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# Domestic Radicalization and Violent Extremism

An Overview of NIJ's Research Portfolio

**January 2, 2024**

Countering and preventing terrorism is a primary concern for state and local law enforcement agencies as well as the federal government. Terrorists are those who support or commit ideologically motivated violence to further political, social or religious goals. The goal of NIJ's work on domestic radicalization and violent extremism is to provide community leaders with evidence-based practices for bolstering resilience and developing communitywide responses that can prevent radicalization and mitigate threats posed by those individuals mobilized to violent extremism.

Important questions remain about the nature of terrorism, but few are as vexing as why and how individuals become terrorists. This process, often referred to as "radicalization to terrorism" or "radicalization to violent extremism," is the central focus of NIJ's research and evaluation efforts in this area of study.

To improve our understanding of radicalization to violent extremism as it occurs in the United States, NIJ supports research aimed at answering several questions:

- What common threads exist among cases of domestic radicalization to violent extremism?
- Which models of radicalization to violent extremism explain how the process occurs in the United States, and what can these models tell us about preventing and countering violent extremism?

- Why do people adopt radical beliefs, and why do some people choose to engage in violence to further those beliefs while others do not?
- How are U.S. communities responding to radicalization, and what works to prevent radicalization to violent extremism and terrorism?

NIJ has funded research on terrorism since 2002. Since 2012, NIJ has focused its research investments in this area on developing a better understanding of domestic radicalization and advancing evidence-based strategies for effective intervention and prevention of radicalization to violent extremism in the United States.

Following are short overviews of our primary focus in each year of the program and links to a list of awards funding in that year.

## **Fiscal Year 2023**

In the twelfth year of the program (FY23), NIJ continued its focus in understanding and identifying threats of radicalization and violent extremism, as well as examining intervention and prevention strategies. In addition, with the increase of online engagement facilitating radicalization and violent extremism, this year's funding also supported research that explored the role of social media, online forums and other internet platforms on violent extremism and radicalization. Overall, NIJ identified these areas of focus in the solicitation:

- Research to inform terrorism intervention and prevention efforts.
- Research on the role of communications in promoting and countering extremist content and information.
- Research on disengagement, deradicalization and the reintegration into society of individuals incarcerated for terrorism related offenses.
- Evaluations of programs and practices to prevent acts of terrorism.

NIJ selected five projects for funding that each address these areas of focus to inform policy on strategies to counter the increase in radicalization and violent extremism.

[Read abstracts and see award details for the 2023 projects.](#)

## **Fiscal Year 2022**

In the eleventh year of the program (FY22), NIJ shared many of the same objectives as the fiscal year 2021 solicitation of assembling knowledge for the prevention and intervention of

radicalization to violent extremism. Additionally, in order to address a major research need and in direct response to the *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism*, NIJ solicited research on mis-, dis-, and mal- information. In all, NIJ expressed interest in the following areas:

- Research to inform terrorism prevention efforts.
- Research on the disengagement, deradicalization, and reintegration of individuals convicted of terrorism related charges.
- Evaluations of programs and practices to prevent terrorism.
- Research on countering mis-, dis-, or mal-information.

Moreover, in response to NIJ's congressional mandate for FY22, the solicitation emphasized a focus on the radicalization of White nationalists, and evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies were encouraged.

After a competitive review process, NIJ awarded grants for two projects.

[Read abstracts and see award details for the 2022 projects.](#)

## **Fiscal Year 2021** [↗](#)

In the tenth year of the program (FY21), NIJ desired insight into the domestic radicalization process to inform evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies. As highlighted in three focus areas, NIJ sought applicants conducting rigorous studies to

- Improve upon existing research on terrorism prevention,
- Increase knowledge on how to support the reintegration of individuals convicted of terrorism-related charges back into the community effectively, or
- Evaluate programs and practices aimed at preventing terrorism.

An overarching goal of this solicitation was to bridge the gap between research and practice by having applicants partner with agencies to develop novel and translational approaches for efficiently meeting the needs of current and former extremists. Ultimately, NIJ selected eight projects for funding.

[Read abstracts and see award details for the 2021 projects.](#)

## **Fiscal Year 2020** [↗](#)

In the ninth year of the program (FY20), NIJ aimed to support research that specified approaches to prevent terrorism effectively.

An emphasis was placed on the following priority areas:

- Evaluations of terrorism prevention programs and practices.
- Research to inform terrorism prevention efforts.
- Research on the reintegration of individuals convicted of terrorism-related charges back into the community.

Funded projects demonstrated an effort to establish partnerships between researchers and practitioners in developing terrorism prevention strategies and underscored clear benefits and implications for criminal justice agencies.

In total, NIJ chose three projects for funding. These projects examined the risk and protective factors increasing or decreasing an individual's involvement in politically motivated violence, the differences among five far-right groups to create an analytic framework for policies that address far-right extremism, and how a community-based program can engage individuals at risk of radicalizing to violence.

[Read abstracts and see award details for the 2020 projects.](#)

## **Fiscal Year 2019**

In the eighth year of the program (FY19), NIJ emphasized an interest in evaluations of new and existing demonstration programs to prevent terrorism. NIJ encouraged applicants to submit projects which conduct phased, comparative and multi-site programmatic evaluations, help the field better understand risk factors, and develop risk assessment tools. NIJ also encouraged applicants to submit projects to increase knowledge surrounding deradicalization and disengagement, in addition to programming and services provided to those incarcerated for or released from terrorism related offenses.

NIJ's priorities for the FY19 solicitation were to fund studies in three focus areas:

1. Both formative and outcome evaluations of programs and practices to prevent terrorism
2. Research to inform terrorism prevention efforts (same as previous years)
3. Research on the reintegration of individuals to the community (new)

The first area of focus emphasized a phased evaluation approach. If applicants selected for awards under this area are successful in completing a formative and evaluability assessment, additional funding may be provided to those applicants for the subsequent phases of the evaluation (i.e. the process evaluation or the outcome/impact evaluation). Applicants were also allowed to submit proposals for standalone outcome evaluations of existing strong and well-developed programs. Rigor and strong experimental designs were emphasized.

The second area of focus solicited research on prevention and intervention programs, as well as comparative analyses of these types of programs from various communities across the country. This area of focus attempted to develop knowledge and bridge gaps in research about pathways, risk and protective factors, and the assessment of those risk factors. This area also focused on the development of instruments, procedures, and practices to improve the identification of individuals at high-risk of becoming committed to terrorist ideologies and carrying out acts of terrorism. NIJ sought applications that build and improve on existing research in this area, including research that improves on data sources and methods.

The last area of focus emphasized needs-assessments and general knowledge building around the reintegration of persons released on terrorism-related charges. As this research area is highly understudied and still in its infancy, NIJ sought to build knowledge of pre-release and post-confinement characteristics of those convicted of committing acts of terrorism that may inform reintegration policies, programs, and practices.

[Read abstracts and see award details for the 2019 projects that were selected for funding.](#)

## **Fiscal Year 2018**

In the seventh year of the program, we re-emphasized many of the same themes from the fiscal year 2017 solicitation. Special attention was directed towards supporting replication and rigorous scientific evaluation of existing programs, as well as the development and evaluation of programs where none currently exist. We funded studies that apply an approach that engages researchers and practitioners in an active partnership to develop more effective solutions to specific problems, and to produce transportable lessons and strategies that may help other localities with similar problems.

[Read abstracts and see award details for the 2018 projects that were selected for funding.](#)

## **Fiscal Year 2017**

In the sixth year of the program, NIJ sought to support both programmatic evaluations and foundational research to better understand causes and contributing factors to radicalization. Areas of focus highlighted in the solicitation included (but were not limited to):

- Risk factors and risk assessment tools.
- Development of instruments, procedures, and practices.
- Comparative/multi-site programmatic evaluations and analyses.

Our overall with this solicitation was to bridge gaps in knowledge by understanding why and how radicalization occurs, and what research-informed steps can be taken to prevent it, or intervene before it leads to violence.

[Read abstracts and see award details for the 2017 projects that were selected for funding.](#)

## **Fiscal Year 2016** [↗](#)

The fifth year of the program continued the theme of focusing on the application of research. Along with the release of many of the individual studies funded in the first two years of the program, NIJ is launching a series of papers that will synthesize the results of the studies and integrate findings from non-NIJ studies and reports to state plainly what the research tells us about radicalization pathways, behavioral indicators and so forth. Second, NIJ hosted a Program Status Meeting in December of 2016 which brought together NIJ grantees, practitioners, local/state/federal partners and stakeholders to discuss research findings and ideas for future research direction. The fiscal year 2016 solicitation called for papers that intended to support replication and evaluation of existing programs as well as the development and evaluation of programs where none currently exist. NIJ sought applications that applied an “action research” approach that engages researchers and practitioners in an active partnership to develop more effective solutions to specific problems and to produce transportable lessons and strategies that may help other localities with similar problems. The fiscal 2016 solicitation resulted in the funding of three new studies. [Read abstracts and see award details for the 2016 projects.](#)

## **Fiscal year 2015** [↗](#)

Year 4 of the program shifted away from the construction of the evidence base to focus more on prevention and intervention. Two major activities demarcated this shift. The first was a major, three-day conference called “Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Lessons from Canada, the UK and the US,” which brought together the most influential research teams from

the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada. It gathered the best researchers from five robust and comprehensive programs targeting terrorism and delivered practical, timely and plain spoken results to the practitioners who can use them.

The second major activity was the launch of an effort to work with stakeholders in the field to determine the requirements for identifying individuals who would benefit from early intervention to dissuade radicalization or for determining whether an individual is eligible for diversion and rehabilitation programs. To accomplish this, NIJ supported a Department of Homeland Security Directorate of Science and Technology (DHS S&T) contract action that will scan and assess existing tools and programs against the requirements of stakeholders.

Lastly, NIJ launched a fourth call for proposals addressing radicalization to terrorism. The objectives of this call for proposals were to address radicalization to Indigenous forms of terrorism, to explore contemporary forms of radicalization, and to evaluate community-based prevention and intervention programs. Four projects were selected for funding. [Read abstracts and see award details for the 2015 projects.](#)

## **Fiscal year 2014** [↗](#)

Year 3 of the program has focused on the dissemination of early results. NIJ hosted practitioners, including representatives from U.S. Attorneys' Offices, other federal agencies, state and local law enforcement agencies, and international partners, at a program update meeting in June 2014. The meeting provided a chance for the first-year grantees to present their initial findings and for the second-year grantees to introduce their new projects.

After a competitive review process, NIJ awarded grants for six research projects in 2014. [Read abstracts and see award details for the 2014 projects.](#)

## **Fiscal Year 2013** [↗](#)

In the second year of the program, NIJ undertook a coordinated effort to bring together stakeholders and demonstrate the importance of the research. The effort culminated in a meeting of grantees and key stakeholders from federal, state and local criminal justice agencies.

The research and evaluation goals were expanded to include six research grants targeting new questions that were brought to the table. NIJ identified the following areas of interest for year 2 proposals:

- Comparative analysis of individual terrorists, individuals who perpetrate mass casualty events, gang members, hate group members and/or organized criminals
- Online radicalization to terrorism
- Evaluations of promising practices
- The relationship between and convergence of organized crime and either terrorist groups or transnational gangs

After a competitive review process, NIJ awarded six grants.

Five of the six were awarded under the "Research and Evaluation on Radicalization to Violent Extremism in the United States" solicitation. [Read abstracts and see award details for those five projects.](#)

One grant was awarded under the "Research and Evaluation on Transnational Issues Trafficking in Persons, Transnational Organized Crime and Violent Extremism" solicitation. [Read an abstract and see award details for that award.](#)

## **Fiscal Year 2012 (Initial Year of the Program)**

In the first year of the program, NIJ focused its call for research proposals on four areas of interest:

- Empirical evaluation of social science theories of domestic radicalization.
- Examination of the radicalization process for individuals, including "lone wolf" terrorists.
- Comparative analysis of terrorists, organized criminals, gangs, hate groups and/or cults.
- Influence of community-level and policing strategies on domestic radicalization.

After a competitive review process, NIJ awarded six grants and one evaluation contract. [Read abstracts and see award details for the 2012 projects.](#)

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