

NCITE Project Summary

Youth Terrorist Mobilization

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Young people are increasingly involved in violent extremism—including new and emerging threats like nihilistic online networks—both as targets of recruitment and in some cases, as active perpetrators. Yet existing risk tools were designed for adults and may omit youth-specific warning signs. This project provides an end-to-end plan to map youth recruitment and mobilization pathways, quantify how common relevant indicators are in the general population, and translate insights into practitioner-ready guidance and training. The team will synthesize current evidence and practitioner expertise, field two U.S. surveys (young adults; parents/teachers), and apply advanced analyses to surface patterns of vulnerability and mobilization. The project adopts a comparative lens across ideologies and emerging threats to capture the full range of risks facing communities, including a focus on Nihilistic Violent Extremism. Expected outputs include validated indicator sets, base rates, youth-focused risk profiles, and an evaluated training curriculum for end users. The impact is improved prevention, assessment, and intervention decisions to keep minors and communities safer from violent extremism and mass casualty violence.

Impact Statement

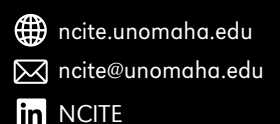
This work gives DHS operators (e.g., Office of Intelligence & Analysis, National Threat Assessment Center, Joint Terrorism Task Forces, Customs and Border Protection Task Force Officers) youth-specific indicators, base rates, and training to sharpen behavioral threat assessment and prevention, improving early identification, and intervention.

Policy Impact

- Executive Order 14321, “Ending Crime and Disorder on America’s Streets” (Jul. 24, 2025): Youth-focused risk indicators and training help jurisdictions implement evidence-based prevention and threat-management elements aligned with violent crime reduction aims.
- National Counterterrorism Center, FBI, and DHS, “Violent Extremist Mobilization Indicators and the Education Sector (Supplement to the U.S. Violent Extremist Mobilization Indicators)” (Feb. 26, 2025): Project findings validate and refine youth-relevant indicators and provide base rates to prioritize responses in education settings.
- DHS, Know2Protect – Tips2Protect Against Violent Extortion and Gore Networks (Aug. 8, 2025): Findings inform guidance on tactics used by violent extortion/gore networks and how to identify at-risk youth earlier.
- DHS Office of Policy, Counterterrorism and Threat Prevention Policy (2025): Project outputs support policy coordination and synchronization across components with practical youth-oriented assessment guidance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND DISCLAIMER

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End User Offices with Direct Operational Impact

DHS Office of Intelligence & Analysis	DHS Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans
Customs and Border Protection	Office of the Director of National Intelligence
Department of Justice – National Security Division	Federal Bureau of Investigation – Joint Terrorism Task Forces
U.S. Secret Service – National Threat Assessment Center	Fusion Centers

Expected Findings and Outputs

- A consolidated, practitioner-vetted set of youth-specific indicators distinguishing susceptibility to recruitment from mobilization behaviors, including patterns relating to emerging threats such as Nihilistic Violent Extremism.
- Comparative insights across ideological movements and violent extremist subcultures, highlighting both shared and unique recruitment and mobilization dynamics.
- Population base rates for key indicators among U.S. young adults and among parents/teachers, enabling operators to separate common behaviors from true warning signs.
- Empirically derived youth risk profiles that identify combinations of factors most associated with recruitment or mobilization, while excluding immutable traits and protected speech.
- Evidence on the applicability and limits of adult-oriented threat/risk tools to youth cases, with guidance on adjustments needed for adolescent developmental factors.

NCITE Strategic Priority

Actors – Addresses who targets and mobilizes youth by mapping recruitment networks, victimization tactics, and offender pathways.

NCITE Operational Area of Excellence

Research and Development Translation and Transition – Produces actionable guidance, briefings, and evaluated training to move science into day-to-day DHS and partner operations.

Methodology

The project will conduct four workstreams: (1) rapid evidence review and expert workshop to synthesize current youth radicalization/mobilization evidence; (2) multi-round focus groups with U.S. practitioners to reach consensus on indicators; (3) two U.S. surveys, one of young adults (19–25) and another of parents/teachers; and (4) analyses using descriptive statistics, psychometric network modeling, and latent class clustering to identify base rates and risk profiles. Research protocols will ensure compliance and protection of civil liberties and will not examine those under 18. Research will translate to operator-ready information products and training materials.

Please visit the NCITE website for more information on the project at ncite.unomaha.edu

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