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NATIONAL THREAT ASSESSMENT CENTER

MASS ATTACKS IN PUBLIC SPACES - 2018

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

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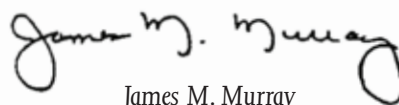
MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

In response to the acts of targeted violence occurring in this Nation, the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) has published this research report titled, **Mass Attacks in Public Spaces – 2018**. The study was conducted for the specific purpose of identifying key information that will enhance efforts to prevent these types of attacks. The report is NTAC's second analysis of mass attacks carried out in public spaces, building upon the findings identified in its 2017 report.

These acts have impacted the safety and security of the places where we work, learn, dine, and conduct our daily activities. Each new tragedy, including the attack on a bank in Sebring, FL; a synagogue in Poway, CA; a university in Charlotte, NC; and the municipal center in Virginia Beach, VA; serves as a reminder that we must continue to research and provide robust training and awareness to help prevent these tragic outcomes.

NTAC's research and publications directly support our agency's protective mission, as well as the missions of those responsible for keeping our communities safe. Through this report, NTAC aims to assist law enforcement, schools, public agencies, private organizations, and others in understanding the motives, behavioral indicators, and situational factors of those who carry out mass attacks.

Empowering public safety professionals to combat this ever-evolving threat is a priority for our agency. I commend our community partners for their continued efforts, commitment, and determination to prevent targeted violence within the Homeland.



James M. Murray
Director

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



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INTRODUCTION

On May 31, 2019, 12 innocent people were killed at the Virginia Beach Municipal Center in Virginia Beach, VA by an attacker who had reportedly resigned from his position at the municipal center earlier that day. While little else is yet known publicly about the attacker or his motive, this act of mass violence is the most recent example of targeted violence affecting a public space in the United States. Mitigating the risk of mass casualties from such an event requires the efforts of everyone with a role in public safety, a responsibility that is not limited to law enforcement. Other community stakeholders may also be in a position to intervene, including workplace managers, school administrators, local officials, and the mental health community, each of whom has a unique role to play in keeping communities safe.

To support these prevention efforts, the Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) is tasked with delivering research, training, consultation, and information sharing on threat assessment and the prevention of targeted violence, including targeted attacks directed at workplaces, houses of worship, schools, and other public spaces. The research and information produced by NTAC guides not only the Secret Service's approach to preventing assassinations, called *threat assessment*, but also informs the communitywide approach needed to prevent incidents of targeted violence.¹

This report is NTAC's second analysis of mass attacks that were carried out in public spaces, and it builds upon *Mass Attacks in Public Spaces – 2017* (MAPS-2017). In MAPS-2017, NTAC found that attackers from that year were most frequently motivated by grievances related to their workplace or a domestic issue. All of the attackers had recently experienced at least one significant stressor, and most had experienced financial instability. Over three-quarters of the attackers had made threatening or concerning communications, and a similar number had elicited concern from others. Further, most had histories of criminal charges, mental health symptoms, and/or illicit substance use or abuse.

With this latest report, *Mass Attacks in Public Spaces – 2018* (MAPS-2018), the Secret Service offers further analysis and operational considerations to our partners in public safety.² Between January and December 2018, 27 incidents of mass attacks – in which three or more persons were harmed – were carried out in public spaces within the United States.³ In total, 91 people were killed and 107 more were injured in locations where people should feel safe, including workplaces, schools, and other public areas.⁴ The loss of life and traumatic nature of these attacks had a devastating impact on the victims and their families, local communities, and the entire nation.

What is Threat Assessment?

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



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Regardless of whether these attacks were acts of workplace violence, domestic violence, school-based violence, or inspired by an ideology, similar themes were observed in the behaviors and circumstances of the perpetrators,⁵ including:

- Most of the attackers utilized **firearms**, and half **departed the site on their own** or **committed suicide**.
- Half were motivated by a **grievance** related to a domestic situation, workplace, or other personal issue.
- Two-thirds had histories of **mental health symptoms**, including **depressive, suicidal, and psychotic symptoms**.
- Nearly all had at least one **significant stressor** within the last five years, and over half had indications of **financial instability** in that timeframe.
- Nearly all made **threatening or concerning communications** and more than three-quarters **elicited concern** from others prior to carrying out their attacks.

The violence described in this report is not the result of a single cause or motive. The findings emphasize, however, that we can identify warning signs prior to an act of violence. While not every act of violence will be prevented, this report indicates that targeted violence may be **preventable**, if appropriate systems are in place to identify concerning behaviors, gather information to assess the risk of violence, and utilize community resources to mitigate the risk.





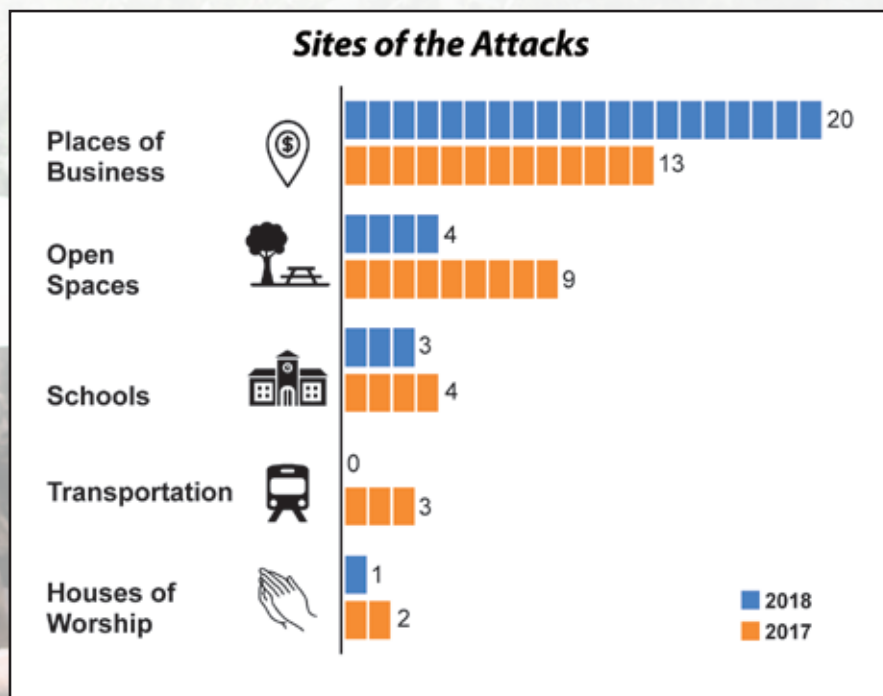
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THE INCIDENTS

THE WEAPONS: Though most of the attacks were carried out using a firearm ($n = 24$, 89%), three attackers used vehicles to cause harm (11%).⁶ Of the 24 who used firearms, at least 10 possessed their weapon illegally at the time of the incident. Two of those ten were minors. The remaining eight had felony convictions, were the subjects of protective orders, or had some other factor present that would have prohibited them from purchasing or possessing a firearm based on federal or state laws.⁷

THE PUBLIC SITES: The 27 incidents were carried out in 18 states, at 28 different sites, with most ($n = 20$, 70%) occurring at places of business (see Figure 1). Those that took place in open spaces ($n = 4$) represented 14% and included such locations as a public sidewalk, street, and parking lot. Three attacks (11%) were carried out at high schools. One attack (4%) took place in a house of worship.

Figure 1.



Places of Business Affected

Bars / Restaurants
Office Buildings
Warehouses
Treatment Facility
Health Center

Bank
Municipal Center
Yoga Studio
Hospital



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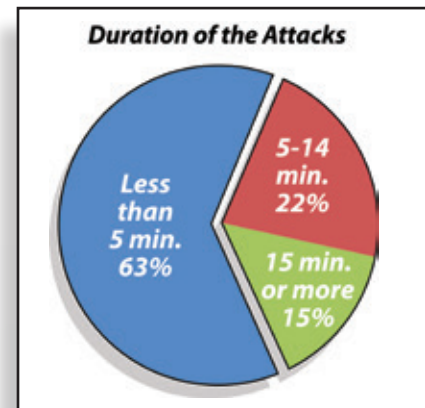
THE TIMING: The attacks took place in every month except December and occurred on every day of the week (see Figure 2). Over half ($n = 16$, 59%) took place between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. More than half ($n = 17$, 63%) of the attacks ended within 5 minutes from when the incident was initiated (see Figure 3).

END OF THE ATTACKS: The most common ways the attacks ended were either by the attacker committing suicide at the scene ($n = 7$, 26%) or departing on their own ($n = 7$, 26%). Three of those who departed the scene on their own committed suicide soon after. Law enforcement intervention at the site brought six attacks to an end (22%). In four of these incidents, the attacker was killed. Other attacks ended when the weapon used became inoperable ($n = 4$, 15%) or due to bystander intervention ($n = 2$, 7%).

Figure 2.

Day of the Week					
Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	
3	2	7	6	4	
		Sat	Sun		
		1	4		

Figure 3.



Attacks Perpetrated By Current Employees

On September 12, 2018, an employee shot and killed his ex-wife and two co-workers near his workplace. Though divorced that April, the ex-wife had recently filed for additional support. The attacker fled the scene and later committed suicide when confronted by police.

On September 19, 2018, an employee opened fire inside his employer's offices, injuring four before being fatally shot by police. The attacker's targets appeared to be random, and his motive is unknown.

On September 20, 2018, a temporary employee opened fire at a distribution center, killing three people and injuring three others before committing suicide. The attacker's motive may have been related to a grievance with co-workers.

On November 12, 2018, an employee shot and injured three individuals at a food distribution warehouse. After fleeing the scene, the attacker called police and reported that his actions were motivated by mental illness. He later committed suicide.



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THE ATTACKERS

GENDER AND AGE: While most of the attackers were male ($n = 25$, 93%), there was one female and one individual in the process of gender reassignment. Their ages ranged from 15 to 64, and the average age was 37 (see Figure 4).

YOUNGEST: *On January 23, 2018, a 15-year-old sophomore began shooting students randomly in a common area at his high school, killing two and injuring ten. When the attacker ran out of bullets, he abandoned his gun and joined other students who had been hiding. After the students were moved to another room, police identified the attacker and arrested him. The student had planned the attack for about a week, and he did not target any particular students, describing his attack as “an experiment.”*

OLDEST: *On March 7, 2018, a 64-year-old male walked into a local cafe and asked to see the owner, with whom he had a disagreement weeks prior. When the owner appeared, the attacker shot him several times with a rifle, killing him. He then proceeded to shoot cafe patrons, injuring two and killing one. After the attacker ran out of bullets, he fled to his nearby home and barricaded himself inside. He eventually surrendered to police.*

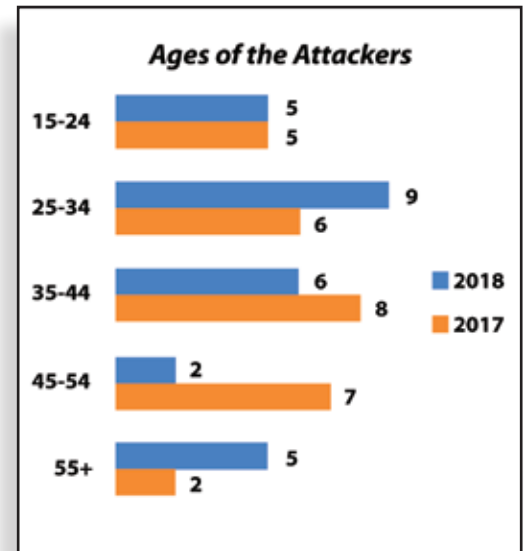
SUBSTANCE USE: Nearly one quarter of the attackers ($n = 6$, 22%) were found to have a history of illicit drug use and/or substance abuse.

CRIMINAL CHARGES AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: Approximately half of the attackers ($n = 13$, 48%) had histories of criminal charges beyond minor traffic violations. Those charges included both non-violent ($n = 10$, 37%) and violent ($n = 6$, 22%) offenses.

Looking specifically at the issue of domestic violence, eight attackers (30%) were found to have had such histories, with only some of those instances resulting in criminal charges or arrests.⁸

On September 19, 2018, a man shot and injured his wife, two bystanders, and a police officer in a municipal building. At the time of the attack, he was subject to a protective order resulting from incidents in which he assaulted and threatened to kill his wife because she wanted a divorce. About a month prior to his attack, he was arrested after he threatened to kill his wife and choked her with a belt. A judge agreed to issue a protective order; however, he denied the wife’s request that her husband be ordered to relinquish his firearms.

Figure 4.





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MENTAL HEALTH: Two-thirds of the attackers ($n = 18$, 67%) experienced mental health symptoms prior to their attacks. The most common symptoms observed were related to depression and psychotic symptoms, such as paranoia, hallucinations, or delusions. Suicidal thoughts were also observed (see Table 1). Nearly half of the attackers ($n = 12$, 44%) had been diagnosed with, or treated for, a mental illness prior to their attacks.

On May 24, 2018, a man opened fire on the patrons of a restaurant, injuring one adult and two children. His motive for the attack is not known, but he was demonstrating symptoms of a mental illness, including suicidal thoughts and paranoid delusions about being taunted by demons and watched by a drone. In videos posted online shortly before the attack, the man said that everyone was against him and he felt tortured and alone. He said, "My life is in danger...Satan is after me."

Table 1.

Mental Health Symptoms	2017	2018
	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>
Depression	4	10
Psychotic Symptoms	9	10
Paranoia	6	9
Delusions	2	5
Hallucinations	6	1
Suicidal Thoughts	6	8



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MOTIVES, BELIEFS, & TARGETING

MOTIVES: The violence in this study resulted from a range of motives, with some attackers having multiple motives. In half of the incidents ($n = 14$, 52%), grievances appeared to be the main motivating factor. In these cases, the attackers were retaliating for perceived wrongs related to their domestic situations ($n = 6$, 22%), workplaces ($n = 3$, 11%), or other personal issues ($n = 6$, 22%), for example, losing a video game competition or having an argument with an owner of a retail establishment (see Table 2).⁹

Beyond grievances, some motives were related to the attackers' mental health symptoms ($n = 5$, 19%), while others were connected to ideological beliefs ($n = 2$, 7%). Of the two perpetrators motivated by an ideology, one was motivated by anti-abortion beliefs while the other was motivated by anti-Semitic beliefs. Additionally, one attacker appeared to have been motivated by the desire for fame or notoriety. For the remaining incidents ($n = 6$, 22%), a motive was not identifiable given information that was publicly available.

BELIEFS: While only two of the attacks were primarily motivated by an ideology, nearly one-third of the attackers ($n = 8$, 30%) appeared to have subscribed to a belief system that has previously been associated with violence. Often the attackers' beliefs were multifaceted and touched on a range of issues, including white supremacy, anti-Semitism, conspiracy theories, sovereign citizens, animal rights, and the "incel" movement. Incels, or involuntarily celibates, are members of an Internet-based subculture of heterosexual males who view themselves as undesirable to females and therefore unable to establish romantic or sexual relationships to which they feel entitled.

Table 2.

Components to Motive	2017	2018
Grievances	46%	52%
Domestic	18%	22%
Personal	7%	22%
Workplace	21%	11%
Mental Health/Psychosis	14%	19%
Ideological	21%	7%
Fame	4%	4%
Political	4%	0%
Unknown	14%	22%
*Percentages exceed 100 as some attackers had more than one motive.		





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FIXATIONS: Two-fifths of the attackers ($n = 11$, 41%) exhibited a fixation, defined as an intense or obsessive preoccupation with a person, activity, or belief to the point that it negatively impacted aspects of their lives. The focuses of these fixations included an ex-girlfriend, wife, or other females in the subjects' lives; perceived injustices; delusions; sociopolitical ideologies; and video games. The behaviors that demonstrated these fixations included, but were not limited to, posting written material or videos online, stalking or harassing others, and filing lawsuits or complaints to police.

On June 28, 2018, a man shot and killed five employees in a newspaper office. Six years prior, he had sued the newspaper and some of its employees for alleged defamation. He became fixated on the case, stating in 2013 that it had "become [his] life." He created social media profiles to impersonate people involved in the court proceedings. After the lawsuit was dismissed, he continued to file related court documents.

TARGETING: In 11 cases (41%), the attacker appeared to have pre-selected targets in mind. Seven of those attacks resulted in harm to both the targeted person and random bystanders, and in three cases the harm was restricted to just those specifically targeted. In the remaining case, when the attacker could not find his intended targets at their workplaces, he randomly fired at other people associated with the office. In nearly two-thirds of the attacks ($n = 16$, 59%) harm was directed at persons indiscriminately.

On October 27, 2018, a man opened fire indiscriminately inside a synagogue. Eleven people were killed and six more were wounded before he was shot and apprehended by police. The attacker had previously accused a Jewish-founded refugee advocacy group of helping to transport refugees, whom he referred to as "invaders," from Central America into the United States. When he later attacked the synagogue, he reportedly targeted a specific Jewish congregation in the building that had previously partnered with that refugee aid group.

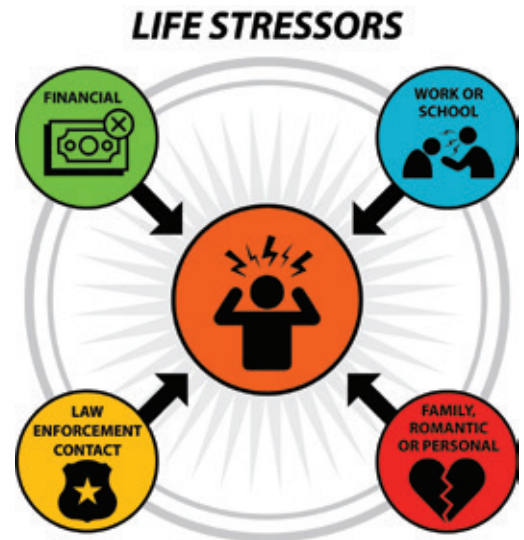


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KEY INVESTIGATIVE THEMES

SIGNIFICANT STRESSORS WITHIN FIVE YEARS: Most ($n = 23$, 85%) attackers had at least one significant stressor occur in their lives in the five years preceding the attack. For three-quarters of the attackers ($n = 20$, 74%), the stressors they experienced occurred within one year of the attack. Beyond the criminal charges described earlier, the stressors most often faced by the attackers were related to:

- **Family/romantic relationships**, such as the death of a loved one, divorce, a broken engagement, or physical or emotional abuse.
- **Work or school**, such as being denied a promotion, losing a job, or being forced to withdraw from school.
- **Contact with law enforcement that did not result in arrests or charges**, including law enforcement responding to reports of inappropriately touching women, domestic violence, or engaging in other violent acts towards others.
- **Personal issues**, such as homelessness or losing a competition.



Over half of the attackers ($n = 15$, 56%) experienced stressors related to **financial instability** in the five-year period prior to their attacks. These financial stressors were evidenced through the inability to sustain employment, losing civil judgements in court, filing for bankruptcy, loss of income, or having to rely on others for income.

On April 3, 2018, a female opened fire at the headquarters of a video sharing website, injuring three people. The attacker had supported herself financially using the ad revenue generated by videos that she posted to the company's website, some of which had received hundreds of thousands of views. Prior to the attack, the woman had expressed her anger at the company over recent policy changes that resulted in a loss of income. Following the attack, her father reported that she had been angry for weeks and complaining that the company had ruined her life.

THREATS AND OTHER CONCERNING COMMUNICATIONS: Nearly all of the attackers ($n = 25$, 93%) engaged in prior threatening or concerning communications. One-third had threatened someone ($n = 10$, 37%), including threats against the target in six cases (22%). Most of those who made threats against the target had a direct relationship with them, as a co-worker, domestic partner, classmate, member of the same treatment facility, or peer in a competition. Though the presence of prior threats to the target is unusual for some forms of targeted violence (e.g., assassination), threats are often seen in cases motivated by domestic or workplace issues, which together represent one-third of these mass attacks ($n = 9$, 33%).

All but four attackers ($n = 23$, 85%) made some type of communication that did not constitute a direct threat, but should have elicited concern. Some of these concerning communications included expressing interest in previous attackers, racist and misogynistic comments, referencing a desire to purchase a gun, and comments that suggest an aspiration to commit future violence.

On February 14, 2018, a former student opened fire at his prior high school, killing 14 students and 3 staff, and wounding an additional 17. The attacker had a long history of behavioral problems and concerning communications. While enrolled at the targeted high school, he was known by classmates to make racist and anti-Semitic comments and to speak openly about



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his guns. A year prior to the attack, someone who knew the attacker contacted local law enforcement to report that the attacker had posted on Instagram a photo of himself holding a gun and a statement similar to, "I am going to get this gun when I turn 18 and shoot up the school." Another concerned individual notified law enforcement of the attacker's concerning social media posts about a month before the shooting.

HISTORY OF ELICITING CONCERN: Most of the attackers ($n = 21$, 78%) in this report exhibited behaviors that caused concern in others. Those who were concerned had various degrees of association with the attackers, from those who were close to them, to strangers in the community who may have never met the attacker before.

The Behaviors that Elicited Concern

- Social media posts with alarming content
- Escalating anger or aggressive behavior
- Changes in behavior and appearance
- Expressions of suicidal ideations
- Writing about violence or weapons
- Cutting off communications
- Inappropriate behavior toward females
- Stalking and harassing behaviors
- Increased depression
- Increased drug use
- Erratic behavior
- Purchasing weapons
- Threats of domestic violence
- Acting paranoid

The responses from others to these behaviors varied from more passive activities like avoiding the attacker, to more active efforts like transporting the person for a mental health evaluation. The ways in which people responded to their concerns included:

- Mothers and fathers seeking therapy for the attacker, calling police, confiscating weapons, or searching for the person when they could not be reached.
- Family and friends making efforts to spend more time with the attacker.
- Online community members calling police.
- Fellow students telling school staff about their concerns.
- Law enforcement getting the attacker to undergo a mental health evaluation, revoking firearms licenses, or asking family to consensually restrict access to weapons.
- Employers firing them or calling their family members to express concern.
- Co-workers checking on them or suggesting counseling.
- Members of the community asking them to leave business establishments or treatment programs, sometimes resorting to calling law enforcement.

Who Was Concerned

- Mothers & Fathers
- Romantic Partners
- Siblings & Children
-
- Friends & Neighbors
-
- School Staff & Classmates
-
- Supervisors & Coworkers
-
- Mental Health Professionals
-
- Law Enforcement
- Judges & Attorneys
- Community Services
-
- Community Members
- Religious Leaders
-
- Online Community



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For the majority of the attackers ($n = 19$, 70%), the concern others felt was so severe that they feared specifically for the safety of the individual, themselves, or others. Some of those concerned for their own safety acted on that fear by filing for divorce, ceasing communications, filing for restraining or protection orders, asking loved ones to stay with them out of fear, changing their daily routines, moving, or warning their own family and friends about their concerns. In one case, a person shared photos of the attacker so that others could remain alert and call the police if needed.

On November 2, 2018, a man opened fire inside a yoga studio, killing two and injuring five. From adolescence, others had expressed concerns about his behavior around women and girls. According to police investigative records and other sources, his conduct had resulted in the man being discharged from the Army, fired from two teaching jobs, reported to law enforcement, arrested and investigated by police on multiple occasions, banned from a university campus, asked to leave a child's party, and avoided by acquaintances and former friends.





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MASS ATTACKS IN PUBLIC SPACES 2017 & 2018

Many of the key findings in both the 2017 and 2018 reports reflect similarities among the incidents and the attackers. For example, attacks occurred across the country and attackers predominantly used firearms. The majority of attackers elicited concern in others and two-thirds had histories of mental health symptoms or treatment. A majority of the attackers had recently experienced significant stressors, with just over half of the attackers experiencing financial instability in that same timeframe.

Table 3.

General Backgrounds	2017	2018
Gender - Male	100%	93%
Age: Range	15-66	15-64
<i>Average</i>	37	37
Illicit drug use or substance abuse	54%	22%
History of criminal charge(s)	71%	48%
<i>Non-violent</i>	57%	37%
<i>Violent</i>	54%	22%
History of domestic violence	32%	30%
Overall history of violence	64%	44%
Mental health symptoms	64%	67%
<i>Known treatment or diagnosis</i>	25%	44%
Investigative Themes	2017	2018
Beliefs	25%	30%
Fixation	39%	41%
Stressors	100%	85%
<i>Financial instability</i>	57%	56%
Threatening or concerning communications	86%	93%
<i>History of making threats</i>	50%	37%
<i>Threats specific to the target</i>	36%	22%
<i>Concerning communications</i>	82%	85%
Elicited concern	79%	78%
<i>Concern about safety</i>	46%	70%



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CONSIDERATIONS

Like the year before, 2018 saw incidents of mass violence impact the places where we work, learn, worship, or otherwise conduct our daily activities. Consistent with previous research from the Secret Service, these attacks were found to be motivated by a variety of goals, grievances, and ideologies. The attackers varied widely on demographic factors, and while there is no single profile that can be used to predict who will engage in targeted violence, focusing on a range of concerning behaviors while assessing threats can help promote early intervention with those rare individuals that pose such a risk.

- **Mental health and mental wellness** – Mental illness, alone, is not a risk factor for violence, and most violence is committed by individuals who are not mentally ill. Two-thirds of the attackers in this study, however, had previously displayed symptoms indicative of mental health issues, including depression, paranoia, and delusions. Other attackers displayed behaviors that do not indicate the presence of a mental illness, but do show that the person was experiencing some sort of distress or an emotional struggle. These behaviors included displays of persistent anger, an inability to cope with stressful events, or increased isolation. A multidisciplinary approach that promotes emotional and mental wellness is an important component of any community violence prevention model. For example, a robust employee assistance program (EAP) can help to promote mental wellness in the workplace, whether that involves facilitating mental health treatment or assisting with other personal problems, like substance abuse, financial struggles, or problems in a personal relationship.
- **The importance of reporting** – Since three-quarters of the attackers had concerned the people around them, with most of them specifically eliciting concerns for safety, the public is encouraged to share concerns they may have regarding coworkers, classmates, family members, or neighbors. Such reports could be made to workplace managers, school administrators, or law enforcement, as appropriate. While over-reporting is not the goal, a reasonable awareness of the warning signs that can precede an act of violence may prompt community members to share their concerns with someone who can help. Systems can be developed to promote and facilitate such reporting, and people should be encouraged to trust their instincts, especially if they have concerns for someone's safety. For example, several states have recently developed statewide reporting infrastructures that allow students and others to utilize a smartphone app to submit anonymous tips to a call center staffed by law enforcement. This type of program can facilitate not only a law enforcement response to reported threats, but also a community-level response to reports of bullying, suicidal ideation, self-harm, or depression.
- **"...Do Something"** – Since 2010, the Department of Homeland Security has effectively promoted the "If You See Something, Say Something" national campaign, originally developed by New York City's Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which encourages the reporting of suspicious activity. In many of these cases from 2018, members of the general public successfully performed their role in the "See Something, Say Something" process, by reporting their concerns to someone with a role in public safety. At that point, the responsibility is on the public safety professionals to "Do Something," namely assessing the situation and managing as needed. By adopting a multidisciplinary threat assessment approach, that standardizes the process for identifying, assessing, and managing individuals who may pose a risk of violence, law enforcement and others are taking steps to ensure that those individuals who have elicited concern do not "fall through the cracks."



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- **Law enforcement partnerships** – While law enforcement has a key role to play in the prevention of community violence, intervening with individuals who may pose a risk is not the responsibility of law enforcement alone. Particularly in those instances where a concerning individual has not broken a law, the relationships between law enforcement and other community resources become paramount. Law enforcement personnel are encouraged to continue developing close partnerships with the mental health community, local schools and school districts, houses of worship, social services, and other private and public community organizations. The mission of law enforcement in the United States is public service oriented, and that mission will be most effectively executed through multidisciplinary and collaborative community efforts.

Targeted violence has a profound and devastating impact on those directly involved and a far reaching emotional impact to those beyond. Because these acts are usually planned over a period of time, and the attackers often elicit concern from the people around them, there exists an opportunity to stop these incidents before they occur. **Threat assessment** is one of the most effective practices for prevention. Many of the resources to support this process are already in place at the community level, but require leadership, collaboration, and information sharing to facilitate their effectiveness at preventing violence.

The Importance of Threat Assessment

“Threat assessment” refers to a proactive approach to violence prevention. It is an investigative model originally developed by the U.S. Secret Service to prevent assassinations, but has since been adapted to prevent all forms of targeted violence, regardless of motivation. This includes K-12 school shootings and acts of workplace violence. When implemented effectively, a threat assessment generally involves three key components:

Identify → Assess → Manage

Research indicates that the majority of perpetrators of targeted violence elicit concern in others prior to the attack. We rely on those people who observe such concerns to **identify** the individual to law enforcement or to someone else with a public safety responsibility. In educational settings or workplaces, concerns may be reported to a multidisciplinary threat assessment team that works in conjunction with law enforcement when needed. The responsible public safety entity is then tasked to **assess** the situation to determine how they can **manage** any risk of violence posed by the individual. With a focus on early intervention, this systematic approach is an important component of any safety plan. It allows communities to respond appropriately to a broad range of situations, from those individuals who are displaying a low-level concerning behavior to those who may pose an immediate and imminent risk of violence.



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THE INCIDENTS

- 1) On January 23, a student fatally shot two and injured ten at a high school in Benton, KY.
- 2) On January 28, a gunman fatally shot four in a parking lot in Melcroft, PA.
- 3) On February 14, a former student fatally shot 17 and injured another 17 at a high school in Parkland, FL.
- 4) On February 14, a man drove a truck into a clinic, injuring three in East Orange, NJ.
- 5) On March 7, a gunman fatally shot two and injured two inside a restaurant in Hurtsboro, AL.
- 6) On March 9, a gunman fatally shot three at a treatment facility in Yountville, CA.
- 7) On April 3, a woman shot and injured three at the headquarters of a video sharing website in San Bruno, CA.
- 8) On April 22, a gunman fatally shot four and injured four others in a restaurant in Antioch, TN.
- 9) On May 18, a student fatally shot 10 and injured 13 at a high school in Santa Fe, TX.
- 10) On May 20, a man drove a vehicle into a restaurant, killing two and injuring three in Bessemer City, NC.
- 11) On May 24, a gunman injured three in a restaurant in Oklahoma City, OK.
- 12) On May 25, a man drove a vehicle onto a sidewalk, injuring three in Portland, OR.
- 13) On June 1, a gunman killed two at a law firm, followed by one at a psychologist's office, in Scottsdale, AZ.
- 14) On June 28, a gunman killed five in a newsroom in Annapolis, MD.
- 15) On July 5, a gunman injured six in the street near the oceanfront in Virginia Beach, VA.
- 16) On August 26, a gunman fatally shot two and injured nine at a video game competition in Jacksonville, FL.
- 17) On September 6, a gunman fatally shot three and injured two at a bank in Cincinnati, OH.
- 18) On September 12, a gunman fatally shot three in front of a trucking company in Bakersfield, CA.
- 19) On September 19, a gunman injured four at a municipal center in Masontown, PA.
- 20) On September 19, a gunman injured four in an office building in Middleton, WI.
- 21) On September 20, a gunman fatally shot three and injured three at a warehouse in Aberdeen, MD.
- 22) On October 27, a gunman fatally shot 11 in a synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA.
- 23) On November 2, a gunman fatally shot two and injured five in a yoga studio in Tallahassee, FL.
- 24) On November 5, a gunman fatally shot one and injured two at a drug treatment center in San Rafael, CA.
- 25) On November 7, a gunman fatally shot 11 and injured at least two at a bar in Thousand Oaks, CA.
- 26) On November 12, a gunman injured three at a food distribution warehouse in Albuquerque, NM.
- 27) On November 19, a gunman fatally shot three at a hospital in Chicago, IL.

¹ Additional threat assessment resources and publications from the National Threat Assessment Center are available on the U.S. Secret Service website, located at <https://www.secretservice.gov/protection/ntac/>.

² The limitations of open source information should be considered when reviewing the findings contained in this report. Since information for a few of the offenders was limited, it is likely that a larger number than reported here may have displayed the behaviors, symptoms, and other background elements described here.

³ The incidents included in this report were identified and researched through open source reporting (e.g., media sources and released law enforcement records); therefore, it is possible that more incidents took place than were discovered at the time of this writing. Though there is much debate as to what defines a *mass attack*, for the purpose of this report we included acts of intentional violence in public spaces (e.g., parks, community events, retail establishments) or semi-public places (e.g., workplaces, schools, religious establishments) during which significant harm was caused to three or more persons. We excluded violence related to criminal acts (e.g., gang or drug activity), failed attempts at a mass attack, and spontaneous violence.

⁴ In two incidents, the attackers harmed additional persons that were not included in the total number killed and injured, based on the criteria for this report. In one case, the attacker killed two individuals at a private residence following his attack in a public space. In another case, the attacker had killed one person the day prior to the mass attack. Further, the total of those harmed only included individuals that were harmed as a direct result of the subject's actions. Injuries sustained while fleeing the scene, for example, were not included.

⁵ This report was prepared for educational and research purposes. The background and behaviors reported herein are of those individuals who: 1) were arrested for the act; 2) died at the scene; or 3) died immediately following the attack. Actions attributed to individuals who have been arrested, indicted, or charged in these incidents are merely allegations, and all are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

⁶ In one attack, the attacker used a combination of a firearm and smoke/flash-bang grenades. In another attack, the subject brought explosives to the school, but they were not used in the attack and were determined to be inoperable.

⁷ Though illegal drug use within the previous year is one of the disqualifying factors for possessing a firearm under federal law, it was not considered in this review as information was not available to confirm active use within one year of the incident.

⁸ For the purpose of this report, *domestic violence* was defined as physical force or the threat of imminent bodily harm inflicted on a romantic partner, parent/guardian, or child (of the assailant or romantic partner). If an attacker was classified as having a history of domestic violence against a parent or child, the perpetrator and the victim must have resided at the same location.

⁹ One subject had both domestic and personal grievances as part of his motive for the attack.



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