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COMPARING INDIVIDUALS WHO ENGAGE IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND SIMILAR ACTS

What Research Sponsored by the
National Institute of Justice Tells Us

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Executive Summary

Over the years, the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ) funding for research has provided important opportunities to advance our understanding of topics related to crime and justice within the United States. Drawing from this portfolio, this synthesis paper compares and contrasts the data and findings from NIJ-sponsored research projects on violent extremism, mass shootings, and bias crimes. This comparison focuses both on the content of the data and on the creation and coverage of the data, examining findings from four research projects:

- The Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) database of 2,226 individuals who demonstrated at least 1 of 5 extremist or radicalized behaviors.
- The Bias Incidents and Actors Study (BIAS) database of 966 adults arrested or indicted for bias crimes.
- The National Hate Crime Investigation Study (NHCIS) database of 1,230 hate crime cases.
- The Violence Project dataset of 172 mass shootings.

This synthesis first reviews the creation of each dataset and the types of information that are collected to better understand their generalizability and the ability to make comparisons across separate datasets. There are significant differences in the size, time span, and information of the four datasets, which limits the comparisons that can be made between the individuals described in each dataset and necessitates caution in drawing strong conclusions from such comparisons.

With that caution in mind, the datasets suggest some similarities in the individuals who commit bias crimes and mass shootings and display violent extremist behavior. These individuals are primarily males in their 20s and 30s and unmarried at the time of their offenses. They may exhibit higher rates of unemployment than the general population and often have prior criminal histories. However, that is not to say that these characteristics should be used as a profile to determine who is at risk of or more likely to commit any of these types of offenses or behaviors. Rather, it calls into question what other factors may be impacting individuals with these characteristics who go on to commit these types of offenses.

The datasets also suggest some differences in the individuals who commit each type of offense or behavior. Individuals associated with violent extremism tend to be more educated

than those who commit mass shootings or bias crimes. Individuals who commit mass shootings exhibit higher rates of mental health issues than those who commit bias crimes or participate in violent extremism offenses. The comparison of individuals across categories also highlighted differences among individuals who committed the same type of offense. Among individuals who supported violent extremism, for example, those acting in support of far-right ideologies were more likely to have military experience than those following other ideologies.

Comparing these datasets highlights their potential and their limitations, suggesting paths forward for future research. The different collection methods show the importance of precisely describing the data collection method, discussing which behaviors are missed by that method, and triangulating among data with different methods to understand what is missing. The differences in the types of information that each dataset collects about each individual and action suggest that future collections could have greater overlap and comparability. The establishment of potential similarities in demographics and life experiences also allows for more targeted data collection focusing on why most individuals who fit that profile do not commit an offense, while others do. In this way, these projects not only contribute to our current understanding of these types of offenses and behaviors but also allow future research and programming to be conducted more effectively.

Introduction

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) began funding research about radicalization to terrorism in the United States in 2012. This stream of research, along with other NIJ-sponsored projects related to crime and justice, has advanced our understanding of the characteristics, risk factors, and behaviors associated with terrorism and violent extremism and provided information relevant to approaching, preventing, and addressing them.

As part of an ongoing effort to synthesize these findings as they relate to terrorism prevention efforts specifically, this paper explores efforts undertaken in distinct yet related NIJ research areas to synthesize what we know about persons who engage in domestic violent extremism and compare that knowledge to findings from NIJ-sponsored research on people who commit other, similar types of violence, namely those carrying out mass shootings and hate or bias crimes (“hate” and “bias” crimes are used interchangeably in this report). In doing so, the paper explores completed and ongoing NIJ-sponsored research on people who engage in or commit each of these types of acts to identify potential similarities and differences based on synthesized research findings. This comparison, while not scientific, provides additional insight helpful in informing future directions for research, policy, and practice aimed at understanding, preventing, and addressing domestic terrorism, violent extremism, and similar offenses in the United States.¹

Understanding how persons who engage in violent extremist behaviors compare with persons who commit other crimes has significant implications for policy and practice. Identifying similarities and differences provides insight into how interventions and efforts meant to address each type of behavior may be relevant or applied to others — and where they may not. In addition, this comparison can aid in more appropriately identifying the extent to which persons who perpetrate similar, yet distinct, forms of criminal behavior may share similar demographic characteristics and experience similar pathways in their advancement to violent or criminal offenses.

The paper begins with a short discussion of variation and similarity within and across each type of offense, including definitional parameters, relative prevalence, and the basis for comparison given potential areas of overlap. It then provides an overview of select

NIJ-sponsored research on persons who engage in either violent extremist behaviors, mass shootings, or hate crimes, based on their potential comparability. Synthesized findings from these NIJ-sponsored studies are then discussed, including the following:

- Persons who engage in violent extremist behaviors, hate crimes, and mass shooter offenses show similar demographic tendencies in age, gender, employment, and criminal history.
- However, persons who engage in these different types of crimes and behaviors show some differences in histories of education, trauma, mental illness, and military service.
- Persons who engage in different types of crimes and behaviors may differ in their social tendencies and networks.
- Current data do not allow direct comparison of people's pathways to these different behaviors, but this is a promising area for future research.

It is important to once again note that not all the research discussed is scientifically comparative in nature. However, understanding how and when findings overlap can assist in future comparative studies. This paper concludes with a discussion of caveats, areas for further research, and implications for policy and practice based on the synthesized findings.

Considering Violent Extremism, Mass Shootings, and Hate Crimes

Determining the factors that distinguish and make similar violent extremist, mass shooting, and hate crime acts (criminal offenses or actions/behaviors) — and the people who commit them — is particularly important for understanding and addressing each type of act. Not only is misunderstanding or mislabeling these different offenses — which, on the surface, can appear similar — detrimental to developing appropriate efforts to address those behaviors, it is also detrimental to researchers studying them. Unfortunately, making those determinations is notoriously difficult, especially given the variation and overlap in conceptions and definitions used in describing individual offense or behavior types. Such determinations are even further complicated given that definitions of certain types of offenses or behaviors rely, in part, on the individual motivation behind the act. This, in turn, underscores the important yet difficult task of identifying causal relationships between the characteristics, motivations, and behaviors of individuals engaged in each type of offense. Thus, before discussing potential similarities and differences across individuals engaged in each type of act, this section provides a brief synopsis of common definitional criteria associated with each type of act, including discussion of where all three may overlap.

Violent Extremism: Definitions and Characteristics

Defining what constitutes violent extremism and terrorism vis-a-vis other forms of violence and crime has been a persistent issue for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike.² Definitions can vary considerably based on the type of violent extremism addressed (including lone actor or group-affiliated, and categories of ideological motivation such as jihadist, far-right, far-left, or anti-government), unit of analysis (e.g., ideology, individuals committing the offenses, material support, online content), temporal focus, and even legal framework. Although no universally agreed-on definition exists, certain elements of individual definitions do overlap.

Consistently, violent extremist offenses include an ideologically motivated action, be it active support for or association with violent extremist or terrorist groups, or actual participation in violent activities to achieve ideological goals. However, the treatment of these components may vary. NIJ, for instance, has previously defined violent extremists as individuals who advocate, encourage, condone, justify, or support violent acts to achieve terroristic goals.³ The Profiles on Individual Radicalization in the United States dataset, however, identifies violent and nonviolent extremists as any persons who show behavior linked to espoused ideological motives and are either members of a designated terrorist organization or violent extremist group, arrested or indicted for an ideologically motivated crime, or killed as a result of their ideological activities.⁴

Violent extremism can include both violent and nonviolent acts in furtherance of violent, ideologically motivated goals. These acts can be carried out by lone actors or by groups of individuals and can involve the use of a wide variety of tools, including the provision of material support, advocating or encouraging violence, and committing violent acts. The targets of violent extremist actions, rhetoric, and attacks may also vary — from members of a perceived out-group or a perceived in-group to the public writ large. Actual violent extremist attacks, however, are often characterized as relatively rare.

Mass Shootings: Definitions and Characteristics

Mass shootings refer to events involving firearms characterized by the shooting of multiple individuals within a limited amount of time or within close proximity.⁵ As noted by an NIJ-sponsored publication on the phenomenon, although mass shootings can be conceived of as existing underneath a broader umbrella of events involving mass violence, the motive behind mass shootings can be unclear (unlike in violent extremist offenses).⁶ Definitions of mass shootings also vary, especially regarding the number of people killed, with implications for research findings.⁷ The Congressional Research Service, for example, defines a mass shooting as “a multiple homicide incident in which four or more victims are murdered with firearms, within one event, and in one or more locations in close proximity.”⁸ As noted by NIJ-sponsored research, among other distinctions in criteria, other definitions classify mass shooting incidents as involving at least three or at least six victims.⁹ Further questions regarding whether injured parties, not just deaths, should be included in these victimization thresholds have also been posed.¹⁰ Unlike violent extremist attacks, mass shootings are generally considered to be more common in occurrence and, in fact, increasing in prevalence in the United States.¹¹ Typically, individuals carrying out mass shootings operate alone, but that does not preclude multiple individuals from carrying out a mass shooting attack.¹² Although mass shootings necessitate the commission of or intent to commit a violent attack using a firearm, the targets of mass shootings can vary.

Hate and Bias Crimes: Definitions and Characteristics

The FBI defines hate crimes (also referred to as bias crimes) as “criminal offenses against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity.”¹³ Those targeted by hate crimes are usually selected based on their “(perceived) group affiliation,”¹⁴ sometimes based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, and

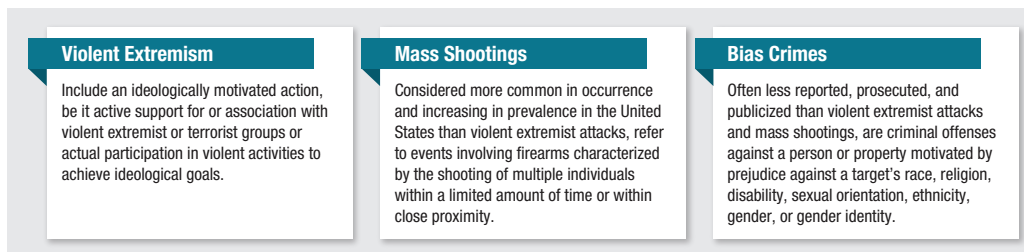
age. However, classification for hate and bias crimes may vary based on local jurisdictions.¹⁵ This variation and issues associated with determining the role of bias in motivating the perpetration of crimes can make it difficult to assess the prevalence and relative frequency of hate crimes accurately.¹⁶

Unlike violent extremist attacks and mass shooting incidents, it is easier for hate crimes to remain unreported or unprosecuted, given that they are often less publicized.¹⁷ This, in turn, can further complicate efforts to gather the data needed to accurately assess the threat these crimes pose and the profiles of the individuals who perpetrate them. As noted in a recent NIJ-sponsored report, previous research suggests that although one person alone can commit a hate crime, hate crimes in general are more likely than non-hate-motivated crimes to involve multiple perpetrators.¹⁸ Although hate crimes can be both violent and nonviolent, they are more likely to involve “serious violent crimes or assault” than crimes not associated with hate as a motivating factor.¹⁹

The Comparability of Individuals Who Commit Violent Extremist, Hate Crime, and Mass Shooting Offenses

Although our understanding of violent extremism, hate crimes, and mass shootings is complicated by issues associated with definitional clarity and potential points of overlap, comparing information on each of these types of offenses and the individuals who carry them out may yield valuable insights. Indeed, given some of the similarities in offense definitions and characteristics, it may be useful to conceive of the three phenomena as not always mutually exclusive, but fluid and sometimes overlapping (see exhibit 1 for a visual guide).

Exhibit 1. Potential overlaps in definitions in violent extremist, mass shooter, and hate crime offenses



This overlap can be seen both conceptually and empirically. Violent extremism is partly defined by ideological motivations, and many prominent ideologies are built around or incorporate hatred toward an out-group as a basic tenet.²⁰ Thus, many (but not all) acts of violent extremism are inherently hate crimes. In terms of empirical measurement, this overlap can affect data collection, as discussed later in this report. Mass shootings differ from violent extremism and hate crimes in that they are defined by the means and scale of violence as opposed to motive. As such, there is no conceptual conflict between mass shootings and either violent extremism or hate crimes; a mass shooting can be violent

extremism, a hate crime, both, or neither.²¹ The localized effects of mass shootings means that often certain subgroups are more impacted, which can give the appearance of a hate crime even if the targeting was not ideologically motivated.²² Often, research on mass shootings explicitly excludes mass shooting events with other underlying goals, such as terrorist attacks or gang-related violence.²³

To further explore these potential overlaps and their implications for prevention, policy, and response, the following sections of this paper synthesize information derived from NIJ-sponsored studies of individuals carrying out each form of activity, with a particular focus on individuals' demographic characteristics, backgrounds, and trajectories toward violence and potential programmatic and policy solutions. It is important to keep in mind that the individuals engaging in offenses within each category are not monolithic. As such, the sections below also delineate potential similarities and differences not only across people who commit different offenses, but also within these groups, as detailed by the research.

NIJ-Sponsored Studies Supporting Cross-Type Comparison

This section provides an overview of the different focuses of NIJ-sponsored research on people who engage in each type of act, as well as summaries of NIJ-sponsored research supporting cross-type comparisons. Although differences in the data collection for each project make direct comparisons difficult, these projects allow us to survey likely commonalities and distinctions across the different types of violence and help us identify hypotheses to test and data issues to address going forward.

The research projects summarized here are not representative of all NIJ-sponsored research studies on persons who engage in violent extremism, hate crimes, or mass shootings. Instead, they represent a limited sample with data deemed comparable for the purposes of this paper. A full review of all NIJ-sponsored research on violent extremism, hate crimes, and mass shootings is beyond the scope of this paper. However, additional research and synthesis efforts sponsored by NIJ, both existing and forthcoming, provide further insight into the similarities and differences between people who engage in violent extremist behaviors and other offenses.²⁴ When possible and relevant, these complementary efforts are included in the discussion.

Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization

The NIJ-supported Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR) project at the University of Maryland created the Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) database. The PIRUS database contains information on 2,226 people demonstrating extremist or radicalized behavior.²⁵ The 147 variables in the database capture information about each individual's demographics, background, ideology, and group affiliations.²⁶

The PIRUS database defined radicalization as “the psychological, emotional, and behavioral processes by which an individual or group adopts an ideology that promotes the use of

violence for the attainment of political, economic, religious, or social goals.” To create a dataset of radicalized individuals, the team first used open-source materials and resources from the University of Maryland’s National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses of Terrorism (START) to identify 4,000 people who may meet the inclusion criteria. The team then confirmed whether each individual actually met at least one of the following criteria: (a) arrested for an ideologically motivated crime, (b) indicted for an ideologically motivated crime, (c) killed as a result of their ideological activities, (d) a member of a designated terrorist organization, or (e) a member of a violent extremist group. The team randomly sampled from the individuals that met these criteria to select the 1,418 entries. They then coded the rest of the information for each individual. Missing data were imputed using several techniques. The team later created qualitative life histories for 56 of the individuals.²⁷ Further updates increased the final dataset to 2,226 individuals.²⁸

This dataset allowed the researchers to compare individuals motivated by different ideologies: Islamist, far-right, far-left, and single issue.²⁹ They found that people engaged in far-right violent extremism were older than previously believed (with a median age of 36), which has important implications for programming designed to counter violent extremism.³⁰ They also found that group membership was common for people subscribing to both far-left and far-right ideologies. In addition, they found that many typical traits — mental health, substance abuse, childhood trauma, economic deprivation, lack of education — were no more prevalent among individuals in their dataset than among the general population.³¹

A Pathway Approach to the Study of Individuals Who Commit Bias Crimes

With the support of NIJ, the University of Maryland research team created the Bias Incidents and Actors Study (BIAS) database. The database includes information on 966 adults who committed hate crimes motivated by race, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or age. For each entry, the database includes details on the person committing the bias crime (e.g., demographics, education, criminal record, group affiliations) and on the bias crime itself (e.g., violent/nonviolent, spontaneous/premeditated, lone/group).³²

To understand the BIAS dataset, it is important to understand its creation. The team first created five criteria for inclusion: (1) arrested/indicted for a crime in the United States in 1990-2018, (2) age 18 or older at the time of the crime, (3) residing in the United States at the time of the crime, (4) substantial evidence that the crime was committed because of bias against the target, and (5) sufficient open-source information to code the details of the crime and a majority of the demographic traits. If we consider all bias crimes committed by adults in the United States, these criteria rule out crimes committed by foreign visitors, crimes that were never reported or never led to charges, and crimes that led to charges but are insufficiently documented in open-source materials.

The team began their collection with the PIRUS dataset and found 300 cases that met the criteria.³³ Their report suggested that because the PIRUS dataset was created from a random sample, this inclusion did not impact BIAS’s representativeness — but elsewhere the team behind the PIRUS dataset cautioned that it should not be treated as representative, given its limited information sources and the bias inherent to those sources (e.g., the

media's greater focus post-9/11 on people who fit an Islamic extremism narrative).³⁴ In addition, using the PIRUS dataset as a starting point may have biased the BIAS dataset toward the PIRUS dataset's own criteria (i.e., arrested for an ideologically motivated crime). The BIAS researchers did make clear, however, that their dataset should not be used to report aggregate hate crime trends.³⁵

The rest of the cases included in the BIAS data were found using searches of news aggregators and targeted searches for rarer types of events, such as crimes committed by female individuals and crimes against Native American individuals. The research team identified limitations with respect to recency: 91% of older cases from the 1990s had insufficient information for inclusion, compared to 57% of cases after 2010. The results also show disproportionately high rates of inclusion for cases in California (19% of BIAS cases, 12% of U.S. population) and New York (10% of BIAS cases, 6% of U.S. population), which raises questions about differences in bias crime law and enforcement across states. Several states do not have hate crime laws, and others enacted such laws after the start of the dataset, which may have limited researchers' ability to detect bias crimes in those states.³⁶

Within the dataset of people who committed bias crimes, 93.5% were male and 80% were white. The median age was 26 years old. The dataset allows us to look at subgroups based on the type of their bias motivation. Subjects could exhibit multiple motivations; 67.2% of subjects showed race/ethnicity/nationality bias, 23.5% showed religion bias, and 12.1% showed sexual orientation/gender identity bias. People who targeted sexual orientation/gender identity were on average younger (24 years old) and less likely to be married (12.8%) compared to people motivated by race/ethnicity/nationality (26 years old on average, 18.6% married) or religion (31 years old on average, 27.3% married).³⁷ With these data, the research team also compared crime characteristics by bias type, the motivation of the person who committed the crime (i.e., mission, defensive, thrill, retaliatory, or mixed motive), whether the crime was violent or nonviolent, and whether the person committed a mass casualty attack.

Investigations and Profiles of Individuals Who Commit Hate Crimes: A National Survey of U.S. Law Enforcement Agencies

A project at the University of New Hampshire created the National Hate Crime Investigation Study (NHCIS) focused on understanding hate crimes and how law enforcement agencies handle them. To do this, the researchers took the National Directory of Criminal Justice Data's list of law enforcement agencies, stratified the agencies into five groups based on jurisdiction and size, and mailed surveys to a random sample within each group. They contacted 3,520 agencies with jurisdiction to investigate hate crimes, of which 2,488 responded (70.7% of those contacted) and 575 reported at least one hate crime investigation in 2018 (23.1% of respondents). The respondents reported a total of 3,530 hate crime investigations. The researchers estimated that there were 6,486 hate crime investigations in the United States in 2018 (with a 95% confidence interval of 5,623-7,348) and randomly sampled 1,935 cases for further study. They successfully collected information on 1,230 cases through telephone interviews and case reports.³⁸

The survey also asked agencies about how they approached hate crimes. About half of the agencies reported they had set up a review process for cases in which patrol officers notice bias motivation (57%), had written policy guidelines for investigating hate crimes (52%),

and had received training related to investigating hate crimes in the last two years (50%); 19% of agencies had an officer or unit dedicated to investigating hate crimes. All these steps (except for the training) were correlated with a greater number of hate crime investigations at an agency.³⁹

The dataset provides details about the type of hate crime and, when possible, about the suspect (63% of cases) and the person targeted (77% of cases). The suspects were mainly male (86.2%) and white (74%), and the people targeted were mainly male (63.7%) and nonwhite (61.3%), with a plurality who were Black (48.73%). For the 474 crimes in which the researchers could determine the suspect's relationship to the targeted person, in 272 cases (57.5%) the suspect was a stranger. The use of weapons (14%) and injury to the targeted person (13%) were less common. Individuals suspected of committing a hate crime were arrested in 27.5% of cases and charged in 10.3% of cases, with hate crime charges in only 4.3% of cases.⁴⁰

The researchers concluded with calls for greater consistency across agencies in identifying, reporting, and responding to hate crimes. They emphasize that only 23% of agencies reported any hate crimes, including only 45% of large agencies with 100 officers or more. They also pointed out the important role of community-based solutions, given the problem of underreporting hate crimes and the limitations faced by law enforcement and the justice system in their ability to detect, identify, and investigate hate crimes.⁴¹

A Multilevel, Multimethod Investigation of the Psychosocial Life Histories of Mass Shooters

Hamline University researchers collected data for the Violence Project on mass public shootings, focusing on who committed them and where they occurred. The researchers defined a mass public shooting as an event where four or more people were murdered with firearms in one or more public locations such as a workplace, school, or place of worship.⁴² They compiled existing open-source lists of mass shootings and added to them using online newspapers and media. Then, they identified the people who committed each shooting and coded the variables of interest using eyewitness accounts of the shooting, social media and communications from the person who committed the shooting, media coverage, government records, and other materials. Information on each person who committed a mass shooting was double-coded,⁴³ rechecked by a third coder, and then updated with public feedback. In addition, the research team conducted interviews with five people convicted of mass shootings and with 43 other people affected by mass shootings, including friends and family of the people who committed or were harmed in the shooting, first responders, and community stakeholders.

The database contains 172 people who committed 168 mass shootings, the 370 firearms they used, and the 1,200 people they killed.⁴⁴ In reviewing their life histories, the researchers found that 80% of the people who committed the shootings were in crisis, meaning "their current situation was overwhelming their ability to cope."⁴⁵ A quarter (26.7%) of these individuals showed evidence of a psychotic disorder diagnosis, a rate much higher than the general population's (1%). The symptoms of psychosis played a significant or primary role for 19.2% of the shooters.⁴⁶ In terms of warning signs, 48% of the shooters communicated to a third party their intent to do harm in advance of the event.⁴⁷ Weapons were purchased illegally by 13% and were stolen by 19%. Over 80% of the people who attacked a K-12 school stole their weapons from family members.⁴⁸

The researchers correctly advised against generalizing from their qualitative interviews due to the small, unrepresentative sample, but they highlighted four commonalities that echo trends in the quantitative data and point to avenues for further research. First, all five of the people who committed mass shootings described some childhood trauma. Second, all five described reaching a crisis point within a few months before the shooting. Third, several suggested having studied mass shootings prior to their own. Fourth, access to weapons and chosen targets was common.⁴⁹

Comparison of Data Creation and Coverage

The four projects described in this synthesis all created datasets that capture and organize new information on individuals who engaged in mass shooter, violent extremist, and hate crime offenses. Before we compare that information, we first compare the structure of the datasets to understand the nature of the data and their similarities and differences for the purpose of comparison. Exhibit 2 gives an overview of the datasets⁵⁰ based on how they cover people engaged in each type of behavior, their collection methods, and their time spans.

Exhibit 2: Summary of NIJ-Sponsored Datasets

	PIRUS	Violence Project	BIAS	NHCIS
Behavior	Extremist views and behavior	Mass shootings	Hate crimes	Hate crimes
Method	Open-source searches	Existing lists and open-source search	PIRUS and open-source searches	Survey of law enforcement
Size	2,226 ³	172	996	1,230
Time Span	1948-2018	1966-2022	1990-2018	2018

1. Project lead reports that dataset was shipped to data archive at the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) to be posted.
2. No information on data availability found and project authors did not respond to inquiry.
3. Updated from original dataset of 1,418 individuals. Jessica Rivinius and Monica Pizzo, "START Releases New Data on Radicalization in the United States," <https://www.start.umd.edu/news/start-releases-new-data-radicalization-united-states>.

For example, the PIRUS dataset describes individuals who engaged in violent extremist behaviors between 1948 and 2018, while NHCIS describes people who committed hate crimes in 2018. We also see the variation in the size of these datasets. The Violence

Project describes 172 mass shooters across 56 years, while NHCIS has 3,530 entries from a single year. Exhibit 3 shows the information each dataset captures about the individuals committing the offenses, roughly grouped as background information, behavior drivers, and stressors. It also shows the information each dataset has about individuals' methods, offense aftermath, and people harmed, highlighting additional variation across the datasets. Of the 45 variables tracked, only four are captured by all four datasets. This speaks to the differences between these behaviors and the different approaches across these projects. More broadly, it suggests that comparisons across datasets are limited by the type of information that each dataset collects.

Given the noncomparative nature of the reports discussed in this paper, synthesized findings derived from these materials should be taken as starting points for further comparative research studies, rather than as generalizable truths, risk assessment frameworks, or anything more than a superficial assessment of potential similarities and differences. This is especially so considering the ambiguities that are inherent in defining each type of offense, as well as in the wide variety of sources, missing data, and analytical techniques used to assess each project referenced here. The definitions used in data collection efforts affect the data and their findings, and studies focused on different sets of definitional criteria may yield different findings. The same is true of studies focusing mainly on certain ideological strands of violent extremism and studies focusing on specific criteria in defining hate crimes. Readers should be cognizant of these limitations when considering the synthesized findings.

Beyond considerations of definitional criteria, there are limitations to extrapolating too broadly from the data in each of the studies, especially given issues associated with potential data skew due to factors associated with data availability and missing data. Importantly, the infrequency yet high impact of terrorist and mass shooter events can lead to bias in the data, particularly if derived from media sources. Similarly, legal distinctions in determining hate crime criteria and underreporting of hate crime incidents can lead to unrepresentative samples from which data are collected, with implications for the generalizability of information derived from the data. Additionally, the possibility of bias and overlap in the data given the similarities among people committing different offenses may lead to inaccurate interpretations of comparative characteristics, motives, and demographics across offense types. This is a limitation specifically noted by the researchers who constructed the BIAS dataset, given their reliance on PIRUS data. But it is important to keep that limitation in mind more broadly, given the various methods and means by which each project discussed herein collected and assessed its data.

It must be reiterated that these studies were not intended to be comparative in nature; they were not designed to compare similarities and differences across people committing different types of offenses. As such, all comparisons of the studies' findings may be shaped by their methodologies, the timelines from which data were derived, and the focus of their analysis.

Exhibit 3: Individual and Event Information in NIJ-Sponsored Datasets

Grouping	Variable	PIRUS	Violence Project	BIAS	NHCIS
Background	Gender	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Age	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Ethnicity	✓	✓		✓
	Sexuality		✓		
	Religion	✓	✓		
	Location	✓			
	Citizenship	✓	✓	✓	
	Relationship	✓	✓	✓	
	Children		✓	✓	
	Education	✓	✓	✓	
	Socioeconomic	✓			
	Employment	✓	✓	✓	
	Military Service	✓	✓	✓	
	Social Life	✓			
	Social Media	✓	✓		
	Civic Involvement			✓	
	Criminal History	✓	✓	✓	✓
Drivers	Radicalization	✓			
	Bias/Prejudice		✓	✓	✓
	Ideology	✓			
	Terror/Hate Group Membership	✓	✓	✓	
Stressors	Mental Health	✓	✓	✓	
	Substance Abuse	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Abused	✓	✓	✓	
	Trauma	✓	✓	✓	
Victims	Personal Crisis		✓		
	Religion			✓	
	Number		✓		
	Gender		✓	✓	✓
	Sexual Orientation			✓	
	Race/Ethnicity		✓	✓	✓
	Age		✓		✓
Relationship		✓	✓	✓	

Exhibit 3: Individual and Event Information in NIJ-Sponsored Datasets (continued)

Grouping	Variable	PIRUS	Violence Project	BIAS	NHCIS
Method/Attack	Target	✓	✓		
	Planning/Preparation	✓		✓	
	Immediate Trigger (Provocation)			✓	
	Secrecy	✓		✓	
	Plan Disclosed (Leakage)		✓		
	Violence	✓			
	Location		✓		
	Motivation		✓	✓	
	Weapon			✓	
	Suicide			✓	
Aftermath	Charge/Arrest	✓	✓		✓
	Current Status	✓			
	Killed		✓		

Synthesized Findings: Comparing and Contrasting People Committing Different Offenses

Although nonscientific for the reasons noted above, comparing the findings from NIJ-sponsored research on people committing hate crimes, extremist violence, and mass shootings does reveal important considerations and insights for better understanding these individuals and areas where policy and practice initiatives might have shared relevance in addressing their behaviors. The synthesized findings detailed below expand on these potential similarities and differences, specifically focusing on demographic characteristics, backgrounds, social networks, and potential pathways and precursors.

Certain Characteristics May Be Similar Among People Committing Different Offenses, But Others May Vary, Even Within Each Type of Person

Findings from across the studies suggest that people who engage in violent extremist behaviors, hate crimes, and mass shootings may share certain similar demographics — specifically in terms of age, gender, criminal history, and employment. However, findings from across the studies also suggest important variations in terms of demographics not only across people engaged in different acts, but also between people engaged in the same act.

Potential Overlaps Between People Who Commit Offenses: Age, Gender, Employment, and Criminal History

As far as similarities are concerned, the studies suggest that people committing mass shootings and hate crimes and people showing violent extremist behavior may be similar in that they are primarily males in their 20s and 30s at the time of their offense, although this can vary when they are further disaggregated by bias or ideology within the studies.⁵² In addition, levels of employment at the time of the offense may be similar across people committing different offenses. Those who committed mass shootings or hate crimes both showed relatively high levels of unemployment at the time of their offense. In data on individuals committing mass shooting offenses gathered by another NIJ-sponsored study, 45.3% of the individuals were unemployed,⁵³ while based on data from the BIAS project, 39.5%-47% of those committing bias crimes were unemployed.⁵⁴ Although it was not possible to determine employment levels across people showing violent extremist behaviors as reported by the PIRUS dataset findings,⁵⁵ additional NIJ-sponsored studies comparing people committing mass shootings to lone actors committing violent extremism have indicated that unemployment among the lone actors may be similarly relatively high, at 38%.⁵⁶ Findings from the PIRUS dataset further suggest that people with stable employment histories may be less likely to engage in violence, specifically in cases occurring in 2000 and earlier.⁵⁷

In terms of criminal histories, on aggregate, people within each of the three offense types were identified as having high rates of prior criminal activity before their offenses. Although people who committed mass shootings were reported as having the highest rates of criminal histories (62.3%-64.5%),⁵⁸ people who committed hate crimes (56.6%-66.9%) or demonstrated violent extremist behavior also showed relatively high rates of criminal histories.⁵⁹ However, their rates of criminal history varied based on their type of motivation. People who engaged in hate crimes, for example, showed variations in criminal history based on their type of bias,⁶⁰ as did people engaged in violent extremist behaviors based on their ideology.⁶¹

Although not necessarily comparable, these potential overlaps in age, employment status, criminal history, and gender across the groups of people who committed each type of offense carry with them important implications for research, policy, and practice. Notably, they suggest that prevention programming and future research across all three groups should consider the specific issues and motivations affecting men in their 20s and 30s with criminal histories and poor histories of employment that may impact their trajectories to violent and nonviolent offenses. Programs addressing these characteristics, as noted by the PIRUS dataset, may differ from programs and policies focused on younger populations.⁶² That is not to say, however, that these characteristics should be used to profile individuals.

Potential Differences: Education, Trauma, Mental Illness, and Military Service

Data derived from NIJ-sponsored research on violent extremism, hate crimes, and mass shootings also revealed potential areas of divergence in the backgrounds of individuals who engaged in each type of offense, and areas of divergence among individuals categorized

within any one type of offense. One of those areas was level of education. According to data gathered through the PIRUS dataset, people exhibiting ideologically motivated behaviors from different ideologies may vary in their levels of education.⁶³ In aggregate, however, it is possible that individuals who engage in violent extremist behavior have higher levels of education than do those who commit mass shootings or hate crimes; both of the latter also show some variation in levels of education individually based on NIJ-sponsored research.⁶⁴ As also noted by the PIRUS dataset, factors like low levels of education were “not more common than they are for the general population.”⁶⁵

In terms of military service, data from NIJ-sponsored studies suggest potential variation among people engaged in violent extremism, hate crimes, or mass shootings, and in some cases, among individuals within these acts/offense types. Those committing mass shootings and people demonstrating far-right radicalization, overall, seem to display higher rates of prior or current military service at the time of their offenses (28.5% and 29.2% respectively),⁶⁶ whereas people who commit hate crimes and non-far-right radicalization displayed lower rates of military service (varying based on motivation between 6.8% and 18.8%).⁶⁷ When looking at violent acts more specifically, analysis by the PIRUS dataset team suggested that military service did not appear to impact the probability of carrying out a violent act.⁶⁸ However, the BIAS team’s analysis suggested that although histories of military service were relatively rare across individuals committing hate crimes, prior military service (among other factors) was seen at higher rates among individuals who carried out hate crimes resulting in mass casualties.⁶⁹ In addition, within the BIAS study, the team found that individuals motivated by “mission,” or “a singular goal to ‘eliminate’ an entire community or population of people,” displayed relatively higher rates of military service (22.7%).⁷⁰ This poses questions for further study — namely, might people who commit mass-casualty hate crimes and those demonstrating far-right radicalization have more in common with people who commit mass shootings than they do with other people who commit hate crimes and engage in violent extremist behaviors?

Similarly, it is possible that people engaged in different types of offenses have different histories of trauma, abuse, and mental health, both across and within each type of offense. People who commit mass shootings varied notably in terms of histories of mental health by issue type.⁷¹ People who committed hate crimes exhibited variation in mental illness rates across hate crime type.⁷² People demonstrating violent extremist behavior, on the other hand, showed the lowest rates of mental illness, with 91.6% in aggregate without a history of suspected or professionally diagnosed illness.⁷³

In terms of previous trauma, data from the PIRUS dataset suggest that histories of trauma among people demonstrating violent extremist behavior are relatively consistent and low across ideologies, as were the lower comparative rates among people in the BIAS dataset.⁷⁴ People who commit mass shootings, however, may exhibit comparatively higher rates of prior trauma based on data derived from the Violence Project research team, with 31% experiencing severe childhood trauma (and higher rates among those targeting K-12 schools).⁷⁵

Comparing Social Factors — The Impact of Social Networks

Additional factors of divergence and interest include social factors, such as relationship status and group membership. Although it was not possible based on the final EADR report to determine the percentage of people demonstrating violent extremist behavior who were either in a romantic relationship or married at the time of their offense, additional NIJ-sponsored research on the subject found that among lone actors demonstrating violent extremist behavior, a relatively high percentage (37%) were single at the time of their offense, and a relatively lower percentage (19%) were married.⁷⁶ That same study found similar rates of being married and single in those who committed mass shootings (43% single and 17% married at the time of offense).⁷⁷ Additional NIJ-sponsored studies on hate crimes and mass shootings also found relatively low rates of marriage among people that commit them (less than one-third of both were married at the time of offense), although information on relationship status beyond marriage was not reported.⁷⁸

Beyond romantic relationships, data from NIJ-sponsored studies suggest that people demonstrating violent extremist behavior may be more likely to be affiliated with like-minded groups. Data from the PIRUS dataset suggest that lack of any group affiliation may be relatively low; only 14.4% of individuals within that dataset had no discernable affiliations with like-minded (including formal and informal) or completely legal groups.⁷⁹ Clique membership, or a close association with a few like-minded individuals, was also relatively common, ranging from 41.7% among single-issue ideologies to 64.4% among Islamist ideologies,⁸⁰ with implications for understanding the role of social networks among people demonstrating violent extremist behavior.⁸¹ To a certain extent, this contrasts with NIJ-sponsored research comparing lone actors and people who committed mass shootings, which found 51% (highly significant) of lone actors engaged in violent extremist behaviors to be socially isolated as opposed to only 26% of those who committed mass shootings (not significant).⁸² This, however, could be due to differences in data and focus, given that the study focused specifically on lone actors and did not include individuals who acted based on direction from or in coordination with a group. People who committed hate crimes varied depending on bias motivation, but between 20.1% and 42.7% were reported as being members of organized hate groups.⁸³

Although there were fewer data on social network impacts on mass shooters — which may constitute a significant gap in research, considering that even information on lone actors of violent extremism suggests social interactions and networks may play a role in radicalization processes⁸⁴ — studies on those who committed mass shootings suggest that few mass shootings are carried out by multiple people.⁸⁵ Importantly, however, data on people who committed mass shootings, similar to data on people who demonstrated violent extremist behaviors, suggest that leakage — or communications by those people to social contacts regarding their intent to commit a crime — may be prevalent and thus could represent a viable means of prevention.⁸⁶ Leakage involves immediate social networks and connections, suggesting the continued relevance of engaging with the local communities and family members of individuals exhibiting concerning behaviors or communicating an intent to commit criminal activities to develop viable and nonthreatening mechanisms by which to report and address concerning behaviors and communications from individuals planning to commit an offense.⁸⁷

Similarities and Differences in Offense Trajectories Across Offense Types

NIJ-sponsored studies also highlight important information that may be useful in determining differences and similarities among people who commit mass shootings, violent extremist behavior, and hate crimes, with important implications for policy and practice. Although deriving specific information on offense types was not possible from the data supplied, both NIJ studies on people who committed hate crimes and violent extremist behaviors supplied important information about potential combinations of characteristics and life experiences that may lead individuals to pursue violent (as opposed to nonviolent) offenses. Information on people who committed mass shootings — whose offenses or plans to commit an offense are violent in nature — supply additional insight into potential pathways to violence. Although more research is needed to determine the comparative nature of these pathways, these insights merit further study and attention from policy and practice.

In terms of precipitating events leading to violence, data from the Hamline University team suggest that people who committed mass shootings experienced recent personal crises to a high degree — including employment issues and relationship issues — that may have impacted their trajectories to violence.⁸⁸ Looking specifically at precipitating factors leading to violent offenses (versus nonviolent), researchers tested the datasets on people committing hate crimes and violent extremist behaviors to determine how combinations of risk and background factors may influence trajectories to both. Findings on people showing violent extremist behaviors suggest that, although many factors may contribute to radicalization, cognitive frame alignment — and, to a more significant extent, community crisis (or perceptions that one's community has been victimized) — may contribute to conditions in which radicalization to violence does, but not necessarily will, occur, although researchers noted that combinations of psychological and emotional factors may further contribute to violent outcomes in these cases.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, findings from data on hate crimes suggest that the quantity of factors and, importantly, certain combinations of factors, may be associated with violent offenses. For example, people who committed hate crimes spontaneously with their peers were potentially more likely to commit violence — while specific types of factors that lead to feelings of disappointment may increase the likelihood of engagement in mass casualty bias crimes.⁹⁰

Gaps and Path Forward

The NIJ-sponsored research discussed in this paper provides important insight into potential similarities and differences between individuals who commit violent extremist, mass shooting, and hate crime offenses and the types of offenses they commit. However, it also highlights gaps in our knowledge and areas for further research and refinement. Although the open sources and voluntary responses are often the most accessible information available, they are not without their weaknesses. Future work should focus on improving the state of data collection by continuing the efforts described in these projects, triangulating among other official data sources, and undertaking new data collection. Part of this may include trying to assess how often radicalization, bias crimes, and mass shootings go unreported and undetected. Another aspect of this is to consider additional variables to collect based on the findings of other studies, such as the role of ideology in hate crimes and mass shootings.

With advances in measurement, there will be more opportunities to advance types of analysis. These projects have allowed us to make some comparisons between people who committed different types of offenses and the general public. Conducting common measurements of these distinct yet related behaviors will allow for greater comparisons between individuals who commit these different offenses. Identifying common attributes will also allow data collection targeted at people who have never committed an offense but share the characteristics of those who have, so we can start to answer questions such as why some personal crises lead to mass shootings and others do not. Any patterns that we observe then become prime targets for additional qualitative work to understand the mechanisms behind those patterns. A collection of common variables in datasets of people who have and have not committed offenses will also lend itself to advanced techniques such as machine learning to examine common assumptions about whether an individual will commit a hate crime, mass shooting, violent extremist behavior, or none of those based on their characteristics and background.

Future research should further explore potential overlaps and distinctions within and across all three offense types, with a specific focus on areas in which offenses converge and why. For example, future studies may choose to assess areas in which mass shootings,

violent extremist behaviors, and hate crimes are carried out by the same individuals to better understand the motivations to violence and the choice of specific means of violence across ideological and bias types. Future research may also choose to explore the role of the internet and social media in motivating or contributing to each type of violence, including how people who commit each type of offense use online platforms and connections to communicate and justify their actions and ideologies. Finally, future research should further explore the distinctions among people committing each type of offense, with specific emphasis on understanding demographic, pathway, programmatic, and policy-oriented actions for addressing factors that may lead people to commit each type of offense to explore further how various programmatic and policy-oriented initiatives may align or diverge based on offense types and individuals' characteristics, ideologies, and motivations.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Overall, NIJ-sponsored research illuminates important insights that may provide avenues for further understanding and comparison of people who commit hate crimes, mass shootings, and violent extremist behavior, including their overlaps, distinctions, and potential points of intervention. Although findings from the studies are not without their caveats and are not necessarily generalizable nor directly comparable, this synthesis suggests important considerations and avenues for policy and practice addressing varied offense types, as detailed below.

Recognize Potential Overlaps Across Individuals of Different Offense Types, But Remain Sensitive to Individual Distinctions

There is no one-size-fits-all profile across or even within people who have committed different types of offenses. Despite this, however, data from studies on each group of people seem to suggest that they share some similarities. Although this may be the case, evidence of variation across individuals committing each type of offense suggests the continued need for targeted, individual, and community-based policy solutions for people who may potentially commit violent extremist behavior, hate crimes, and mass shootings. The focus should be on individual experiences and trajectories, recognizing overarching factors that may be shared among all three groups — such as age, criminal history, gender, and employment history.

Certain programs may be more relevant on a societal or primary (rather than a specified) prevention level but should be carefully tailored so as not to inadvertently stigmatize or profile one specific group of individuals. Indeed, given social factors, a focus on targeting groups or engaging with social networks that individuals are associated with (rather than individuals primarily) may be advisable. There is a need to recognize social issues that may impact individual trajectories and tap into social networks capable of responsibly recognizing potential signs of risk by which to tailor appropriate individual responses. These responses may include trauma care or rehabilitation and reintegration based on

prior criminal offenses. Social- and economic-oriented alternatives, including counseling and career development programs, as suggested by some of these studies, may represent an important point of intervention across offense types. Still these interventions will need to be tailored based on the offense and individuals involved in its commission. Ultimately, universal risk assessments are not fully suited to assessing people at risk of different types of offenses. Importantly, and as noted across NIJ-sponsored research on violent extremism and mass shootings, efforts to address leakage and support community and social networks in recognizing and reporting potential indicators of intent to commit violent actions should be carefully coordinated with local law enforcement and community supportive care services in a manner that does not stigmatize communities nor inspire fear of or leave ambiguous the consequences of reporting potential criminal behaviors.

Recognize the Difficulties Inherent in Data Collection and Develop Mechanisms To Improve Coordination and Reporting

None of the data collection efforts for these projects capture a representative sample of the types of violence that they are interested in. If we start with every crime each project would like to capture (within any given geographic and temporal range), some portion of those crimes are observed, some portion of those observed crimes are reported, some portion of those reported are documented, and some portion of those documented crimes are collected into these datasets. Each step in that chain of information is nonrandom; it is probable that certain crimes are more likely to be passed along than others. The significance of that bias varies. These projects should be applauded for their frequent discussions on the limitations of their data and warnings against making broad generalizations. Although frustrating to practitioners and policymakers who need information, transparency about these limitations is essential to guarantee that policy and action are informed by the truth. Furthermore, being explicit about their limitations makes it easier to find each project's true value in drawing conclusions and informing future research. Increased investment and coordination are necessary for developing clear definitions and improved mechanisms for identifying and reporting on violent extremist, hate crime, and mass shooter offenses and the people who commit them. Moreover, these definitions and mechanisms must recognize the potential overlaps and fluidity between people who committed different types of offenses and the differences within each offense type.

Build Better Mechanisms To Coordinate, Identify, and Report on Each Type of Offense

Although overlaps between each of the three offense types exist, policymakers, the media, and practitioners should take great care in reporting on potential offenses and coordinating identification and reporting processes. This is especially so in terms of first responses to offenses that may appear to fall within one or multiple categories, but on further investigation actually fall into another. Given the high impact but relatively low prevalence of violent extremist and mass shooter offenses, in particular, care in assessing the motivations and pathways to violence of the individuals who carry them out is needed, particularly because of the heightened media attention they can garner. In addition, given the variation in national definitions and legal structures regarding hate crime offenses, greater coordination in developing shared definitional criteria, metrics, reporting, and response protocols should be explored.

Notes

1. For more on this effort, see Aisha Javed Qureshi, “Understanding Domestic Radicalization and Terrorism: A National Issue Within a Global Context,” *NIJ Journal* 282, August 2020, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/understanding-domestic-radicalization-and-terrorism>. Additional synthesis reports in this series include Kateira Aryaeinejad and Thomas Leo Scherer, “Evaluating and Assessing Terrorism Prevention Programs: What Research Sponsored by the National Institute of Justice Tells Us,” Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice (forthcoming); Kateira Aryaeinejad and Thomas Leo Scherer, “The Role of Social Networks in Facilitating and Preventing Domestic Radicalization,” Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice (forthcoming); and Kateira Aryaeinejad and Thomas Leo Scherer, “The Role of the Internet and Social Media on Radicalization: What Research Sponsored by the National Institute of Justice Tells Us,” Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice (forthcoming).
2. For discussions on how different actors define terrorism and why it matters, see Nicholas J. Perry, “The Numerous Federal Legal Definitions of Terrorism: The Problem of Too Many Grails,” *Journal of Legislation* 30 no. 2 (2004): 249-274; Wesley S. McCann and Nicholas Pimley, “Mixed Mandates: Issues Concerning Organizational and Statutory Definitions of Terrorism in the United States,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32 no. 4 (2020): 807-830; Joshua D. Freilich, Steven M. Chermak, and Joseph Simone Jr., “Surveying American State Police Agencies About Terrorism Threats, Terrorism Sources, and Terrorism Definitions,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21 no. 3 (2009): 450-475; Helen Taylor, “Domestic Terrorism and Hate Crimes: Legal Definitions and Media Framing of Mass Shootings in the United States,” *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 14 no. 3 (2019): 227-244; Connor Huff and Joshua D. Kertzer, “How the Public Defines Terrorism,” *American Journal of Political Science* 62 no. 1 (2018): 55-71; and Wojciech Kaczkowski, Ayse Lokmanoglu, and Carol Winkler, “Definitions Matter: A Comparison of the Global Terrorism Database and the U.S. Governmental Reports of Terrorist Incidents in Western Europe, 2002-2016,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 35 no. 1 (2022): 55-72.

3. National Institute of Justice funding opportunity, “NIJ FY22 Research and Evaluation on Domestic Radicalization and Violent Extremism,” grants.gov announcement number O-NIJ-2022-171193, posted March 10, 2022, <https://nij.ojp.gov/funding/O-NIJ-2022-171193.pdf>.
4. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), “PIRUS — Frequently Asked Questions,” <https://www.start.umd.edu/pirus-frequently-asked-questions>.
5. See, as an example, William J. Krouse and Daniel J. Richardson, “Mass Murder With Firearms: Incidents and Victims, 1999-2013,” Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015.
6. Basia E. Lopez, Danielle M. Crimmins, and Paul A. Haskins, “Advancing Mass Shooting Research To Inform Practice,” *NIJ Journal* 282, April 6, 2020, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/advancing-mass-shooting-research-inform-practice>.
7. Chunrye Kim, Joel A. Capellan, and Alexa Adler, “Exploring the Empirical Literature on Mass Shooting: A Mixed-Method Systematic Review of Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles,” *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 58 (2021): 101584.
8. Krouse and Richardson, “Mass Murder With Firearms.”
9. James Alan Fox, “The Nature, Trends, Correlates, and Prevention of Mass Public Shootings in America, 1976-2018,” Final report to the National Institute of Justice, award number 2018-75-CX-0025, March 2022, NCJ 304453, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/304453.pdf>, 7.
10. Lopez, Crimmins, and Haskins, “Advancing Mass Shooting Research To Inform Practice.”
11. Jillian Peterson and James Densley, “The Violence Project Database of Mass Shootings in the United States,” St. Paul, MN: The Violence Project, November 2019, <https://www.theviolenceproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/TVP-Mass-Shooter-Database-Report-Final-compressed.pdf>.
12. The Columbine mass shooting serves as an example of a mass shooting involving two individuals perpetrating the offense. However, NIJ-sponsored research finds that mass shootings involving more than one individual perpetrating the offense are relatively rare, accounting for only 2.4% of mass shootings occurring in the United States. See Fox, “The Nature, Trends, Correlates, and Prevention of Mass Public Shootings in America, 1976-2018,” 19.
13. Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Hate Crimes,” accessed September 2022, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/civil-rights/hate-crimes#Definition>. This definition is also accepted by NIJ; see National Institute of Justice, “Overview of Hate Crime,” September 13, 2021, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/overview-hate-crime>.
14. National Institute of Justice funding opportunity, “NIJ FY22 Research and Evaluation on Hate Crimes,” grants.gov announcement number O-NIJ-2022-171191, posted March 8, 2022, <https://nij.ojp.gov/funding/O-NIJ-2022-171191.pdf>.

15. Michael A. Jensen, Elizabeth A. Yates, and Sheehan E. Kane, "A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders," Final report to the National Institute of Justice, award number 2017-VF-GX-0003, February 2021, NCJ 300114, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/300114.pdf>.
16. Lisa M. Jones, Kimberly J. Mitchell, and Heather A. Turner, "U.S. Hate Crime Investigation Rates and Characteristics: Findings From the National Hate Crime Investigations Study (NHCIS)," Final report to the National Institute of Justice, award number 2018-MU-MU-0029, April 2022, NCJ 304531, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/304531.pdf>.
17. Jones, Mitchell, and Turner, "U.S. Hate Crime Investigation Rates and Characteristics."
18. Based on previous literature cited in Jones, Mitchell, and Turner, "U.S. Hate Crime Investigation Rates and Characteristics," 4.
19. Jones, Mitchell, and Turner, "U.S. Hate Crime Investigation Rates and Characteristics."
20. Wesam Charkawi, Kevin Dunn, and Ana-Maria Bliuc, "The Influences of Social Identity and Perceptions of Injustice on Support to Violent Extremism," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 13 no. 3 (2021): 177-196.
21. As a recent example, the May 14, 2022, mass shooting in Buffalo, New York, has been indicted as a hate crime and on domestic terrorism offenses. Jonathan Franklin, "Suspect in the Buffalo Mass Shooting Has Been Indicted on Federal Hate Crime Charges," *NPR*, July 14, 2022.
22. After the June 4, 2022, Highland Park parade shooting in a heavily Jewish neighborhood, there was some speculation about a potential religious motivation for the attack, although the actual motivations were not yet known. Lisa Desjardins and Tommy Walters, "Police Search for a Motive in Highland Park Mass Shooting," *PBS NewsHour*, July 5, 2022.
23. For example, terrorism is excluded in the analysis of public mass shootings in Erin Bagalman et al., "Public Mass Shootings in the United States: Selected Implications for Federal Public Health and Safety Policy," Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013.
24. Rachel A. Kane, Basia E. Lopez, and Paul A. Haskins, NIJ Special Report: Public Mass Shootings Research, December 21, 2023, NCJ 307401, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/307401.pdf>.
25. The original 2016 dataset contained 1,418 individuals. It was subsequently expanded to 2,226 individuals. Jessica Rivinius and Monica Pizzo, "START Releases New Data on Radicalization in the United States," <https://www.start.umd.edu/news/start-releases-new-data-radicalization-united-states>.
26. Michael Jensen and Gary LaFree, "Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR)," Final report to the National Institute of Justice, award number 2012-ZA-BX-0005, December 2016, NCJ 250481, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/250481.pdf>.

27. Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR).”
28. Rivinius and Pizzo, “START Releases New Data.”
29. The single-issue group included individuals motivated by a single issue, which varied widely from anti-abortion to Puerto Rican independence.
30. Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 16.
31. Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR).”
32. Michael A. Jensen, Elizabeth A. Yates, and Sheehan E. Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” Final report to the National Institute of Justice, award number 2017-VF-GX-0003, February 2021, NCJ 300114, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/300114.pdf>.
33. The PIRUS database was created with the support of NIJ award number 2012-ZA-BX-0005, “Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization.” National Institute of Justice, “Hate Crimes: National Database Identifies Traits and Motivations Marking Distinct Pathways of People Who Commit Bias-Based Offenses,” November 30, 2021, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/hate-crimes-national-database-identifies-traits-and-motivations-marking-distinct>.
34. START, “PIRUS — Frequently Asked Questions.”
35. Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders.”
36. Anti-Defamation League, “Anti-Defamation League State Hate Crime Statutory Provisions,” 2022, <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2022-05/Hate%20Crime%20Statutes%20-%20updated%202022.pdf>.
37. Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders.”
38. Of the 3,530 reported investigations, 5% were not eligible for this study because they were not investigated in 2018 or could not show that hate or bias was a motivating factor of the crime. Jones, Mitchell, and Turner, “U.S. Hate Crime Investigation Rates and Characteristics.”
39. Jones, Mitchell, and Turner, “U.S. Hate Crime Investigation Rates and Characteristics.”
40. Jones, Mitchell, and Turner, “U.S. Hate Crime Investigation Rates and Characteristics.”
41. Jones, Mitchell, and Turner, “U.S. Hate Crime Investigation Rates and Characteristics.”
42. Krouse and Richardson, “Mass Murder With Firearms.” In addition, the shooting must be unrelated to some underlying criminal activity such as armed robbery or intergroup competition. Jillian Peterson, “A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the

Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters,” Final report to the National Institute of Justice, award number 2018-75-CX-0023, January 2021, NCJ 302101, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/302101.pdf>.

43. In cases in which multiple individuals perpetrated a single mass shooting, each individual received their own entry, allowing for a single shooting to be included multiple times.
44. For a demographic breakdown, see Patricia I. Jewett et al., “U.S. Mass Public Shootings Since Columbine: Victims per Incident by Race and Ethnicity of the Perpetrator,” *Preventive Medicine* 162 (2022): 107176.
45. Peterson, “A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters,” 12.
46. See also Jillian K. Peterson et al., “Psychosis and Mass Shootings: A Systematic Examination Using Publicly Available Data,” *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 28 no. 2 (2022): 280.
47. See also Jillian Peterson et al., “Communication of Intent To Do Harm Preceding Mass Public Shootings in the United States, 1966 to 2019,” *JAMA Network Open* 4 no. 11 (2021).
48. Peterson, “A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters.”
49. Peterson, “A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters.”
50. Michael Irving Jensen, “Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS), 1948-2014 (ICPSR 36309),” data file, National Archive of Criminal Justice Data, <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36309.v1>; Peterson and Densley, “The Violence Project Database of Mass Shootings in the United States”; Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders”; and Jones, Mitchell, and Turner, “U.S. Hate Crime Investigation Rates and Characteristics.”
51. Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders.”
52. Males accounted for about 97.7% of individuals suspected of or who committed mass shooting offenses (see Peterson, “A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters”). An additional NIJ-sponsored study on mass shootings found similar results, with 97.6% of individuals committing mass shooting offenses found to be male (see Fox, “The Nature, Trends, Correlates, and Prevention of Mass Public Shootings in America, 1976-2018,” 20-22). Further NIJ-sponsored studies found females accounted for 13.76% of hate crime suspects (see Jones, Mitchell, and Turner, “U.S. Hate Crime Investigation Rates and Characteristics,” 18), although that percentage may vary slightly based on bias motivation. The BIAS project found that 4.7% of individuals motivated by sexual orientation/gender identity bias were female, whereas 6.7% of those motivated by race/ethnicity/nationality bias and 8.5% of those motivated by religious bias were female. See Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 14. Across ideologies, 90% of those who engaged in violent extremist behaviors were male, although that

percentage varied based on ideology; those motivated by far-right ideologies were least likely to be male (75.6%). See Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 16. On aggregate across ideological motivations, people involved in violent extremist offenses had a mean age of 34.18 and a median age of 31, whereas those committing hate crimes had a median age that varied based on bias motivation: age 26 overall, age 24 for sexual orientation/gender identity bias, age 26 for race/ethnicity/nationality bias, and age 31 for religion-based bias. See Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 16; and Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 14. Data from NHCIS suggested a more even distribution in the ages of those who committed hate crimes; see Jones, Mitchell, and Turner, “U.S. Hate Crime Investigation Rates and Characteristics,” 18-19. Individuals who committed mass shootings ranged from 11 to 70 years old, with a mean age of 34.1 (see Peterson, “A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters,” 11). However, in the data available, age characteristics varied based on reporting medians versus means and ranges. The age data, therefore, are not necessarily comparable. People showing Islamist and far-left extremist behaviors tended to be younger at the time of the offense, with median ages of 27 and 26, respectively; Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 16. So, too, did those committing hate crimes motivated by biases against sexual orientation or gender (median age 24) and biases against race, ethnicity, or nationality (median age 26); see Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 14. Demographic data varied notably across projects; see Jones, Mitchell, and Turner, “U.S. Hate Crime Investigation Rates and Characteristics.” Horgan et al., in a study also sponsored by NIJ, however, found no significant variation in the ages of people committing mass shootings versus lone actors motivated by ideology, but did find an overwhelming representation of males in both samples. John G. Horgan et al., “Across the Universe? A Comparative Analysis of Violent Behavior and Radicalization Across Three Offender Types With Implications for Criminal Justice Training and Education,” Final report to the National Institute of Justice, award number 2013-ZA-BX-0002, June 2016, NCJ 249937, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/249937.pdf>, 20-21.

53. Fox, “The Nature, Trends, Correlates, and Prevention of Mass Public Shootings in America, 1976-2018,” 20-22.
54. The range in percentages reflects variation in unemployment based on bias motivation, with those motivated by sexual orientation and gender bias showing the highest rates of unemployment and those motivated by religious and race/ethnicity/nationality biases showing the lowest. See Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 15-16.
55. Data on socioeconomic status from the project suggest that people demonstrating violent extremist behavior tend to be from middle-class backgrounds. See Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 17.
56. Another NIJ-sponsored study found that 28% of individuals committing mass shooter offenses were unemployed at the time of the offense. See Horgan et al., “Across the Universe?,” 21.

57. This, as the researchers suggest, may be related to the relatively younger age of individuals engaged in violent extremism after 2000, which they believe may be due to the fact that younger individuals have not been in the workforce for as long a period of time. See Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 42.
58. The lower estimate, 62.3%, is based on data reported in an NIJ-sponsored study conducted by Northeastern University. See Fox, “The Nature, Trends, Correlates, and Prevention of Mass Public Shootings in America, 1976-2018,” 22. The higher estimate, 64.5%, is based on data derived from the Hamline University study. See Peterson, “A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters,” 11.
59. On aggregate, only 45.9% of individuals exhibiting violent extremist behavior were identified as having no prior criminal history, although 54% of data on this characteristic was reported as missing. Analysis from the project team also found a strong association between pre-radicalization criminal activity and post-radicalization acts of violence. See Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 21-24, 41. The ranges for people who committed hate crimes and demonstrated violent extremist behaviors represent differences depending on their motivation. Data on people who committed mass shootings suggest that 64.5% had a prior criminal record and 62.8% had prior histories of violence. See Peterson, “A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters,” 11-12.
60. Data from the BIAS study suggest that people who committed hate crimes had a higher prevalence of prior criminal histories. Those motivated by race, nationality, or ethnicity bias exhibited the highest levels of prior criminal histories (66.9%), followed by those motivated by religious bias (58.2%) and those motivated by sexual orientation or gender identity bias (56.6%). Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 16-17. However, data from NHCIS suggest that only 19.66% of individuals suspected were investigated for a prior criminal offense, and only 16.63% had a record of prior arrest. Jones, Mitchell, and Turner, “U.S. Hate Crime Investigation Rates and Characteristics,” 18-19.
61. Among people exhibiting violent extremist behaviors, on aggregate, 45.9% showed evidence of no criminal history. However, the percentage varied based on ideology, with people who adopted Islamist ideologies showing the highest rates of an absence of a criminal history (59.5%) and those who adopted far-right ideologies showing the lowest (36.9%), although notably, missing data may impact these findings. See Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 21-24.
62. Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR).”
63. Individuals following far-right ideologies were less likely than those following other ideologies to have attended college and more likely to have not finished high school. See Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 17.

64. On aggregate, 19.6% of people demonstrating ideologically motivated behavior had attended at least some college and 43.3% had obtained a college degree or higher. See Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 17. According to the BIAS project, individuals exhibiting hate crime-related behaviors varied in levels of educational attainment, with a larger percentage of those motivated by sexual orientation/gender identity biases (69.3%) and race/ethnicity/nationality biases (72.8%) holding a high school degree or lower at the time of offense, whereas 53.3% of those motivated by religious biases held a high school degree or lower at the time of offense. See Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 15-16. Among individuals who committed mass shootings, an additional NIJ-sponsored study found that 21.4% had no high school degree, 40.2% had a high school degree, and 38.2% had educational attainment beyond high school. For more, see Fox, “The Nature, Trends, Correlates, and Prevention of Mass Public Shootings in America, 1976-2018,” 21-22.
65. Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 25.
66. For mass shooting information, see Peterson, “A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters,” 12. Importantly, as the EADR team notes, when aggregating ideologies, military service histories are relatively uncommon. See Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 21.
67. The military service histories of individuals who had radicalized varied based on ideology; 10.5%-18.0% of those with non-far-right ideologies had previously served in the military or were actively serving in the military, although across ideologies, rates of current military service were notably lower than rates of previous military service. See Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 21-22. Individuals committing bias or hate crimes also varied in terms of military service experience, with those motivated by religious bias showing higher rates (16.3%) and those motivated by sexual orientation/gender identity bias (9.2%) and race/ethnicity/nationality bias (6.8%) displaying lower rates. See Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 14-15.
68. Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 42.
69. This, the authors suggest, could be related to feelings of “unmet expectations.” See Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 43.
70. Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 47.
71. Data from this project indicated that, of people that committed mass shootings, “19.8% had a history of previous hospitalization for psychiatric reasons, 29.1% had a history of counseling, and 23.3% had a known history of taking psychiatric medication.” In addition, “15.7% showed evidence of a mood disorder diagnosis” and “26.7% showed evidence of a psychotic disorder diagnosis,” which, as Peterson notes, is higher than that of the general population. See Peterson, “A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters,” 12.

72. Of people who committed hate crimes targeting religion, 34.4% exhibited suspected or diagnosed histories of mental health issues (a rate noted by the researchers as higher than the national average), while 15.8% of those targeting sexual orientation/gender identity and 15.1% targeting race, nationality, or ethnicity showed histories of mental health issues. See Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 16. Although these statistics alone do not necessarily indicate that prior history of mental illness impacts whether an individual will commit a hate crime, additional analysis from the project does suggest that people who commit hate crimes based on religious bias display higher rates of mental health issues and are more likely to be responsible for mass casualty events depending on motivation (religion and mission) and type of crime (mass casualty). This indicates that demographic and motivational factors, in combination, may impact trajectories toward violence. See Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 23.
73. Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 23.
74. Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 25. Jensen, Yates, and Kane found that 10.6% motivated by race/ethnicity/nationality, 11.7% of individuals motivated by sexual orientation/gender identity, and 14.5% of those motivated by religion who carried out hate crime offenses had experienced previous traumatic events in BIAS. Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 16-17.
75. Peterson, “A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters,” 12.
76. Horgan et al., “Across the Universe?” 22.
77. Horgan et al., “Across the Universe?” 22.
78. With individuals committing hate crime offenses motivated by religion showing the highest rates of marriage at the time of offense (27.3%) and those motivated by sexual orientation/gender identity and race/ethnicity/nationality showing comparatively lower rates (12.8% and 18.6% respectively). Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 14-15. In an additional NIJ-sponsored study on mass shootings, 3 out of every 10 mass shooters were reported to be married at the time of offense. Fox, “The Nature, Trends, Correlates, and Prevention of Mass Public Shootings in America, 1976-2018,” 21.
79. Although rates varied based on ideological motivation and type of group (informal, formal, or legal). Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 18-19.
80. Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 19-20.
81. Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 19-10. For more on the role of social networks, see, for example, Aryaeinejad and Scherer, “The Role of Social Networks in Facilitating and Preventing Domestic Radicalization.”

82. Horgan et al., “Across the Universe?” 23.
83. With those motivated by sexual orientation/gender identity exhibiting the lowest rates of group membership and those motivated by race/ethnicity/nationality exhibiting the highest. Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 16.
84. For further discussion, see Aryaeinejad and Scherer, “The Role of Social Networks in Facilitating and Preventing Domestic Radicalization.”
85. In their dataset, only 2.4% of mass shootings were carried out by multiple people. Fox, “The Nature, Trends, Correlates, and Prevention of Mass Public Shootings in America, 1976-2018,” 19.
86. For example, the NIJ-sponsored Violence Project on people who committed mass shootings suggests that leakage was present in 48% of cases. See Peterson, “A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters,” 13.
87. Peterson, “A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters,” 21-22.
88. Peterson, “A Multi-Level, Multi-Method Investigation of the Psycho-Social Life Histories of Mass Shooters,” 12.
89. Jensen and LaFree, “Final Report: Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR),” 70-73.
90. Jensen, Yates, and Kane, “A Pathway Approach to the Study of Bias Crime Offenders,” 37-45.
91. For example, the NHCIS team emphasized that it is unlikely that the many large law enforcement departments reporting zero hate crimes actually had zero hate crimes in their jurisdictions during that time period. See Jones, Mitchell, and Turner, “U.S. Hate Crime Investigation Rates and Characteristics.”

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