiring weapons under what would be deemed as normal circumstances. These weapons-related actions included when attackers researched explosives, brought weapons to school, fired weapons near homes, brandished weapons, and elicited concern in others by purchasing or demonstrating an obsession with weapons.

On August 3, 2019, a 21-year-old man reportedly opened fire using a semiautomatic rifle at a superstore, killing 23 (1 of whom died nine months later) and injuring 22 more. The alleged attacker stated in his “manifesto” uploaded prior to the attack that he was doing it to defend against an invasion by immigrants at the border. Forty-five days prior, the man legally purchased the firearm online. He also purchased 1,000 rounds of hollow-point ammunition. As documented in his “manifesto,” he felt this weapon was not the best choice as it could overheat after 100 shots fired in succession. He also noted that the penetration power of the bullets, though not as good as normal AK4 bullets, was reasonable. Attorneys for the family said the man’s mother called local police just days after this purchase with concerns given his age, maturity level, and lack of experience handling guns. During the call, a public safety officer inquired about the man’s emotional state, if he was suicidal, if he had made any threats, and his intention for the weapon. After the mother denied any such concerns, the officer advised that he possessed the firearm legally. The officer did not ask the caller’s name or that of her son and no further action was taken as her report was not made from fear and she did not indicate that she thought he posed a threat, just that she was concerned.

- **Violent or unusual interests ($n = 26$, 21%):** This interest was evidenced by attackers making statements depicting their fascination and interests in violent topics, hate-filled content, extreme conspiracy theories, or in hurting or killing people in general.





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- **Self-harm ($n = 22$, 18%):** These behaviors included attackers who spoke about or attempted suicide in the past, as well as those who engaged in self-harm, including cutting. In these instances, the concern expressed by others was mainly regarding the attacker's own safety, rather than the safety of other people.
- **Changes in behavior ($n = 20$, 16%):** As noted earlier, nearly half of the 180 attackers ($n = 82$, 46%) exhibited an observable change in behavior prior to carrying out their attack. For at least some, the change elicited discernable alarm to the point that those concerned shared their fears with others or took some action in response.
- **Isolating or withdrawing ($n = 12$, 10%):** Several of the attackers withdrew from others, isolated themselves, or went missing at some point prior to their attack. This included younger attackers who ran away from home, as well as adult attackers who failed to respond to calls from their family. Regardless of their age, family members were concerned enough to post pleas for help online and even go in search of their loved ones out of state.
- **Substance use or abuse ($n = 11$, 9%):** Though many of the attackers had histories of substance use, for a handful, the use elicited concern from others.

Outside of the categories listed above, evidence of attackers eliciting concern was demonstrated by non-specific expressions of concern from others ($n = 30$, 24%) and a variety of other behaviors that were idiosyncratic and observed less frequently ($n = 38$, 30%). This included five attackers who others feared might carry out a violent act, and two attackers who asked others to help them out of concern they may do something prior to their attacks.

Just over half of the 125 attackers who elicited concern ($n = 68$, 54%) **exhibited behaviors that fell within three or more of the categories described above**, while the remaining ($n = 57$, 46%) exhibited behaviors from one or two. The attacker who exhibited the most types was a 19-year-old attacker who exhibited one or more behaviors from ten of the types described above.

***TEN CATEGORIES OF CONCERN:** On February 14, 2018, a 19-year-old man entered his former high school and proceeded to kill 17 students and staff and injure another 17. Concern over the attacker's behaviors began with aggression that lasted most of his life. It not only remained a part of his behavioral norm, but it also increased over time and was demonstrated through violence toward other people and property at home. The attacker told others how he enjoyed killing small animals, and one neighbor reported that he trained his dogs to attack other animals in the neighborhood as an adolescent. The attacker showed interest in racist beliefs, often making offensive comments, and was known to look at gory pictures during class. Others also noted his unusual obsession with firearms. Less than three months prior to the attack, guardians with whom he lived after his mother's death called police twice over concerns that he had purchased firearms, one of which he buried in the yard. This was around the same time they noted a change in his demeanor, seeming more disturbed. Others noted that he made girls feel uncomfortable when he approached them. Concern was also expressed about his mental well-being, as he consistently demonstrated poor emotional health, appeared depressed at times, and reportedly engaged in self-harm behaviors, for example, posting a video online claiming he had attempted suicide by drinking gasoline. Both online and offline, he shared disturbing and threatening communications, including statements that he felt like killing people and was going to be the next school shooter. One friend of his mother's contacted authorities, telling them she feared he was "a Columbine in the making." Overall, those concerned included family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, classmates and their parents, school officials, and individuals online.*

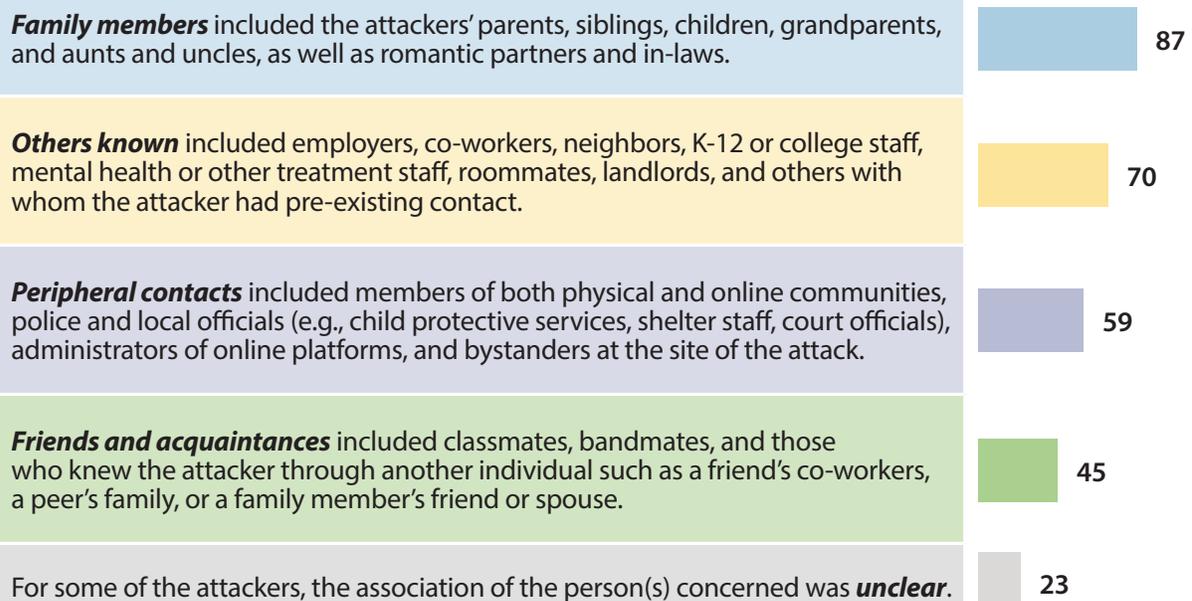


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Who was concerned

Those who demonstrated concern had varying degrees of association with the attackers. While most of the attackers who elicited concern did so from family ($n = 87, 70\%$), nearly half concerned those who had only peripheral contact with them ($n = 59, 47\%$).

Degree of association of those who demonstrated concern



MOST TYPES OF PEOPLE CONCERNED: On May 26, 2017, a 35-year-old man fatally stabbed two and injured a third after shouting anti-Muslim slurs and other bigoted comments at two teenage girls on a light rail train. The previous evening, he had made numerous threats to stab and kill people while ranting about his racist beliefs and was pepper sprayed by a passenger he had threatened as she exited the train. For years, the attacker had elicited concern from others close to him, including his mother, friends, and classmates. His racist beliefs and aggressive behavior also drew concern from many who encountered him in the community, both online and offline. Four years prior, after being told by a staff member at a residential reentry center that he could not use the computers to look up comic books, the attacker grew aggressive to the point that the staff member pressed their panic button. At another point, he was banned from attending a reunion barbecue after posting offensive messages on a social media page for his middle school. Two years later, a social media platform removed a threatening anti-Semitic post, which caused the attacker to post another ranting message. About one month before his mass attack, while attending a right-wing protest, he drew concern from police and other attendees who confronted him, confiscated a bat he had brought to assault counter-protesters, and removed him from the protest. Two weeks later, the attacker recognized someone from the protest driving by. He ran after the car, stuck his head in the window, and tried to talk with the driver about shared views. Instead, the individual called the attacker a racist and drove off. During the confrontation that happened the day prior to the mass attack, other train passengers recorded the attacker's rantings, intending to report them to police. Minutes before the mass attack, passengers on board that train did the same.



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Responses to concerning behavior and communications

Though nearly all of the 125 attackers ($n = 116$, 93%) who elicited concern for their behaviors and communications had at least one person demonstrate their concern through overt actions, most ($n = 73$, 58%) also elicited responses that were more cautious. Overall, the following types of actions were taken by those who were concerned

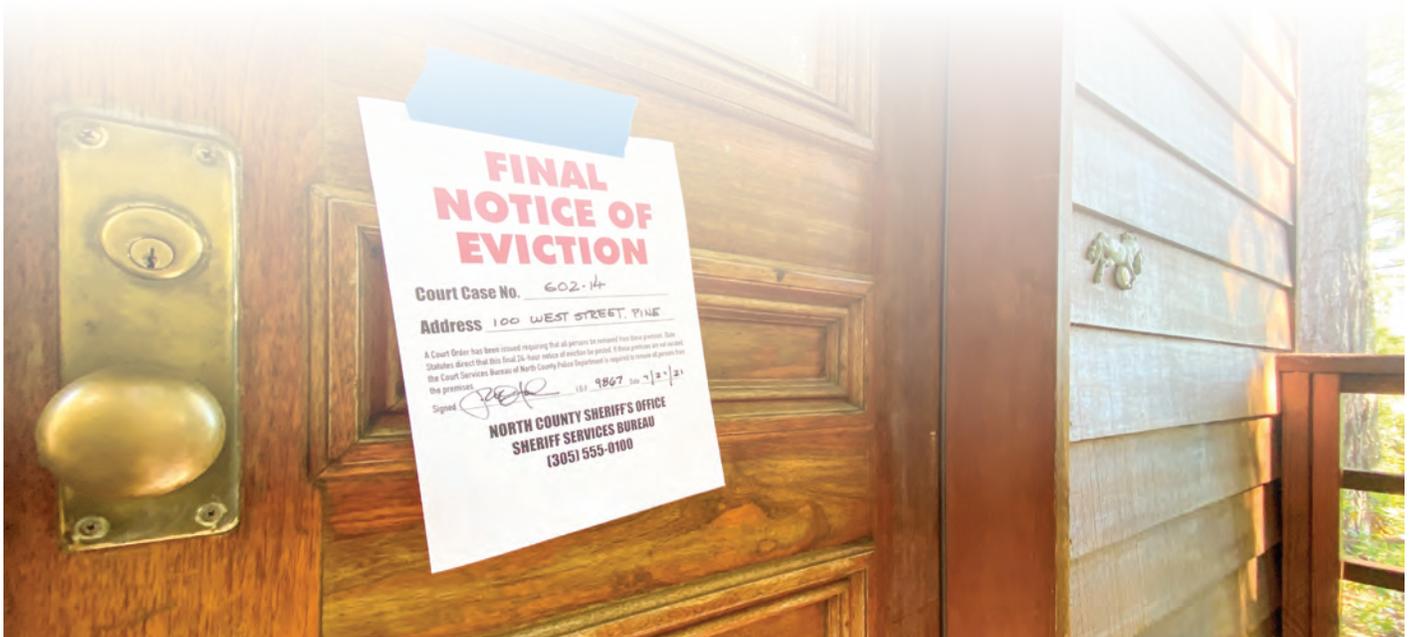
Direct interactions with the attacker ($n = 85$, 68%):

These actions included confronting the attacker about their behaviors or generally discouraging the behaviors that caused the concern. Some set limits on the attacker, asking them to stop or leave, or ended their association with them. These actions also included more positive approaches, such as encouraging and supporting the attacker, or facilitating mental health assistance through either voluntary or involuntary evaluation or treatment.

Reported to a person in a position to respond ($n = 76$, 61%):

This not only included contacting federal, state, or local law enforcement, it also involved contacting school or college officials, social service officials, workplace managers, property managers or landlords, security representatives, and online platform administrators.

DEMONSTRATIONS OF CONCERN	<i>n</i>	% of 125
Overt	116	93%
Direct interactions with attacker	85	68%
Reported to a person in a position to respond	76	61%
Official actions	69	55%
Other	8	6%
Cautious	73	58%
Expressed concern or asked others for help	49	39%
Protected self or others	46	37%
Other	4	3%
No action	29	23%





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Official actions ($n = 69$, 55%): In the workplace, these actions included employers disciplining, demoting, transferring, suspending, or firing the attacker; employers rescinding job offers; and co-workers filing complaints. In schools, this included suspensions, expulsions, and other school discipline; requiring an escort while the person was on campus; and daily searches. Outside of these contexts, legal actions were taken against the attackers, including protective orders, evictions, divorce filings, and other legal filings. Also included here were police actions beyond arrest or transporting an attacker for a mental health evaluation. Examples included police initiating an investigation or surveillance, entering an attacker into monitoring databases, providing additional patrols, issuing a BOLO (be-on-the-lookout), and conducting welfare checks. In one case, eight years prior to the mass attack, after transporting the then-28-year-old attacker for a mental health evaluation, police took pictures of the family's residence with his mother's consent, just in case a SWAT response later became necessary.

Expressed concern or asked others for help ($n = 49$, 39%): These expressions of concern were to the observers' friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, and others. In some cases, the person concerned warned others about the attacker's behaviors, reasonably believing there was an expectation of violence. Some posted the warnings online and some communicated their concern directly with the eventual target. In other situations, the concerned party asked others for help in dealing with the attacker or asked others to intervene directly.

Protected self or others ($n = 46$, 37%): This included when the concerned person took proactive safety measures, such as securing safehouses, developing escape plans, getting a guard dog, giving photos of the attacker to staff and family, sleeping with locked doors with a weapon at hand, and securing weapons in the house. This also included taking away the attacker's weapons, and asking police to confiscate weapons. Others restricted the attacker's access to their children. Some of those concerned made a concerted effort to avoid the attacker, including a mother who left her own home out of fear, co-workers who refused to work with the attacker or quit their jobs, and parents who tried to move their children from a classroom they shared with the future attacker.

For nearly one quarter of these attackers ($n = 29$, 23%), at least one of those concerned noted their fear about an objectively concerning behavior but took no discernible action. Examples of these behaviors that elicited concern include threatening others with a rifle, occurrences of domestic violence, sexual or other physical assaults, threatening co-workers, violent and hate-filled communications, asking others to help build bombs, and suicidal ideations.





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Concerning and threatening communications

The following sections describe the concerning communications the attackers made prior to their attacks, including the timing of when they were shared and who observed them.

For these sections, unless otherwise indicated, percentages will be of the 119 attackers who shared concerning communications.

Overall, two-thirds of the 180 attackers ($n = 119$, 66%) engaged in prior threatening or otherwise concerning communications. These communications, which were conveyed both online and offline, included verbal statements, written messages, self-made videos, and drawings. Some of these communications, which included those that were objectively or contextually concerning, elicited concern in those who observed them, while others did not garner such a response.

On August 4, 2019, a 24-year-old man opened fire in a popular bar district, killing 9 and injuring 20. Ten years before his eventual attack, he wrote a hit list and rape list with names of classmates and texted one of the lists to a girl who was on it. Over the following months and years, he continued to talk with friends and romantic partners about death and his desire to hurt others. This interest in violent themes was also reflected in his social media posts and music. The year before the incident, he began performing as a vocalist in a pornogrind band. While other band members viewed their sexually violent lyrics as a joke, the attacker reportedly took them seriously. The other band members eventually began to distance themselves from the attacker because of his concerning statements about drugs and violence.

Specificity of the Threats to Targets

This study found that the threats attackers made to harm the target often lacked specificity. Of the 41 who did make threats toward the target prior to the attack, most stated that they would kill the target ($n = 30$), as opposed to just assault them or harm them in an unspecified way. Rarely did attackers specify where ($n = 16$) or when ($n = 14$) they would harm the target.

This demonstrates why waiting for a specific threat that names the location and timing of an intended attack — something that is often thought of as required to justify a response — can result in missed opportunities to prevent violence.

As many as two-thirds of the 119 attackers ($n = 76$, 64%) who shared concerning communications directly or indirectly threatened to harm others prior to their attacks. This included over one-third ($n = 41$, 34%) who made threats **toward the eventual target** and involved threats to specific individuals (e.g., a former romantic partner) as well as groups of people (e.g., classmates, Jewish people, police officers). Though in several cases ($n = 13$) the attacker communicated that their attack was imminent, in some of these, the warning was vague or sent just minutes before the attack was carried out. One attacker told friends online that he was going to kill his father and that he would initiate a school attack the next day, which he referred to as his “Rainbow Day” plan. The following day, two and a half hours before the attack took place, he told his friends online the exact time he would leave his house for the attack. Another attacker posted on social media five minutes before his attack at a synagogue, stating, “I’m going in.”



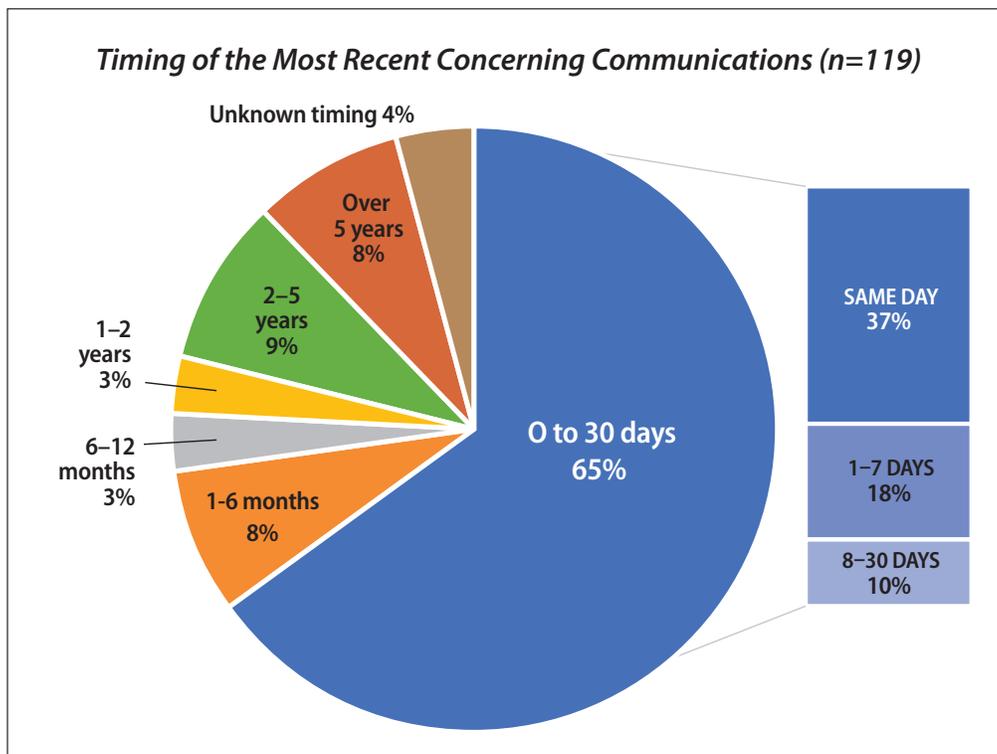
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Outside of those who threatened others, some attackers ($n = 15$) also engaged in hate speech directed at an individual or group. These attackers expressed hatred toward or encouraged violence against others based on characteristics like their gender, race, and ethnicity. **Most of the attackers who engaged in hate speech were motivated by their ideology to commit their attack.** The most frequently observed hate speech voiced by these attackers focused on White supremacist or anti-Semitic beliefs.

On March 15, 2020, a 31-year-old man began shooting randomly out of his vehicle window while driving and while inside a local convenience store, killing four and injuring three. During the incident, while inside the convenience store, the attacker yelled at his victims that he had been disrespected throughout his life and wanted to inflict pain on others. In the years prior, the attacker posted violent memes and photos on social media about martyrdom as well as anti-government and neo-Nazi beliefs. One image included the words, “Keep Calm and Purge Heretics.” He also used gaming chat platforms to try to radicalize others into his White supremacist and neo-Nazi ideology by establishing or joining groups on a social media video game platform. In one of these groups, he and the group’s only other member ranted about server administrators that did not tolerate neo-Nazism. Together, they intended to livestream a harassment campaign against identified online servers that had “slighted them.”

Timing of concerning communications

Many of the attackers shared concerning communications over a long period of time and continued to do so up to and including the day of the attack. For over half of the 119 attackers who shared concerning communications ($n = 65, 55\%$), their **first concerning communication** was observed more than two years before the attack. Additionally, for two-thirds ($n = 77, 65\%$), their **most recent concerning communication** was observed within 30 days of the attack. This included over one-third ($n = 44, 37\%$) who shared a concerning communication the day of the attack.





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NTAC's prior research into averted school attacks¹³ showed that in 82% of the plots studied, someone speaking up when they found out about concerning communications led to the detection and prevention of a plot to carry out a school attack. This, in combination with the findings herein, emphasizes the importance of inquiring about or reporting communications when they are observed to the appropriate responsible party who may be in a position to respond.

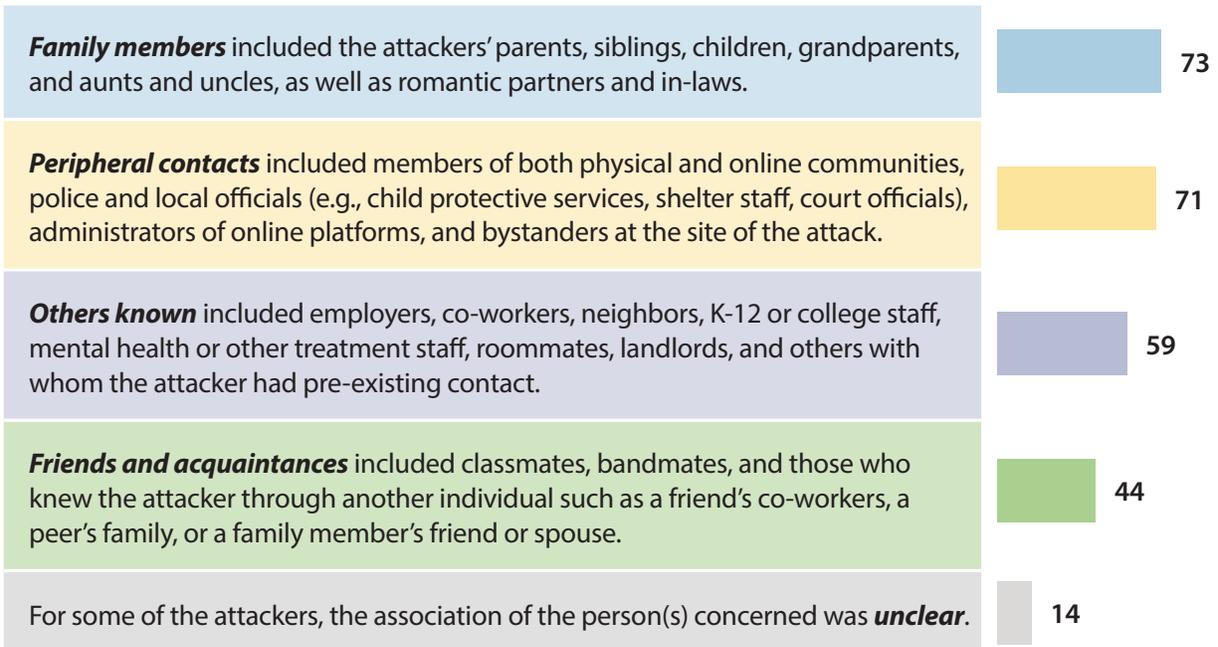
Communications Found After the Attacks

In addition to those communications conveyed to others, some of the attackers ($n = 40$) left behind journals, self-recorded videos, manifestos, suicide notes, and other concerning content that was not previously observed by others. These materials often identified the motive for the attack, documented their planning, and/or contained goodbye messages.

Who observed the communications

Those who observed the concerning communications included people with whom the attacker may have been close, as well as those with whom they had infrequent or peripheral contact. For example, those who observed concerning communications were often members of the attacker's family ($n = 73$, 61%), yet notably, a nearly equal number of attackers made concerning communications that were observed by persons on their periphery ($n = 71$, 60%).

Degree of association of those who observed concerning communications





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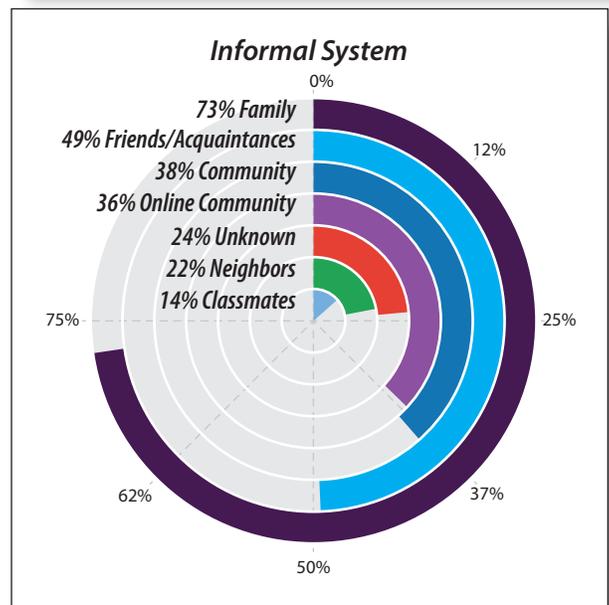
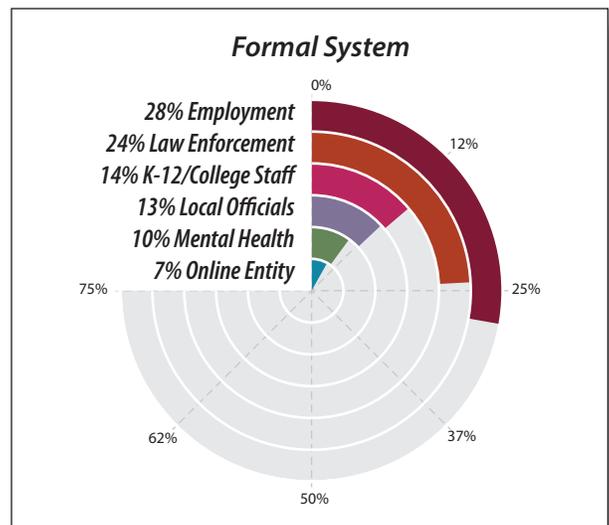
Community systems with information about the attacker

The following section describes the community systems with relevant information regarding the attacker's prior behaviors. **For this section, percentages will be of the 136 attackers who made concerning communications and/or elicited concern from others.**

A behavioral threat assessment involves gathering and evaluating information about concerning behaviors and communications from diverse sources across the community. In this information-gathering phase, public safety professionals should seek corroborating information from both **formal** and **informal community systems** to determine if an individual poses a risk of violence.

- **Formal community systems** are structured organizations or groups, which tend to maintain a physical location and system of records. These systems include law enforcement, criminal courts, civil courts, employers, educational institutions, mental health services, social services, and can also include online and social media platforms. Gathering information from these systems can involve records checks, in accordance with all applicable laws protecting the privacy of those records, as well as interviews for developing a more comprehensive assessment of the individual's concerning behaviors. For over half of the 136 attackers who made concerning communications or elicited concern in others ($n = 76, 56\%$), at least one formal community system had valuable information about the attacker's concerning behaviors.

On November 2, 2018, a 40-year-old man fatally shot two people and injured five others at a fitness studio. Throughout his life, he displayed concerning behaviors across various community systems, mainly related to his actions. Growing up, he was disciplined in school for touching girls' backsides. Through his adulthood, this behavior was observed by family, college staff, employers, law enforcement, and members of the community, both online and offline. At different points, his inappropriate behaviors included being asked to leave his niece's birthday party after parents complained that he touched the girls inappropriately as they got out of the pool, being reported by co-eds in college for stalking and harassing behaviors, being disciplined for touching and inappropriate comments with students he taught when he became a teacher, and being reported by a woman he encountered at a residential community pool after touching her backside.





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He would also inappropriately pursue females while in the military, while working at a call center, online, and in the community, concerning several to the point that they contacted police. Other types of behaviors were noted by male friends, acquaintances, and roommates, including one who blocked his incessant calls. The attacker had contacts with other systems, including the mental health system, as he was receiving treatment, and civil court contacts regarding an eviction and lien filed by his apartment complex.

- **Informal community systems** are those that lack structure, a centralized location, and system of records. These systems tend to consist of interpersonal relationships, including family, friends, neighbors, and members of the online community. Information from informal community systems is gathered almost exclusively through interviews. Nearly every attacker who made a concerning communication or elicited concern in others ($n = 130, 96\%$) had these behavioral factors observed by at least one informal community system.

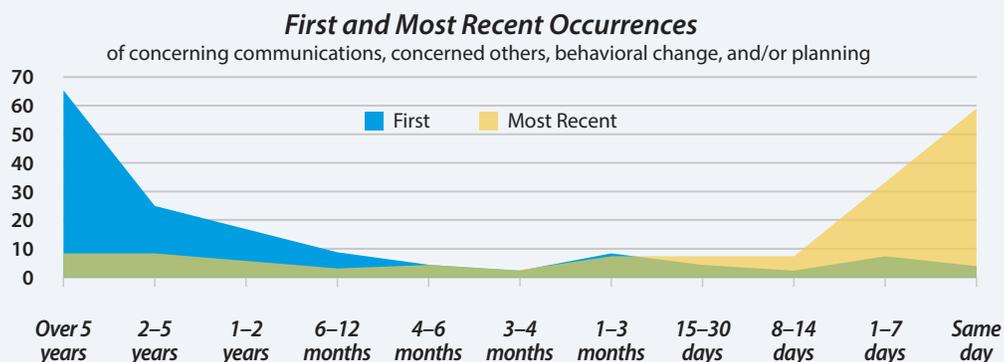
Informal Systems May Contain Valuable Information

For many attackers ($n = 56, 41\%$), concerning behaviors and communications were observed exclusively by informal systems. This demonstrates why it is equally important to gather information from informal systems as it is to gather information from formal community system records. Interviews may be required not only with close personal contacts, but also may include those with whom an individual has less frequent contact.

Timing of Key Behavioral Factors

All of the 180 attackers either 1) elicited concern from others, 2) shared one or more concerning communications, 3) demonstrated behavioral changes, or 4) engaged in overt planning behaviors prior to their attacks. For most of the attackers ($n = 107, 59\%$), the first of these behaviors occurred over a year before the attack. For many ($n = 65$), the first was over five years prior. These long-ranging concerning behaviors highlight the opportunity for early identification and intervention with those displaying behaviors of concern before they resort to violence.

While early identification is possible, these concerning behaviors also tend to appear when violence is more imminent. For half the attackers ($n = 93, 52\%$), the most recent of these behaviors occurred within one week of the attack, and for many ($n = 59$) the most recent behavior occurred on the same day. In fact, 36 attackers (20%) shared a concerning communication or elicited concern from others within two hours of the attack.





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CONCLUSION

Far too often, communities across our nation have been forced to confront the aftermath of mass violence, including injury and loss of life, and the painful grieving that follows. For over 25 years, NTAC's research examining incidents of targeted violence has demonstrated that these acts of violence are rarely spontaneous and are almost always preceded by warning signs that are observed by family members, co-workers, classmates, neighbors, and others across the community. Future tragedies are preventable if the appropriate community systems are in place to identify and intervene when community members report these concerns, and the U.S. Secret Service stands ready to support our community partners in this vital public safety mission.

This report supports the need for multidisciplinary behavioral threat assessment programs to be established as part of any community violence prevention plan. Behavioral threat assessment is a proactive and preventive approach to identify and intervene with individuals who pose a risk of engaging in targeted violence, regardless of motive, target, or weapon used. This approach requires continued research around the types of behaviors and circumstances that tend to precede acts of violence and increased training for the people who are tasked with keeping our communities safe. While no two attacks or attackers are exactly alike, NTAC's research continues to highlight common behaviors and themes that, when identified and reported, provide public safety officials an opportunity for intervention and management of the risks of harm posed by these individuals. Community members should be encouraged to report behaviors that cause them to feel concerned for the safety of themselves or others. The types of behaviors that warrant reporting are those highlighted throughout this report.

The background and behaviors of the attackers demonstrate a continued need for public safety resources to be directed toward addressing threatening behavior, stalking, harassment, domestic violence, violent extremism, and violence in general. The findings further emphasize the increased need for community resources to address mental health needs, social isolation, substance abuse, and individuals in crisis. Based on this analysis, NTAC highlights the following operational implications that should be considered when developing community violence prevention programs.

- **Communities must encourage and facilitate bystander reporting and be prepared to respond when reports of concern are received.**
- **Communities should not wait for a direct and specific threat before taking action.**
- **Individuals displaying an unusual interest in violent topics, especially past attackers, should elicit concern.**
- **Businesses should consider establishing workplace violence prevention plans to identify, assess, and intervene with current employees, former employees, and customers who may pose a risk of violence.**
- **Public safety, school, workplace, and community service professionals should consider strategies for resolving interpersonal grievances.**
- **Individuals tasked with community violence prevention must understand the impact of violent and hateful rhetoric while protecting the constitutional right to free speech.**
- **Misogyny and domestic violence deserve increased attention from those tasked with mass violence prevention.**



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- **Online platforms may be utilized by individuals to make violent communications and to share violent rhetoric and ideas.**
- **Individuals sharing final communications or engaging in other final acts may warrant immediate intervention.**
- **Community violence prevention efforts require identifying and promoting appropriate resources for individuals who are managing stressful life circumstances, experiencing mental health issues, or facing a personal crisis.**
- **Mass shootings have been perpetrated by those who were legally prohibited from possessing firearms.**





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SUMMARY AND TABLES

Attack Elements

- Attacks took place year-round, on every day of the week, and at all hours
- 1/2 were motivated in part due to a grievance
- 1/2 took place at a business, while 1/3 were in open spaces
- 1/3 had specific targets
- Over 1/2 of attackers were not affiliated with the attack site(s)
- Over 1/2 of attacks ended when the attacker(s) stopped causing harm on their own
- 1/4 of the attackers committed suicide during the attack or at a later point
- 1/3 brought extra ammunition or tactical gear
- Nearly 3/4 were carried out using firearms
- In over 1/4 of the attacks involving firearms, at least one attacker was prohibited from possessing a firearm

Behavioral Overview

The majority of attackers:

- Were male
- Had experienced stressors within five years
- Exhibited concerning communications and/or elicited concern from others

Most attackers had:

- Criminal arrests or charges
- A history of mental health symptoms
- Financial instability within five years

Just under half:

- Elicited concern from family members
- Exhibited behavioral changes
- Made a concerning communication within 30 days of the attack
- Engaged in acts of domestic violence
- Engaged in criminal behaviors with no charges or other law enforcement contact
- Had a history of making threats

About one-third:

- Had a history of substance use or abuse
- Had a history of bullying and harassing others
- Experienced a triggering event
- Elicited concern from the general public, police, local officials, administrators of online platforms, or bystanders at the site of the attack

Some attackers:

- Had conspiratorial, topic-specific, or hate-focused beliefs
- Showed misogynistic behaviors
- Demonstrated an inappropriate interest in violence or weapons
- Shared a concerning communication or elicited concern from others within two hours of the attack



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TABLES*

INCIDENT OVERVIEW	<i>n</i> = 173
Motive components	
Grievances	51%
<i>Personal</i>	27%
<i>Domestic</i>	17%
<i>Workplace</i>	10%
Ideological, bias-related, or political beliefs	18%
Psychotic symptoms	14%
Desire to kill	7%
Fame or notoriety	6%
Other	6%
Undetermined	18%
Location of attack	
Business/services	51%
<i>Restaurants/bars</i>	14%
<i>Retail</i>	12%
<i>Services</i>	12%
<i>Manufacturing and distribution</i>	6%
<i>Health</i>	5%
<i>Government</i>	2%
Open spaces	35%
K-12 schools and colleges/universities	8%
Residential communal space	6%
Transportation	3%
Houses of worship	3%
Military	1%
Nonprofit services	1%

* Subsections of tables may not sum to the total *n* or to 100% due to rounding and some attackers who fall into multiple categories within subsections.



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Affiliation with the attack location	
No known affiliation	53%
Employee (current or former)	13%
Customer or consumer of services	9%
Housing-related	8%
Indirect affiliation (e.g., wife's place of employment)	6%
Student (current or former)	6%
Other	4%
Weapons used in the attack	
Firearm	73%
Bladed weapon	16%
Vehicle	10%
Blunt object	3%
Explosive	2%
Arson or incendiary device	2%
Other (e.g., striking a victim's head on the ground)	2%
Targeting	
Specific targets	32%
<i>Romantic partner</i>	14%
<i>Employment-related (e.g., employer, co-workers)</i>	7%
<i>Secondary relationship (e.g., wife's divorce attorney)</i>	6%
<i>Family members</i>	2%
<i>Other (e.g., acquaintances, bullies, rivals)</i>	10%
Random targets or groups (e.g., police, Jewish people, women)	68%



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Resolution of the attack	
Attacker(s) stopped on their own, then...	56%
<i>Arrested at/away from the scene</i>	31%
<i>Committed suicide as part of the attack</i>	17%
<i>Committed suicide away from the scene</i>	7%
<i>Killed by law enforcement away from the scene</i>	1%
Law enforcement intervened, then...	22%
<i>Killed by law enforcement</i>	14%
<i>Arrested at/away from the scene</i>	8%
Weapon rendered inoperable, then arrested	11%
Bystander intervened, then...	10%
<i>Arrested at/away from the scene</i>	8%
<i>Killed by bystander(s)</i>	2%
<i>Killed by law enforcement away from the scene</i>	1%
Circumstances unclear	1%



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FIREARMS ATTACKS	<i>n</i> = 126
Types of firearms	
Handguns	74%
Long guns	32%
Acquisition of firearm(s) used	
Purchased by the attacker(s)	37%
Stolen by the attacker(s)	7%
Gifted to the attacker(s)	2%
Built by the attacker(s)	2%
Purchased for the attacker(s)	1%
Possessed as part of employment	1%



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ATTACKER BACKGROUNDS	<i>n</i> = 180
Gender	
Male	96%
Female	3%
Transgender	2%
Age: average/range	34 avg / 14–87
History of criminal charges/arrests	64%
Non-violent charges	57%
Violent charges	31%
Domestic violence charges	16%
Sex offense charges	6%
Criminal behaviors with no charges or other law enforcement contact	43%
History of engaging in at least one incident of domestic violence	41%
History of mental health symptoms	58%
Known treatment or diagnosis	34%
History of illicit drug use or substance abuse	34%
Beliefs (including conspiratorial, topic-specific, and hate-focused belief systems)	26%
Misogynistic behaviors	19%
Fixations	29%
Inappropriate interest in violence or weapons	21%
Social isolation	29%
History of bullying and harassing others	36%
Stressors within five years	93%
Triggering event	35%
Financial instability within five years	56%
Unstable housing at the time of the attack	17%
Behavioral changes	46%



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Concerning communications and/or elicited concern from others	76%
Objectively concerning	64%
Concern regarding safety	57%
Community systems of those who observed communications or demonstrated concern (n = 136)	
<i>Informal systems</i>	96%
<i>Formal systems</i>	56%
Concerning or threatening communications (n = 119)	66%
History of making threats	64%
Threats specific to the target	34%
Indicating imminence of attack	11%
Hate speech	13%
First observed over two years prior	55%
Most recently observed within 30 days	65%
Most recently observed the same day as the attack	37%
Elicited concern (n = 125)	69%
Top three types of behaviors	
<i>Demeanor and mental well-being</i>	58%
<i>Disturbing communications or threats</i>	49%
<i>Physical violence</i>	46%
Responses to behaviors	
<i>Overt response</i>	93%
<i>Cautious response</i>	58%
<i>No identifiable response</i>	23%



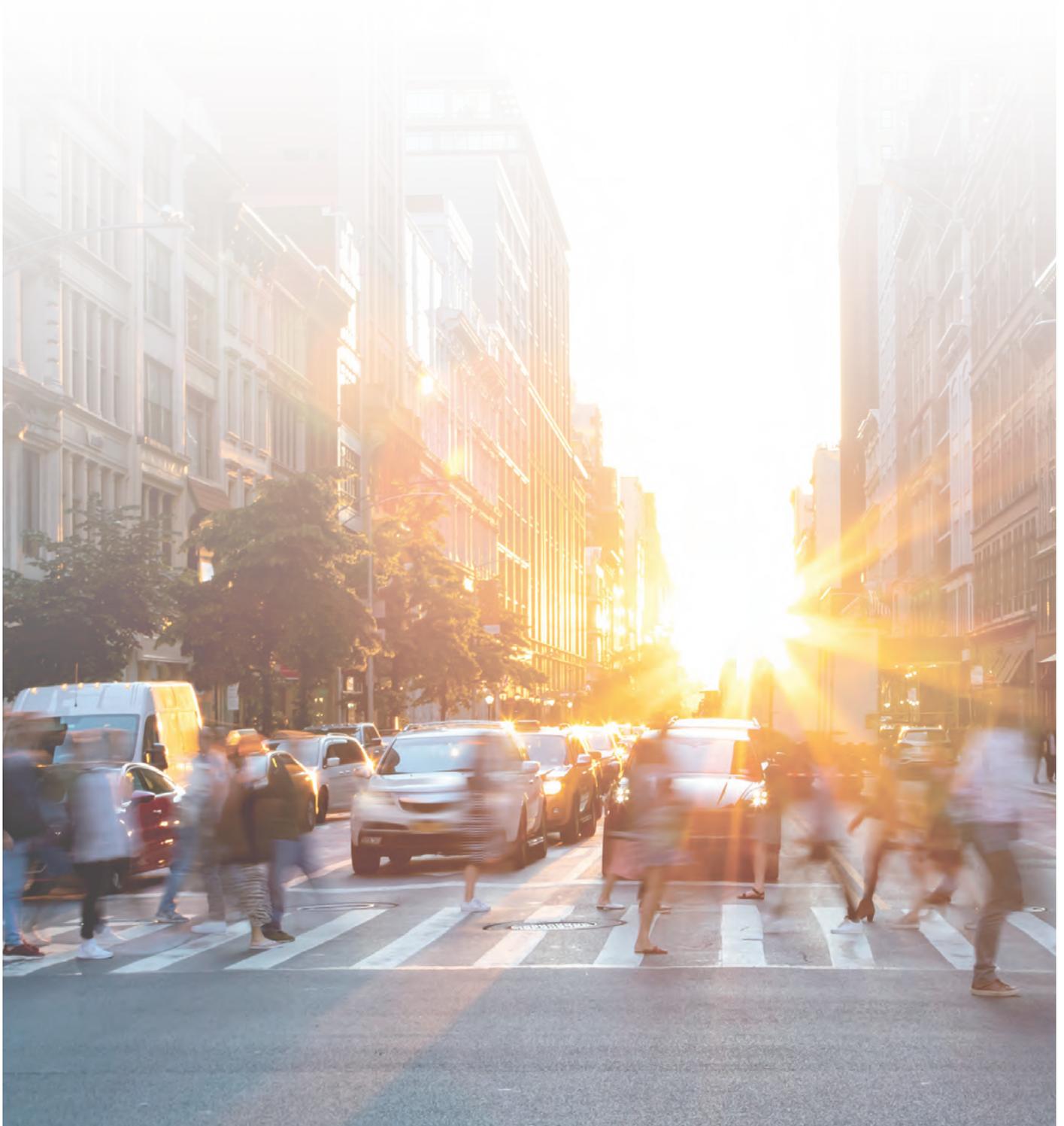
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ENDNOTES

- ¹ This report was prepared for educational and research purposes. The backgrounds and behaviors reported herein are of those individuals who: 1) were arrested for the attack; 2) died at the scene; or 3) died immediately following the attack. Actions attributed to individuals who have been arrested, indicted, or charged in these incidents are merely allegations, and all are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.
- ² The incidents included in this report were identified and researched through open-source reporting (e.g., media sources and publicly available court and law enforcement records); therefore, it is possible that more took place than were discovered at the time of this writing. Further, the limitations of open-source information should be considered when reviewing the findings contained in this report. Because information about a few of the attackers was limited, particularly those who carried out attacks in 2020, it is likely that a larger number than reported here may have displayed the behaviors, symptoms, and other background elements.
- ³ For some attacks, the type of firearm used was not found in open-source reporting ($n = 9, 7\%$).
- ⁴ Though unlawful drug use within a designated timeframe is a NICS qualifier, this was not included here due to limitations on open-source reporting to confirm when the drug use took place.
- ⁵ Two additional attacks involved knives that were illegally possessed based on state laws.
- ⁶ When determining an attacker's race, consideration was given to official police or court records and self-reports of the attacker, their family, and others known to the attacker.
- ⁷ For the purposes of this report, domestic violence is defined as physical force, or the threat of bodily harm, inflicted on a romantic partner, parent/guardian, or child (of subject or subject's romantic partner). If parent or child, they must have been living with the subject.
- ⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, June 28). *About mental health*. <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm>
- ⁹ Perälä, J., Suvisaari, J., Saarni, S. I., Kuoppasalmi, K., Isometsä, E., Pirkola, S., Partonen, T., Tuulio-Henriksson, A., Hintikka, J., Kiesepää, T., Härkänen, T., Koskinen, S., & Lönnqvist, J. (2007). Lifetime prevalence of psychotic and bipolar I disorders in a general population. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 64(1), 19-28. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.64.1.19
- ¹⁰ Involuntarily celibate is a term used to describe men who feel unable to obtain romantic or sexual relationships with women, to which they feel entitled.
- ¹¹ Citron, D. K., & Franks, M. A. (2014). Criminalizing revenge porn. *Wake Forest Law Review*, 49(2), 345-391. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/wflr49&i=357>
- ¹² Stressors are defined as external conditions, factors, or events that placed, or would likely place, negative pressure on an individual and demonstrated, or would likely cause, some level of discomfort or distress. Stressors may be acute (i.e., transient life situations) or chronic (i.e., persistent life situations) and are relative to the person's own background, experiences, and perceptions.
- ¹³ National Threat Assessment Center. (2021). *Averting targeted school violence: A U.S. Secret Service analysis of plots against schools*. U.S. Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security.



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