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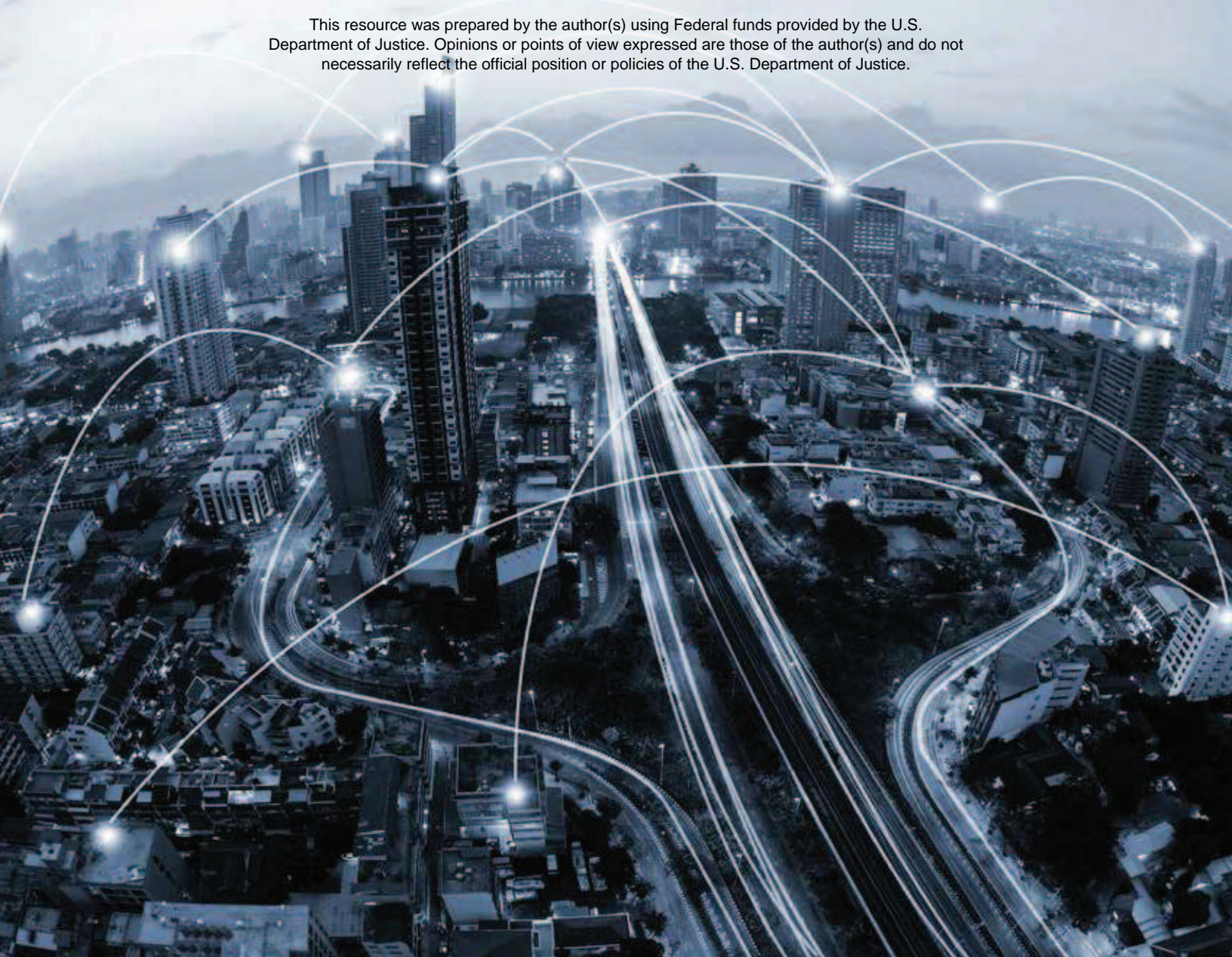
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ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM

A Review of the Obama Administration's CVE Initiative

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AUGUST 2019

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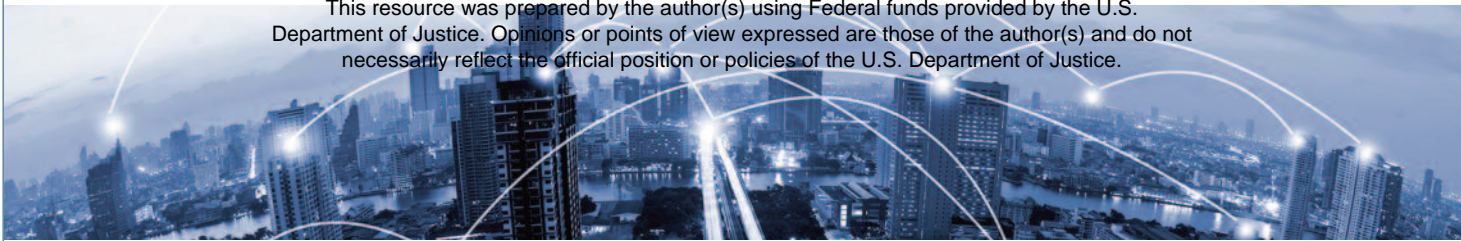


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	1
PART ONE	
The Obama Administration’s “Countering Violent Extremism” Initiative	
CVE Strategy and Program Structure	4
Agency Implementation Efforts	10
Department of Justice	10
Department of Homeland Security	18
National Counter Terrorism Center	22
Federal Bureau of Investigation	22
PART TWO	
Analysis of the CVE Initiative	
The Benefits of Federal Government Outreach and Engagement to Prevent Violent Extremism	33
Challenges Faced by the CVE Initiative	41
Key Flaws in CVE Initiative	49
PART THREE	
Recommendations	59
About the Authors	65
Endnotes	66

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to a series of high-profile homegrown terrorist attacks, in August 2011 the Obama Administration launched a multi-faceted initiative to prevent violent extremism. This program, what we call the “Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Initiative,” supplemented established counterterrorism practices with a set of activities designed to engage communities in the process of diminishing the appeal and effectiveness of violent extremist ideologies. The CVE Initiative developed gradually over the next five and a half years but was promptly terminated after the Trump Administration took office in January 2017.

This report presents a review of the Obama Administration’s CVE Initiative. The conclusions are based on research conducted from 2014-16 consisting of: a nationwide survey of US Attorneys about their CVE activities*, interviews of key stakeholders at the various federal agencies that comprised the CVE Initiative, interviews of federal law enforcement officials in local U.S. Attorneys’ Offices and FBI Field Offices, and focus groups of Muslim Americans about their views of federal CVE efforts and related issues.

Based on this research, we reached three main conclusions. First, the CVE Initiative properly attempted to address the compelling need of developing a program to prevent homegrown violent extremism and was beginning to build momentum toward that goal prior to its termination. Second, despite the necessity of adopting a preventative approach, the Obama Administration faced multiple structural and societal barriers that undercut the CVE Initiative’s chances for success. And finally, the CVE Initiative was flawed in key respects which undermined its effectiveness and ability to sustain itself through the transition to a new Administration. Policy recommendations flowing from our findings are provided for policymakers who seek to build a violence extremism prevention program in the future at the federal level (although many of these lessons learned could apply to other levels of government as well).

THE BENEFITS OF A PREVENTATIVE APPROACH

Preventing acts of homegrown violent extremism continues to be a high national security priority. The two primary sources of violent extremism inside the U.S. since 9/11 have been 1) individuals inspired by the ideology espoused by al Qaeda, ISIS, and likeminded groups and 2) individuals inspired by white supremacy. Regardless of the (comparatively small) amount of violence these individuals cause compared to the overall rate of violent crime in America, media coverage, political discourse, and public attitudes suggest that these crimes are considered to be especially damaging to American society. However, these crimes are especially difficult for law enforcement officials to preempt. Almost all homegrown violent extremists lack connectivity to international terrorist groups and they often leave few clues of their intentions prior to engaging in violence. Their presence inside the U.S. entitles them to rights to obtain firearms and civil liberties protections that limit law enforcement’s ability to conduct surveillance. Consequently, it makes sense for the federal government to attempt to develop a set of policies to reduce the number of individuals attracted to violent extremism and dissuade them from engaging in violence.

While the Obama Administration’s CVE Initiative was flawed in many respects, its efforts to engage communities in violent extremism prevention were well intentioned and had many positive impacts. First, these programs strengthened lines of communication between communities and federal agencies – which is a building block for all forms of crime prevention. Second, the CVE Initiative stimulated strategic thinking about ways to prevent violent extremism. Creative approaches to

* A report containing the questions, results, and analysis of the survey has been previously published. See D. Schanzer & J. Eyerman, “United States Attorneys’ Community Outreach and Engagement Efforts to Counter Violent Extremism: Results From a Nationwide Survey,” December 2016.

education, community building, and, most importantly, intervention for youth at-risk were developed because of the CVE Initiative. Finally, the CVE Initiative provided a forum for addressing many problems experienced by Muslim Americans in the post-9/11 era. In light of the challenging circumstances Muslim Americans have faced during this period, providing them a voice inside federal security agencies was warranted and beneficial.

BARRIERS FACED BY THE CVE INITIATIVE

Although developing a preventative approach to homegrown violent extremism was in the national interest, the Obama Administration's CVE Initiative faced multiple, severe challenges. The Initiative attempted to build trust between communities whose members were at risk of recruitment to violent extremism, but these efforts were taking place in an environment in which deep societal anti-Muslim sentiment was breeding cynicism and mistrust within the Muslim-American community on many fronts. First, many Muslim Americans believed that federal counterterrorism policies were unfair and unlawful. They furthermore objected to CVE being directed virtually exclusively at Muslims even though substantial violence was being perpetrated by white supremacists and other non-Muslim violent extremists. Indeed, many Muslim Americans overtly opposed the CVE Initiative because they perceived it to be interwoven with surveillance and other counterterrorism policies, which they already believed to be discriminatory. Any future effort to develop a community-based preventative effort through government outreach and engagement will need to consider and address these environmental factors more effectively than did the Obama CVE Initiative.

KEY FLAWS IN THE CVE INITIATIVE

The systemic barriers to CVE would have been difficult to overcome with even a perfectly conceived and executed program. Unfortunately, the Obama Administration's CVE Initiative was flawed in many respects.

The program's fundamental error was failing to clearly define its goals. For some, the purpose of the CVE Initiative was to enlist community assistance in identifying specific individuals at risk of engaging in acts of violent extremism; to others the main purpose was to build resiliency to extremism within communities whose members were vulnerable to recruitment by extremist organizations; to others, it had other purposes. This lack of clear definition stunted coherent policy development and allowed the CVE Initiative to be defined by its opponents in a manner that served their purposes, rather than the government's.

Communications missteps also hardened opposition to the CVE Initiative, especially among Muslim-Americans. A key error was rolling out a major expansion of CVE when concerns about the power and barbarism of ISIS were running rampant in the United States and around the world. Many Muslim Americans felt as if the timing and the content of this announcement, and the subsequent White House Summit on CVE, linked their community, in the eyes of many Americans, with the rise of ISIS and cast a cloak of suspicion over them.

Including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the nation's lead counterterrorism investigatory entity, as a lead agency in the CVE Initiative also deeply damaged the effort. Doing so failed to recognize the inherent conflict of interest of the FBI simultaneously investigating terrorism offenses and conducting community outreach and engagement. In addition, concerns about FBI counterterrorism tactics among Muslim Americans inhibited trust-building between the community and the federal government, which was a core objective of the Initiative. Moreover, some of the FBI personnel we interviewed were poor fits for community engagement work as we found that they dismissed Muslim Americans' concerns about FBI tactics and policy as unjustified complaining and were skeptical about the willingness of Muslims Americans to provide assistance to law enforcement. Furthermore, the FBI's policy prohibiting many forms of contact between the FBI and the Council on American Islamic Relations undercut the Bureau's ability to interact with an important part of the Muslim-American community and

created an additional barrier to the development of trust. The FBI's three-year rotation policy for agents also weakened its ability to develop long-term relationships with local communities.

The CVE Initiative also suffered from its virtually exclusive focus on engagement with Muslim-American communities. The failure of the Initiative to develop approaches for interacting with communities whose members were vulnerable to recruitment by white supremacists or other extremists, severely undermined support for the program in portions of the Muslim-American community. They viewed the unidimensional focus of the Initiative as discriminatory and believed that it bolstered the false stereotype that Muslim Americans were more susceptible to violent extremism than other Americans.

Finally, the CVE Initiative was poorly-structured and severely under-resourced. When it began, it had no budget, no administrative structure, no lead agency, and no authorization or appropriation from the Congress. These flaws were gradually remedied over the life of the program, but they hindered the program's ability to gain buy-in from participants and sufficient bureaucratic heft to sustain itself.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the bulk of this report identifies difficulties the Obama Administration's CVE effort faced, we do not believe that efforts to prevent the emergence and spread of violent extremism in the United States should be abandoned. Preventing ideological violence is a very difficult challenge that needs to evolve and adapt as additional knowledge is gathered and new approaches are tested. In our view, the CVE Initiative launched in 2011 was a "proof of concept" that developed slowly and was beginning to gain traction by early 2017 when the Trump Administration took over. It was not possible at that time to determine whether CVE "worked," and it is unfortunate that the entire line of effort was terminated.

There is extensive evidence that our society, and others around the globe, are polarizing on political, ideological, and other grounds. If this trend continues, the need for strategies to undercut violent extremism will become ever more apparent. Federal policymakers who wish to revisit this topic in the future should adopt the core principles for violent extremism prevention programing and consider taking the specific actions listed below:

Core Principles

- Programs to prevent violent extremism will fail unless they apply to all communities targeted by extremists and all forms of extremism.
- The federal government should promote, but not lead, efforts to prevent violent extremism.
- Violent extremism prevention programs should be developed with the input of state and local government agencies and community organizations to ensure there is buy-in and participation by those needed to execute the programs.
- Prevention programs should be limited in scope and carefully constructed to ensure they do not create or reinforce stereotypes
- All entities involved in violent extremism prevention programs should explicitly state that providing counterterrorism intelligence to law enforcement or identifying individuals for potential criminal investigations are not the purposes of the program.
- Federal security and law enforcement agencies should engage with local communities to build trust and improve public services, but these activities must be independent from violent extremism prevention programs.

- To repair the breach of trust between federal law enforcement agencies and some Muslim-American communities, these agencies should enhance their outreach and engagement with Muslim-American communities and take affirmative steps to improve the relationship.
- Federal violent extremism prevention programs should be adequately staffed and funded.

Specific Actions

The Federal Government's Role in Violent Extremism Prevention Programs

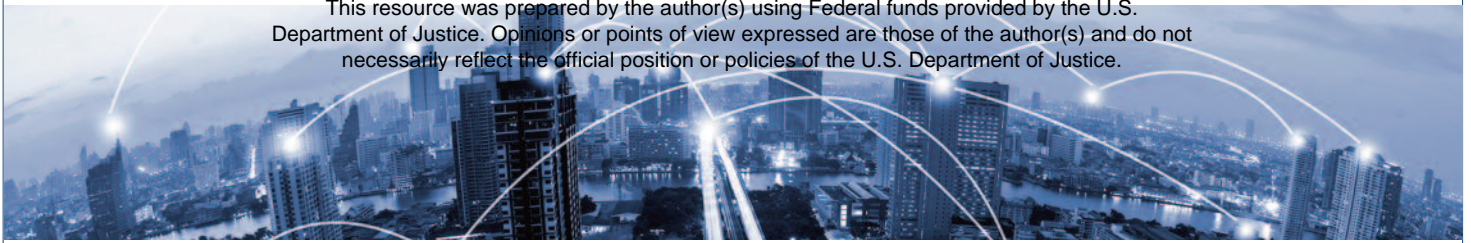
- The federal government should not lead violent extremism prevention programs, but rather should promote the development and growth of such programs nationally through its convening power, research, technical assistance, and, most importantly, funding.
- The federal government should implement violent extremism prevention programs primarily through grants to local governments and non-governmental organizations focused on at-risk youth, crime and delinquency prevention, youth mental health, and community education.
- Lead federal security officials like the United States Attorneys and FBI Special Agents in Charge should not be involved with these efforts
- Congress should provide at least \$50 million in violent extremism prevention grants (the final Obama Administration budget request).
- Congress should also provide regular oversight and require the federal agency supervising the program to develop metrics and conduct regular, independent program evaluations.

Goals of Local Violent Extremism Programs

- Communities should be empowered to identify the educational, and community building activities that they believe will provide a bulwark against violent extremist ideologies.
- Programs should be directed primarily at youth and young adults, including programs that are designed and operated by young adults.
- Violent extremism prevention programs should emphasize the creation of locally based interventions to address mental health or other issues connected with youths at risk of engaging in violent extremism.
- One-half of federal funding should be allocated to programs that address violent extremism based on ideologies other than those advanced by al Qaeda, ISIS, and likeminded groups.

Outreach and Engagement by Federal Law Enforcement Agencies

- Federal security and law enforcement agencies should build trust with communities targeted by violent extremists because trust-building activities will advance their missions.
- There should be no explicit or implicit quid pro quo between trust-building activities and specific forms of law enforcement cooperation by community leaders or members.



Department of Justice

- United States Attorneys should continue outreach and engagement activities with a wide range of communities.
- Outreach and engagement activities should emphasize how the Department of Justice can serve the needs of the community.
- Congress should appropriate staffing funding to United States Attorneys' Offices to support community outreach and engagement activities.
- Discussions with communities should cover a wide range of potential threats, not exclusively counterterrorism.
- United States Attorneys should continue their efforts to build trust and strong relationships with Muslim-American communities.
- Issues of special concern to the Muslim-American community – such as hate crimes, discrimination, and immigration enforcement – are fertile areas for dialogue and education.
- Counterterrorism should be raised with Muslim-Americans only in the context of community involvement in a wide range of crime prevention efforts.
- In order to build more trust in all federal law enforcement, United States Attorneys should discuss with Muslim-American communities their role in supervising electronic surveillance by the FBI and determining whether a criminal referral from the FBI will be prosecuted.
- United States Attorneys should discuss with Muslim-American communities official Department of Justice policies regarding the use of informants in criminal investigations and preventing entrapment.
- The Executive Office of United States Attorneys should develop training modules for new U.S. Attorneys and other Department of Justice employees on outreach and engagement practices.
- The Department of Justice should develop clear guidelines for determining when acts of violence motivated by religious animus will be charged as a federal hate crime and discuss this topic with Muslim-American organizations and communities.
- Decisions regarding whether to bring federal hate crime charges against a perpetrator of violence against Muslim Americans should be made deliberatively, and Muslim-American communities should be provided the same opportunity for consultation on such issues as other communities.

Federal Bureau of Investigation

- In the field of counterterrorism, the FBI should continue to do what it does best, use the full range of its investigatory powers to preempt and deter acts of terrorism in the United States.
- Consistent with the Meese Commission report, however, the FBI should not be involved in violent extremism prevention programming.
- Special Agents in Charge should conduct outreach and engagement with a wide range of communities in their jurisdiction, including, but not exclusive to, Muslim-American communities.
- The goal of such outreach should be to encourage communities to support law enforcement efforts in their communities and contact the FBI if they have concerns about public safety.
- FBI Headquarters should develop presentations for SAC's to use to explain FBI policies regarding surveillance, use of informants, and entrapment to Muslim- American communities and train SAC's on best practices in community engagement.

- Line FBI special agents, however, should not conduct community outreach and engagement due to conflicts of interest with their investigatory activities.
- Line FBI agents, of course, should continue developing useful law enforcement contacts in all communities and encourage community leaders and members to provide information to the FBI about potential criminal activity. But at all times, such agents should make clear that they are acting as criminal investigators.
- When appropriate, the FBI should refer individuals of concern to community-based intervention programs, but the FBI should not organize, fund, and operate these intervention programs.
- The FBI should continue and expand its Citizens Academy and recruit a diverse set of community members to participate, including Muslim Americans.
- The FBI should consider rescinding its ban on interaction with CAIR in light of its questionable utility and the damage it causes to community relations with Muslim Americans.

Department of Homeland Security

- Outreach and engagement with Muslim-American communities via the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties should continue.
- Officials from other key elements of the Department of Homeland Security, such as the TSA and CBP, should regularly attend these outreach and engagement events.
- Outreach and engagement with Muslim Americans should address a broad range of issues and not focus exclusively on counterterrorism. Consequently, DHS should discontinue use of the Community Awareness Briefing (which addresses only terrorism), but rather integrate terrorism awareness materials into educational materials that discuss a broad range of issues and threats.
- The Community Resilience Exercise that brings together Muslim community members and law enforcement officials to discuss terrorism prevention is a beneficial activity, so long as similar exercises are conducted with a broad range of other communities as well.
- Lead local officials from the Transportation Security Agency and Customs and Border Protection should also conduct outreach and community engagement independent of CRCL with Muslim-American and other communities to address community concerns about travel and immigration.

Federal Government Actions to Build Trust with Muslim-American Communities

- The president should visit a mosque.
- Elected officials should attend Muslim-American civic events and be pictured with Muslim Americans.
- The president and other elected officials should speak out when bigoted actions and statements are directed against Muslim Americans.
- Muslim Americans should be appointed to high level federal government positions.
- Federal security agencies should take affirmative steps to recruit Muslim Americans.
- Communications from the White House or federal agencies following violent extremist incidents by Muslim Americans should mention statements by Muslim American organizations condemning such violence.

INTRODUCTION

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the United States government faced a two-fold problem: the foreign organization that had planned and executed the attacks – al Qaeda – and the prospect that additional al Qaeda members may be inside the United States planning additional attacks. The government confronted the first strand of the problem by launching the war in Afghanistan (and many additional lines of effort at home and abroad) and the second by a massive law enforcement effort to find any perpetrators of the attacks inside the United States and any al Qaeda “ sleeper cells ” waiting for the order to launch another wave of terrorism.

The pursuit of “ sleeper cells ” and active al Qaeda operatives in the United States turned up very little.¹ Yet, over the ensuing years, clusters of individuals without a direct connection to al Qaeda were arrested and prosecuted for a range of terrorism-related offenses.² Consequently, law enforcement concerns shifted from “ sleeper cells ” of foreign terrorists to worries that U.S. individuals were adopting al Qaeda’s violent ideology and planning to engage in violence inside the United States.³ Scholars and government officials labeled the phenomenon “ homegrown terrorism. ”⁴

A confluence of events throughout 2009 placed homegrown terrorism at the top of the national agenda. Investigations revealed that over 20 young men had left the Minneapolis region to join al-Shabab in Somalia, the FBI arrested seven people in North Carolina for plotting attacks and stockpiling a large cache of weaponry, the FBI preempted a planned bombing of the New York City subway on the anniversary of 9/11, and then, on November 5, U.S. Army psychiatrist Nidal Hassan opened fire on a crowd of soldiers at Fort Hood, Texas, killing 13 and wounding scores of others.⁵ For the nascent Obama Administration, preventing acts of violent homegrown terrorism had become a major national security concern.⁶

Even prior to 2009, many policymakers believed that reliance on domestic intelligence collection and criminal investigatory tools alone would not be adequate for dealing with the potential threat of individuals embracing violent extremist ideologies and then acting upon them inside the United States.⁷ Indeed, as early as 2002, the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing identified a set of practices that communities and law enforcement agencies could adopt to reduce the prevalence of violent extremism. In 2007, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed legislation that would have created a national commission and a center of excellence to identify “ measures that can be taken to prevent violent radicalization . . . from developing and spreading in the United States. ” Yet, as late as 2010, leading counterterrorism and security experts, Bruce Hoffman and Peter Bergen, noted that “ that there remains no federal government agency or department specifically charged with identifying radicalization and interdicting the recruitment of U.S. citizens or residents for terrorism. ”⁸

To build on earlier efforts, and in direct response to the spate of homegrown terrorism incidents during the early part of his Administration, in 2011, President Obama issued a national strategy to prevent violent extremism. Implementation of this strategy – what we call the “ Obama Administration’s CVE Initiative ” or just “ CVE ” – developed gradually over the course of the next five years. By 2016, the program had an administrative structure, a budget, and various lines of programmatic efforts. Yet, just as the program was beginning to gain momentum, Obama’s second term ended. The Trump Administration has abandoned most of these efforts.

This project was initiated in 2013 to provide an early stage appraisal of the CVE Initiative as it was taking shape and developing. Interim results have been published previously, and advice and assistance were provided to policymakers throughout the project. Now that the federal effort has terminated, this report serves as a historical record and critique of what the Obama Administration accomplished in the field.

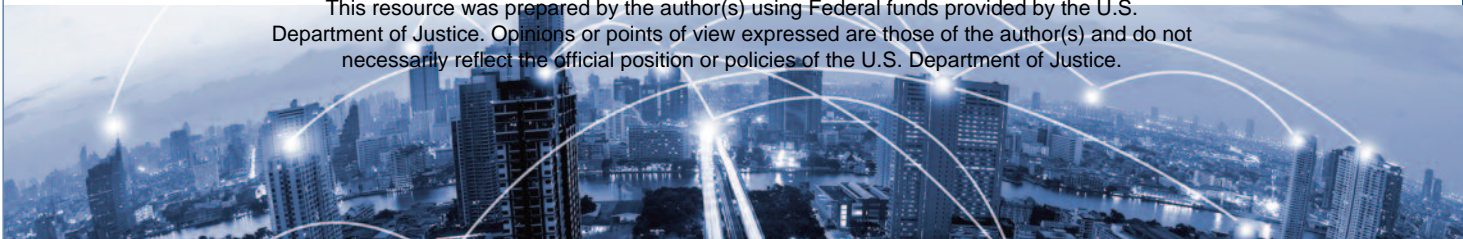
This report is based on a range of sources including interviews of federal government officials in Washington D.C., a national survey of U.S. Attorneys' Offices, interviews of locally based federal law enforcement officials, and focus groups of Muslim Americans in the communities served by those officials. The research focused on a core component of CVE: the federal government's efforts to engage with local communities as a means to prevent recruitment to violent extremism. We recognize that there are other components of CVE besides community engagement – such as academic research and counter-radicalization messaging on social media – but our references in this report to “CVE” focus primarily on the federal government's outreach and engagement efforts.

The report is divided into three parts. The first section describes the multi-agency CVE Initiative, charting the program's evolution and cataloging the range of CVE activities developed by different parts of the federal government. The second section analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of the Obama Administration's CVE Initiative, taking into account difficulties identified by both federal officials and local community members. The final section contains a set of recommendations to improve the structure, legitimacy, and effectiveness of federal violent extremism prevention efforts. These materials should be of interest to policymakers at multiple levels of government and around the world who are continuing to pursue CVE strategies even though the U.S. federal effort has been terminated. Likewise, in the event that federal policymakers choose to revisit CVE as a component of counterterrorism again in the future, the lessons learned from the Obama Administration CVE Initiative will be instructive.

At the outset, readers should keep in mind that the primary focus of the project has been how the federal government has engaged in outreach and engagement to Muslim-American communities and the reaction of those communities to this effort. This focus was of necessity, because, from the beginning, the almost exclusive thrust of the CVE Initiative was engagement with Muslim Americans for the purpose of preventing extremism promoted by al Qaeda and likeminded organizations. The CVE strategy stated this purpose overtly, noting that extremism inspired by al Qaeda and related organizations was “the preeminent terrorist threat to our country.”⁹ Moreover, our research found that the bulk of federal community outreach efforts were directed toward Muslim-American communities. Former Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson confirmed this priority as well, noting in 2016 that “when I talk about building bridges to communities, most often I am talking about building bridges to Muslim-American communities, because that is who the Islamic State is targeting.”¹⁰

The Obama Administration's emphasis on Muslim-American communities, as we discuss below, was one of the key problems with the overall effort. Our interactions with the officials running the program demonstrated that they fully understood the nature of this challenge and were thoughtful and well-intentioned in attempting to overcome it. Yet, our research showed that they pressed forward with a mostly unidimensional approach without garnering broad-based support from the very communities they hoped would participate in and benefit from the CVE Initiative – Muslim Americans. Indeed, we found a wide schism within the Muslim-American community on the entire concept of CVE, with views ranging widely on issues such as whether these efforts were necessary in light of the scope of the problem, as well as the impact of such programs on societal perceptions of Muslim Americans and the civil liberties of affected individuals. While community-wide consensus on such a sensitive topic may not be possible, the core lesson from our research is that transparency, open communication, and extensive consensus-building are necessary precursors to effective action in this area.

Although the bulk of this report identifies difficulties the Obama Administration's CVE effort faced, we do not believe that efforts to prevent the emergence and spread of violent extremist ideologies should be abandoned. Preventing ideological violence is a very difficult challenge that needs to evolve and adapt as additional knowledge is gathered and new approaches are tested. In our view, the CVE Initiative launched in 2011 was a “proof of concept” that developed slowly and was beginning to



gain traction by early 2017 when the Trump Administration took over. It was not possible at that time to determine whether CVE “worked,” and it is unfortunate that the entire line of effort was terminated. There is extensive evidence that our society, and others around the globe, are polarizing on political, ideological, and other grounds. If this trend continues, the need for strategies to undercut violent extremist ideologies will become ever more apparent.

The Obama Administration’s CVE Initiative was a modest effort to begin development of such a tool. We hope those who continue to work in this important space and those who take up the mantle in the future will benefit from our effort to document the history of this effort, evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, and recommend possible pathways for reform.

PART ONE

THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S "COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM" INITIATIVE

This section of the report provides a historical review of the evolution of the Obama Administration's CVE Initiative and describes the various lines of effort that have comprised this effort in the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, the National Counter Terrorism Center and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. We also document how the Trump Administration handled this issue when it took office in January 2017.

CVE STRATEGY AND PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Defining the Federal CVE Initiative

There is no formally named program or set of programs identified as the "Obama Administration's CVE Initiative." This was true when the president announced the national strategy for preventing homegrown extremism in August 2011 and it remains the case today. Rather, this is a phrase we are using for this study to describe numerous lines of effort taking place in multiple federal agencies that are aimed at preventing acts of violent extremism inside the United States.

Defining the boundaries of the "CVE Initiative" is a challenge, but, at the outset, it is worth starting with the types of activities that fall outside the boundary.

For the purposes of this report, "the Obama Administration's CVE Initiative" does not include any governmental efforts to combat extremist organizations outside the United States, whether through the use of force, collection of intelligence, or application of law enforcement powers in conjunction with foreign governments. Similarly, the phrase does not include the actions of the United States Department of State and USAID to work with foreign governments and other partners to blunt violent extremist ideology and organizations around the globe.¹¹ These international efforts have also been labeled "CVE," but they are different in structure and purpose from the domestic efforts examined in this project. Finally, the federal CVE Initiative does not include domestic law enforcement efforts to arrest and prosecute individuals who authorities believe have violated the criminal law. Of course, all of these activities could also be said to "counter violent extremism" by degrading capabilities or killing leaders of foreign violent extremist organizations, addressing grievances that fuel these organizations, or arresting individuals who may be planning acts of violence. But these military, diplomatic and law enforcement efforts are not the types of "prevention" that were discussed and anticipated in the president's 2011 strategy.

The "Obama Administration's CVE Initiative" examined in this study includes a range of activities by various federal agencies or actors (like United States Attorneys) to reduce the number of individuals living in the United States who are attracted to violent extremism and to prevent such individuals from carrying out acts of violence. To clarify, this report focuses on actions of the federal government, not the numerous programs and activities of state and local actors, private sector entities, community groups, or individuals. Efforts by the federal government to convene these parties and set policy or provide funding for their activities are, however, part of the CVE Initiative. Furthermore, the CVE Initiative includes a wide range of different approaches by the federal government to achieve its objectives by interacting with individuals and communities. These would include

meetings between federal officials and community groups to identify areas of concern and common interest, interactions between federal officials and community leaders to encourage them to address violent extremist ideologies, outreach and engagement with communities to build relationship of trust, federal efforts to educate communities about the threat of violent extremism, federal efforts to convene led multi-agency and multi-partner task forces, federal training programs, and other activities.

Aspects of this preventative approach were set forth as national policy in August 2011 in the Obama Administration's strategy document *Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*. This strategy stated that "countering radicalization to violence is frequently best achieved by engaging and empowering individuals and groups at the local level to build resilience against violent extremism."¹² To that end, the strategy proposed to use a "community-based approach" that would "empower local partners, who can more readily identify problems as they emerge and customize responses so that they are appropriate and effective for particular individuals, groups, and locations."¹³ Under this plan, the federal government's role in supporting the community-based approach included three areas of effort: "enhancing federal engagements with and support to local communities that may be targeted for violent extremism"; "building government and law enforcement expertise"; and, "countering extremist propaganda."¹⁴

The second and third prongs of the strategy – federal research efforts and communications strategy – are beyond the scope of this report. This report (and most other public discussions of CVE) focuses instead on federal efforts to engage with and support local communities that may be targeted for violent extremism. According to the national strategy, the purpose of this community engagement is to "(1) share . . . information about the threat of radicalization to violence with a wide range of community groups and organizations . . . ; (2) respond to community concerns about government policies and actions; and (3) better understand how we can effectively support community-based solutions."¹⁵ The strategy asserts that the federal government can use its "convening power" to help build "a network . . . to support community-based efforts to counter violent extremism."¹⁶

Strategic Implementation Plan of 2011

Five months after the national strategy was released, in December 2011, the Obama administration issued a "strategic implementation" plan that assigned responsibility for executing different elements of the national strategy to various federal agencies.¹⁷ The plan identified two lines of effort for federal engagement with and support to communities.

First, the plan called for improving "the depth, breadth, and frequency of Federal Government engagement with and among communities on the wide range of issues they care about, including concerns about civil rights, counterterrorism security measures, international events, and foreign policy issues."¹⁸ To advance this purpose, the plan called for agencies to expand their scope of engagement, build new partnerships, incorporate communities targeted by extremists into non-security related discussion forums, and increase direct engagements on CVE.¹⁹ United States Attorneys (USAs) were assigned the role of "engagement leads in the field" and instructed to "coordinate closely with local government officials, law enforcement, communities, and civil society" in their outreach activities.²⁰ They were also charged with providing "expanded engagement specific to CVE with communities that may be targeted by violent extremist radicalization."²¹ Related responsibilities were assigned to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) and other parts of the Department of Justice (DOJ).²²

The second line of effort emphasized federal support for local initiatives to engage with communities to prevent radicalization to violent extremism. The plan anticipated the federal government playing an indirect role in these local efforts, using its "convening authority" to encourage programmatic development and taking advantage of its "diverse networks across the country . . . to draw together . . . previously unconnected efforts and programs."²³ The activities planned to support "local

partners” in these efforts included the creation of partnerships between communities and local law enforcement, financial support to “community-led” programs through federal grants, and engagement with businesses to educate them about the threat of violent extremism and CVE.²⁴ DHS was designated the lead agency for most of these activities, but DOJ, FBI, NCTC, and the Department of Treasury were assigned supporting roles as well.

The strategic implementation plan recognized that many activities under each line of effort were already taking place at both the federal and local levels. The plan announced an intention to expand and supplement these activities. However, it did not create an organizational structure to administer this effort, identify a lead official in the U.S. government, or suggest how the activities would be funded. The core agencies were not required to report how they intended to fulfill the responsibilities the implementation plan assigned to them.

Early Implementation Efforts and the Three Cities Pilot Project

The implementation effort began with the four lead agencies for federal engagement (DOJ, DHS, FBI & NCTC) developing their own plans and programs, with coordination conducted through regular meetings of agency deputies and their staffs.

Over time, the deputies concluded that while the agencies’ various outreach and engagement efforts were important and should be expanded, they alone could not build the type of nationwide capacity necessary to fulfill the goals of the CVE strategy. To build this capacity, they determined that they needed to implement the strategy in the field, find a way to measure its impacts, and then seek funding to support the most effective strategies. The desire to begin institutionalizing the CVE concept gave rise to the *Three Cities Pilot Programs*.

As an NCTC official stated, “The decision was made to pick three cities with some good CVE efforts already developed. We would learn from these three communities and private sectors. If we could create strong examples of what ‘right’ looked like, hopefully we could find a way to meaningfully implement similar efforts in other places.”[†] Based on these criteria, Boston, Minneapolis and Los Angeles were chosen as the sites for the initial pilot programs.

The pilot programs were initiated in early 2014, but there was no public announcement, due to the potential sensitivity of the topic and the need for the federal officials to recruit local government, law enforcement, and community partners to participate.

On September 15, 2014, however, Attorney General Holder issued a press release announcing the pilot programs.²⁵ This announcement came four days after President Obama gave a televised address to the nation outlining his strategy for confronting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (which the government preferred to label “ISIL”). Holder linked these pilot programs directly to the counter-ISIL strategy, identifying “extensive outreach to communities here in the U.S.” as part of the Department of Justice’s response to “the emergence of ISIL.”²⁶ Holder asserted that DOJ has engaged in outreach with communities in the past “so we can work with them to identify threats before they emerge, to disrupt homegrown terrorists, and to apprehend would be violent extremists.”²⁹ The pilot projects were necessary, he noted, because “we must. . . do even more.”²⁸

Holder elaborated that the federally-led pilot programs were intended to “bring together community representatives, public safety officials, religious leaders, and United States Attorneys to improve local engagement, to counter violent extremism, and – ultimately – to build broad networks of community partnerships to keep our nation safe.”²⁹ These pilot projects would accomplish that goal by working with community representatives to “develop comprehensive strategies, to raise awareness about important issues, to share information on best practices, and to expand and improve training.”³⁰

[†] All quoted material throughout the report that lacks a reference was derived from interviews conducted for this research project. All interview subjects were provided a guarantee of confidentiality.

Unfortunately, the Attorney General's press release caught officials in those three cities off guard, since they were still briefing and recruiting local partners to be part of the effort. As one agency staff noted, "the public affairs blitz about the program has made people think that the pilot system is way further ahead than it really [was]." The public announcement undercut the U.S. Attorneys running the pilot projects because many community members learned about the program for the first time through press coverage.

The announcement also created problems by specifically linking the preventative efforts with the emergence of the ISIS threat. Some Muslim Americans we interviewed said the announcement suggested that ISIS was deeply infiltrating American communities, reinforcing the stereotype that Muslim Americans were potential security threats. Since Muslim Americans believed that this suggestion was alarmist and offensive, the pilot programs and the entire CVE concept the Attorney General was advancing became tainted in their eyes with stereotypical thinking.

Some of the language of the announcement also suggested that outreach and engagement was being used to "identify threats before they emerge. . . and apprehend would-be violent extremists." Since Muslim Americans we interviewed were already deeply suspicious of FBI tactics they believed unfairly targeted them, this language made CVE seem like an expansion of surveillance efforts, again tarnishing the program in the minds of the very people DOJ hoped would participate in the efforts.

Despite this bumpy roll-out, the pilot projects proceeded. Although the press release stated there would be a White House Summit on CVE in October, the meeting did not take place until February 2015. By then, each city had issued a public strategy document outlining general principles for how the communities intended to form partnerships, develop programs, and weave together existing efforts. However, no federal resources were provided for these fledgling efforts.

As such, implementation of the pilot programs began haltingly. Some jurisdictions were able to apply grant monies from pre-existing federal or state programs to start developing the programs called for in their strategies.³¹ Yet, more than a year after the CVE Summit, the three pilot cities were still concerned about lack of implementation resources. For example, more than 18 months after the pilot projects were announced, a key participant in the Los Angeles program, Deputy Police Chief Mike Downing, said, "we haven't seen a dime. We're clearly at the point where we want to put our money where our mouth is."³² An official in another pilot city other noted that "[i]t's been disappointingly slow."³³

New Administrative Structure and Budget Resources

The federal CVE's loose administrative structure became more formalized in September 2015 when the Secretary of Homeland Security created the Office of Community Partnerships in DHS. The new office's purpose was to "build relationships and promote trust and . . . find innovative way to support communities that seek to discourage violent extremism and undercut terrorist narratives."³⁴ This step was followed by the creation of a permanent CVE Task Force to be hosted by DHS in January, 2016.³⁵ The Office of Community Partnership chaired this interagency group, which was charged with synchronizing and integrating the CVE programs; leveraging new CVE efforts; conducting strategic planning; and assessing and evaluating CVE programs.³⁶ The Task Force had four functional areas: 1) research and analysis, 2) engagements and technical assistance, 3) communications, and 4) interventions. The Department of Justice was the co-lead agency and Task Force staffing was also provided by the FBI and NCTC.

In 2015, the Obama Administration finally began requesting dedicated funding for its CVE strategy.³⁷ Its budget request for fiscal year 2016 included a total of \$15 million for the Department of Justice to conduct research (\$4 million), provide training in CVE techniques to state and local law enforcement (\$2 million), support local CVE efforts in collaboration with U.S. Attorneys' Offices (\$6 million) (presumably, based on the Three Cities Pilots), and run demonstration projects administered by the Community Oriented Policing Services office (\$3 million).³⁸ Congress did not honor this specific request. However, in late 2015,

congressional concern following ISIS' coordinated bombings and shootings in Paris, France, resulted in a \$50 million appropriation to the Department of Homeland Security to address "emergent threats from violent extremism and from complex coordinated attacks."³⁹ Some of these funds were used to launch a new DHS grant program to support local CVE programs.

The Obama Administration's final budget submission to Congress in early 2016 expanded its support for the CVE by seeking a total of \$69 million for at least four lines of effort.⁴⁰ First, it formalized the new Office of Community Partnership in the Department of Homeland Security, seeking and reprogramming a total of \$3.5 million for salary and expenses. Second, the budget repeated its \$15 million request for the Department of Justice for research, training, and demonstration projects.⁴¹ Third, it sought an additional \$49 million for the CVE and emerging threats grant program run by the Department of Homeland Security. Finally, acknowledging the role that U.S. Attorneys have been playing in leading local CVE initiatives, the Administration's budget requested \$2.4 million to hire ten "community resilience coordinators" to support outreach and engagement work.⁴²

Updated Strategic Implementation Plan

Toward the end of the Obama Administration, the initially amorphous concept of CVE began to gain greater substantive definition and clarity. In October 2016, the White House issued an updated CVE strategic implementation plan that provided the first official definition of CVE. It defined CVE as "proactive actions to counter efforts by extremists to recruit, radicalize, and mobilize followers to violence."⁴³ These actions, it continued, "intend to address the conditions and reduce the factors that most likely contribute to recruitment and radicalization by violent extremists."⁴⁴ The plan emphasized that CVE addresses "all forms of extremism," and did not suggest, as prior documents had, that priority must be placed on addressing al Qaeda and likeminded groups.⁴⁵ The plan also noted that successful CVE efforts require are "predicated on trust," and assured that that CVE has not been used for law enforcement and intelligence collection activities.⁴⁶ The plan emphatically stated, that intelligence collection "is not the goal of CVE efforts."⁴⁷

The updated plan identified four lines of effort: Engagement and Technical Assistance, Interventions, Research and Analysis, and Communications and Digital Strategy. Community outreach and engagement fell within the "Engagement and Technical Assistance" and "Intervention" areas.

Under the "Engagement and Technical Assistance" line of effort, the plan called for enhanced interactions between local stakeholders and federal officials, including U.S. Attorneys and officials from the DHS Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, on a range of issues, such as discrimination, immigration, transportation security and law enforcement.⁴⁸ These interactions, the plan stated, help identify ways the federal government can better serve communities and inform communities about federal programs and policies.⁴⁹ In addition, the plan also called for increased resources to DOJ and DHS to support federal engagement efforts and improved coordination and sharing of resources.⁵⁰

The plan also called for expanding local CVE frameworks (like the Three Cities Pilot Project), integrating CVE concepts into other, existing programs (like violence prevention programming), and using community policing to build trust and address recruitment and radicalization.⁵¹ Federal technical assistance would also include the provision of CVE-related training to local programs and stakeholders, including the Community Awareness Briefing and Community Resilience Exercise (discussed below) developed by NCTC and DHS.⁵² The plan also called for increasing federal resources for local CVE initiatives by creating CVE-specific grant programs and expanding permitted uses of other grant programs, like the DOJ Community Oriented Policing program.⁵³

The "Interventions" line of effort represented a concept that had not been addressed in the 2011 plan. Interventions were defined as "off-ramps for individuals who appear to be moving toward violent action but who have not yet engaged in criminal

activity.”⁵⁴ The plan called for DOJ and the FBI to support locally developed multi-disciplinary practitioner teams to redirect individuals, especially young people, away from violence.⁵⁵ The government also intended to develop and disseminate educational resources about “possible warning signs” of radicalization and recruitment to encourage friends and family members to seek assistance if someone close to them was at risk of moving towards violent extremism.⁵⁶ Disengagement and rehabilitation interventions would also be built for violent extremist offenders in the criminal justice system or those reentering society after incarceration.⁵⁷

Trump Administration Withdraws Support for Initiative

With the refined strategy and budget lines finally taking shape, the Obama Administration’s CVE Initiative was finally gaining momentum by the end of 2016.

The Initiative had reached a new benchmark in August, 2016 when it launched the first federal assistance program “devoted exclusively to providing local communities with the resources to counter violent extremism in the homeland.”⁵⁸ Using \$10 million from the congressional appropriation approved in late 2015, the grants supported “activities that prevent recruitment or radicalization to violence by interrupting those efforts, building community-level resilience to them, and . . . providing appropriate interventions through civic organizations, law enforcement or other entities.”⁵⁹ DHS received nearly 200 applications for these grants. The 31 grant winners were announced on January 13, 2017, one week before the Obama Administration ended.⁶⁰ Most of the grants were to Muslim-American community groups or local governments and law enforcement agencies proposing to conduct programming and outreach with Muslim Americans. However, consistent with the updated strategy, some of the grants focused on preventing forms of extremism other than those promoted by al Qaeda and likeminded groups, such as white supremacy and anti-government extremism.

President Trump took office on January 17. During the transition, press reports suggested that the CVE grant program would be revamped to focus “solely on Islamist extremism” and the name would be changed from CVE to “Countering Islamic Extremism” or “Countering Radical Islamic Extremism.”⁶¹ One Trump spokesperson predicted with “absolute certitude” that CVE would be “jettisoned.”⁶² A number of groups that had won CVE grant awards stated that they could not be part of a program with this revised purpose and announced they would reject their grants in protest.⁶³

The new Administration did not “jettison” the entire program, but rather suspended the CVE grants pending a review by DHS Secretary John Kelly. In June 2017, Kelly decided to revise the initial awards “to ensure taxpayer dollars go to the programs with the highest likelihood of success [and] support the men and women on the front lines of this fight.”⁶⁴ Seven new grantees received awards, including the Hennepin and Alameda County Sheriff’s offices, the Seattle Police Department, the National Governors Association, and the Massachusetts Office of Public Safety and Security.⁶⁵ Eleven groups that had initially won awards were excluded from the program, including all four Muslim non-profit groups that had publicly declined their awards.⁶⁶

The appropriations laws passed by Congress in May 2017 disregarded all of the Obama Administration’s requests for CVE funding. Then, the Trump Administration’s first budget zeroed out all CVE related accounts (other than research).⁶⁷ In July, 2017, the head of the Office of Community Partnerships, George Selim, resigned, saying that “there were clearly political appointees in this administration who didn’t see the value of community partnerships with American Muslims.”⁶⁸ In December, 2017, the office was renamed the Office of Terrorism Prevention Partnerships.⁶⁹ A permanent director of this office was never named.⁷⁰ In April, 2019, Acting DHS Secretary Kevin McAleenan announced that the office had been renamed again to the “Office of Targeted Violence and Terrorism Protection.”⁷¹ But there were no announcements regarding permanent leadership, staffing, or resources.⁷² One former DHS official noted that the prior office had been reduced from 16 staffers to 7, and from \$9 million in contracts to \$0.⁷³

AGENCY IMPLEMENTATION EFFORTS

This section of the report catalogs agency efforts to implement the national strategy during the Obama Administration. Descriptions of these efforts are based on interviews of key officials in the Washington headquarters of four agencies: DOJ, DHS, FBI and NCTC, and materials gathered from agency officials and public sources. We also interviewed agency officials in the field, including three United States Attorneys along with FBI agents responsible for CVE in two jurisdictions.^{††} The U.S. Attorney interviews were used to develop a nationwide survey of U.S. Attorneys that was fielded from December 2014 to February 2015. The full results of this survey are reported separately,⁷⁴ but some key findings are incorporated here. The activities described in this section occurred during the Obama Administration.

Department of Justice

During the early parts of the Obama Administration, the office of the Deputy Attorney General coordinated the Department of Justice's CVE efforts. These efforts consisted primarily of outreach and engagement conducted by United States Attorneys' offices, supplemented by other Department of Justice entities.

United States Attorneys

United States Attorneys have long interacted with communities to explain DOJ operations and address community concerns regarding the myriad of issues in DOJ's jurisdiction (federal criminal law enforcement, organized crime, drug trafficking, civil rights, and immigration, to name a few). They are well-suited for this role in light of their position as the highest-ranking, Senate-confirmed law enforcement official in each judicial district in the country.

The 9/11 attacks, and the federal government's response to them, heightened the importance of this function because of the prominent role played by federal law enforcement officials in investigating and prosecuting terrorism and terrorism-related cases and in protecting individuals and communities from hate crimes and discrimination. While the Bush Administration did not initiate a formal outreach program, many U.S. Attorneys met with community groups to discuss post-9/11 issues during the Bush Administration and believed community outreach was part of their responsibilities.⁷⁵

Efforts to Increase U.S. Attorney Engagement as Part of CVE

The organized, systematic effort to re-define the community engagement function for U.S. Attorneys as part of an overall program to counter violent extremism began during the early stages of the Obama Administration. At that time, a group of about six U.S. Attorneys formed a working group to establish a set of outreach practices directed toward the Muslim-American community. This group has been referred to by some U.S. Attorneys as the "first wave." At least some of these U.S. Attorneys also were part of an Arab and Muslim Engagement Advisory group appointed by Attorney General Holder. They began meeting formally with Muslim-American leaders, holding community roundtables at mosques and other venues, and participating in broader meetings of community leaders and government officials organized by the DHS (discussed below). The first-wave U.S. Attorneys were also tasked with gathering background information on relevant topics for Muslim-American outreach – for example, on regulations relating to charitable giving to certain Muslim organizations or recent hate-crime statistics and cases. In early 2011, the first-wave group created a lengthy "Community Outreach Resource Guide" and forwarded it to all U.S. Attorneys.⁷⁶ The package included a set of talking points entitled "Q&A – Arab and Muslim American Outreach" which addressed

^{††} The scope of the initial project included a review of the CVE efforts of DOJ, DHS and the NCTC. At the request of the FBI, the project was expanded to include interviews of FBI headquarters officials, interviews at multiple FBI field offices and a survey of FBI SACs about their CVE implementation efforts. Midway through the research effort, the FBI discontinued its participation in the project. This report presents the data gathered prior to the FBI's decision to terminate its participation.

questions such as, “Why is the Department [of Justice] conducting outreach with Arab and Muslim-American communities?”⁷⁷ and, “Is there a special effort to target these communities?” The talking points also covered topics such as undercover investigations, profiling, and sting-operations against non-Muslims.

The first-wave U.S. Attorneys were assigned five or six other U.S. Attorneys in their region to mentor in outreach.⁷⁸ These efforts were supported by nationwide training webinars and video conference sessions with Deputy Attorney General James Cole. Due to these early efforts, the national strategy issued in August 2011, designated U.S. Attorneys as “engagement leads in the field.”⁷⁹

While the Executive Office of U.S. Attorneys and main DOJ headquarters led organizational efforts to kick-start engagement by all U.S. Attorneys across the country, our interviews showed that U.S. Attorneys exercised wide discretion. They decided which communities and sub-communities to engage with, the methods of engagement, the topics to be discussed, and the amount of staff resources to dedicate to outreach and engagement. As a DOJ headquarters official noted, “they are given a lot of leeway . . . to figure the best way to deal with local concerns.”

U.S. Attorneys’ Perspectives on Purpose of Outreach and Engagement

Although the effort to expand U.S. Attorney outreach and engagement with Muslim communities was clearly part of the response to the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. Attorneys we interviewed expressed differing opinions about the purpose of outreach and engagement and its connection to counterterrorism.

One U.S. Attorney explained that he approached the Muslim community as he would any other community group, seeking to identify the broad range of its concerns:

The Muslim community . . . is underserved by law enforcement, so we have an interest in reaching out to them . . . in the civil rights context . . . or to talk about mortgage fraud or identity theft. There’s bullying in schools and employment and fair housing, discrimination, all these different issues which the [DOJ] National Security Division and some of the people back in D.C. are not so concerned about, but we are.

An Assistant U.S. Attorney (AUSA) in that office noted that “we want them to see us as partners they can come to if there’s a problem in their community.” “The purpose,” he noted, “is building community relations. We represent the United States . . . we have to know the community and they have to know us and what we do. Some U.S. Attorneys, however, were concerned that officials in Washington wanted them to prioritize counterterrorism concerns in their relationships with communities more aggressively than they were comfortable with:

Our perspective as U.S. Attorneys is different because we don’t just wear the national security hat. These are members of our community . . . we’re talking to them about all kinds of stuff.

The tension between conducting engagement for counterterrorism or for serving community interests also arose when we asked U.S. Attorneys if a key purpose of CVE outreach and engagement was to identify individuals who may be radicalizing to violence. One AUSA said the purpose of outreach was to ask communities “if there’s someone in your community that you feel is becoming radicalized or could be a danger to your community . . . let us know . . . let the FBI know.” A U.S. Attorney from a different district concurred:

Our number one priority is to protect the homeland. We can’t do that unless we engage the Muslim community because, like it or not, what is happening in the world is related in some crazy ways to that faith. So, if you want to talk about extremists . . . then you have to go to that community and say: ‘we need your help.’

Another AUSA disagreed, arguing that the reason to conduct outreach was to “create more trusting relationships between community members and law enforcement.” She believed that building this trust would enable the community to reach out to U.S. Attorneys’ offices for help in preventing the conditions that lead to radicalization:

We want those communities . . . to come to us and say: ‘we’ve got this concern in our community, what can you do to help us with it?’ It may stem from a kid being bullied at school and becoming isolated. It may stem from a family who’s rejected from receiving housing benefits. Whatever it is, those are the kinds of situations that can create isolation and then mistrust of government and then lead to radicalization.

A different U.S. Attorney stressed that while the purpose of outreach was to serve the community, Muslim-American communities would benefit from a relationship with law enforcement resulting in preventing their members’ victimization by terrorist groups:

The reason you do outreach is because these are at-risk communities in a variety of different ways. U.S. Attorneys really want the communities to know that they can come to us . . . just like any vulnerable population. But one of the ways – maybe not the most important of which – is the radicalization by terrorist groups.

This U.S. Attorney believed a key purpose of outreach is “to prevent radicalization of individuals targeted in these communities.” Similarly, another stated that:

Our goal isn’t to be best friends with them at the end of the day. It is to have a candid dialogue that allows us to interact with them on a level that both allows us to provide their community with services and also equips their community to resist violent extremism.

But he agreed that outreach offers several benefits: “One reason you do it is to get these channels opened up in those communities. And the other reason you do it is because it is just a matter of good government. You actually work for these people.”

Structure and Staffing of U.S. Attorney Outreach Efforts

In each of the three offices we examined, the U.S. Attorney was personally and deeply involved in engagement activities. Yet, the staffing model for these offices differed widely.

In one office, the U.S. Attorney hired a full-time community outreach coordinator who attended events, compiled a listserv for communicating with the community, and coordinated activities with other federal agencies and local law enforcement agencies. This coordinator worked with all communities in the jurisdiction, not just Muslim Americans. At least two Assistant U.S. Attorneys from this office assisted with outreach and engagement, including the lead attorney in one of the satellite offices.

In another office, the U.S. Attorney did most of the outreach work himself and was assisted by the permanent communications director, who handled community issues as part of his many public relations responsibilities.

In the third office, the U.S. Attorney took the lead, but also assigned an AUSA from the civil division of his office to be the main point of contact for the Muslim-American community to ensure that outreach activities be kept entirely separate from on-going criminal prosecutions. This office also relied on a staff member from the state bureau of investigation to organize outreach events with the community and ensure that local law enforcement agencies participated in engagement activities. When asked how large her outreach unit at the state bureau was, she responded “it’s just me . . . I wish there was more, but it’s just me.”

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Outreach and Engagement by U.S. Attorneys with Muslim-American Communities

Outreach and engagement – whether part of a CVE program or just general community relations – takes many forms in United States Attorneys’ Offices across the country.

The primary means of outreach discussed by U.S. Attorneys was meetings with imams and leaders of mosques and Muslim community organizations. Initial efforts were often focused on “just talking about what the U.S. Attorneys’ office does . . . because that also makes people have confidence in us.” Frequent meetings in a variety of settings, U.S. Attorneys noted, were critically important. One emphasized that:

“It’s all personal relationships, it’s going to lunch, it’s going to visit the mosque, it’s going to their celebrations.”

A U.S. Attorney acknowledged that initiating outreach is difficult:

They’re suspicious of why we want to talk to them, and I think a lot of them feel like we’re there just because we suspect that they’re terrorists. We’re trying to get over that, get beyond that, and get a real discussion going. It’s a challenge.

Another U.S. Attorney noted the importance of ensuring that meetings are a “two-way dialogue” and not “just about the terrorism problem:”

An important part of talking to [Muslim communities] is hearing their concerns: about getting hassled by customs and border patrol when they fly in from overseas or bullying in schools or whatever. [Our discussions] are not just a propaganda piece where we’re just talking to them about our concerns.

Indeed, a career prosecutor explained that “We don’t want our relationship with the Muslim community to be based on national security issues because I really think that’s counterproductive.” U.S. Attorneys consistently stated that they used outreach and engagement to convince Muslim communities that the government sees them “as partners:”

If there’s a civil rights issue or a hate crimes issue . . . we want them to feel free to pick up the phone and call the FBI or the U.S. Attorney and say something is happening in our community.

One U.S. Attorney’s office partnered with a state law enforcement agency to develop a series of programmatic activities designed to help familiarize Muslim Americans with law enforcement agencies and build trust. The officer who developed the programs noted the benefit of interacting with “normal people:”

For me, it hasn’t been so much with the heads of a mosque or a community center. It’s been more with the people that I meet from doing the programs. I don’t know if they are less scared of me or what it is, but my relationships have really blossomed. . . . I think it is so important to have a relationship of trust with people. That’s the hardest thing to do.

One successful example was a self-defense program that the officer, a woman, offered for Muslim women:

In the Muslim community, the women are much more comfortable with other women. They can take their face covers off if they want to and we can position them and do different things with them . . . I talk about personal safety, home safety, going out, walking around. It is really a women’s empowerment class.

This officer also planned to develop “a cultural education program about Islam” for local law enforcement. The goal was to have a Muslim trooper and Muslim student “come in to just talk about what it is.” She believed this effort was necessary because “there are some police who’ve never come in contact with a Muslim.” And she was concerned that if local law enforcement officers don’t know about Islam, “then [they’re] going to fear it . . . it’s not helpful.”

U.S. Attorneys expressed the difficulty of broaching the topic of preventing terrorism when meeting with communities because “it’s humiliating for them to even have to have this conversation because it assumes that these leaders have something to do with terrorism, which they do not.” One U.S. Attorney’s office staff recalled asking community members why an outburst at a mosque by one of the Boston marathon bombers was not brought to the attention of the police. The response was, “Thank you. That’s very interesting, but we don’t think that is a problem here.” However, after having this conversation, the staff member noted:

We started getting phone calls from community members . . . “Yes, I saw my son click on a website.” So, we are getting some small expressions of, “hey, this is a problem.”

For some U.S. Attorneys, the issue of U.S. youth trying to travel to Syria to join ISIS is an issue that can be bluntly discussed with Muslim communities:

I said [to Muslim community members], if you want to go fight for ISIS in Syria and you get on-line and you talk about it, and you buy a ticket, you will get prosecuted and we will do everything we can to put you in jail . . . There’s no tolerance for foreign fighters.

Our survey data showed that most U.S. Attorneys’ offices were making large investments of attorney and staff time in outreach. The U.S. Attorneys across the country reported spending an average of 15 hours per month on outreach and 95% of the offices surveyed also assigned outreach responsibilities to, on average, one or two AUSAs per office.⁸⁰ Communications specialists and one or more staff members are also involved in engagement activities in almost all U.S. Attorneys’ offices.⁸¹

Nonetheless, U.S. Attorneys complained that “we do not have the resources to sustain a comprehensive outreach effort into all the places that we have to do outreach.” As one U.S. Attorney noted, “we occupy a district of about 6 million people . . . I have an office of 160 people, counting clerical staff, so the population to employee ratio is not high.” U.S. Attorneys also emphasize that they conduct outreach with not only Muslim Americans, but a wide variety of racial, ethnic, immigrant and other sub-groups within their large jurisdictions. Likewise, Muslim Americans are not “monolithic . . . there are Arabs, non-Arabs . . . we don’t group them all together.”

One staff member involved with outreach and engagement explained that the lack of resources hampered their outreach effort:

I’m the only person . . . It’s really hard to build a relationship with someone who is in [City A] when I am two hours away in [City B]. It’s really hard to have them welcome you if they don’t know you. That’s a huge, huge problem.

Similarly, a U.S. Attorney argued that “it’s an institutional struggle to get beyond, oh yeah, Muslim outreach, check that box . . . [B]ecause we don’t have the people whose job it is to sustain the relationships.”

U.S. Attorneys said they did not receive any extra funding to support outreach these efforts. One noted that “there is not any allocated funding to the U.S. Attorneys for community outreach positions . . . zero allocations. Right now, we are kind of living in the moment.” The lone full-time community relations staff member in that office noted that his position “was actually a one-year detail created in 2011” that has been “extended three times.” “Not having a dedicated position,” he continued, “would severely impact the program.”

Survey results confirmed that most U.S. Attorneys believe the level of funding and staffing they are provided for outreach work is “unhelpful.”⁸² As one supervising attorney argued, “the Department [of Justice] needs to request . . . and the Congress needs to approve additional funding to U.S. Attorneys, because there is no allocation for any of this work.” A U.S. Attorney also emphasized the need for specific funding for staff: “I wholeheartedly believe that to make this a sustainable effort that needs to be done.” One reason to establish such a position, an attorney with the Executive Office of U.S. Attorneys said, is that “if you have an allocated position for . . . community engagement, then it becomes much harder to just say ‘we’re not doing this.’” As one U.S. Attorney admitted, “Because we don’t have an institution, we have no resources or an institutional structure to do this, our efforts kind of wax and wane with the commitment and interest of individuals in the office.”

The U.S. Department of Justice's budget request for fiscal year 2017 included \$2.4 million for 10 Community Resilience Coordinators in U.S. Attorneys' offices to promote CVE. As referenced above, this funding was never appropriated by the Congress nor requested in subsequent budgets by the Trump Administration.

CVE Outreach and Engagement with Non-Muslim Communities

The U.S. Attorneys we interviewed all said they conducted outreach activities with the full range of communities and sub-communities within their districts. These outreach efforts shared many of the same purposes as CVE-related outreach – providing knowledge about the function of the U.S. Attorneys' Office and the Department of Justice, educating communities about their rights, encouraging victims to come forward to provide information about crime, and providing constituencies with an opportunity to express concerns about a wide range of law enforcement and public safety issues.

Nonetheless, our research did not identify efforts to conduct community outreach specifically to address violent extremism inspired by white supremacy, anti-government sentiment, or other ideologies comparable to efforts with Muslim Americans to address al-Qaeda/ISIS related extremism. U.S. Attorneys we interviewed perceived these two issues as fundamentally different problems. One stated:

I just can't picture in my mind how I do outreach with the skinheads or why I would do outreach with skinheads to try to convince them that, "Hey, it's okay if you march with your swastika, but please don't go burn down a temple." To me, this is a fundamentally different kind of thing.

Similarly, another said:

Have I been to a Christian church to say, 'Hey, if there are any Timothy McVeighs in their midst, will you please raise your hand and tell the FBI?' The answer to that is no. Maybe I should have done that, but we haven't.

A U.S. Attorney communications specialist said:

The sovereign citizens don't have an Iftar dinner [to break the daily Ramadan fast] that they invite you to. I don't know how we would do that.

One U.S. Attorney argued, strongly, that there was a key difference between Muslim-American communities with which they conducted outreach and the communities that are targeted for recruitment to certain right-wing ideologies:

Those two things are fundamentally incompatible. If you are doing outreach to these anti-government or sovereign citizens or the skinheads . . . they are not communities that don't want their youth recruited. They are actually the recruiters. They are . . . encouraging the behaviors that . . . lead to criminal conduct.

He noted that this certainly was not the case "when you are doing outreach to the urban Muslim community."

Civil Rights Division

The Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice is charged with enforcing multiple federal laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, disability, religion, familial status and national origin.⁸³ The 2011 strategic implementation plan recognized the important linkage between the concept of civil rights and preventing violent extremism. Government efforts to protect civil rights are an example of "good governance programs," the plan stated, "which may help prevent radicalization that leads to violence."⁸⁴ Protecting civil rights also "reinforce[s] our shared sense of belonging" and "emphasize[s] through our actions that we are all part of the social fabric of America," a message that undercuts the violent extremist narrative that attempts to divide Muslims from the West.

During our interviews, the Civil Rights Division clarified that it perceived that the outreach it was conducting to Muslim-American and other communities was part of its civil rights enforcement mission, not implementation of the Administration's CVE strategy. A Civil Rights Division official explained that:

Historically . . . people from the Civil Rights Division go out meeting with people on employment discrimination, school discrimination, location and place of worship issues, and hate crimes. They say, "that is part of CVE." I say, "well no, we've been doing this long before CVE was ever discovered." We do it because that's our mission.

In fact, the Civil Rights Division was adamant that its outreach and other work should **not** be overtly associated with CVE. The official we interviewed understood the "intuitive appeal" of linking civil rights work – which can prevent radicalization by fostering more integrated communities – to CVE efforts. "Civil rights can have that effect," he emphasized, "but that's not why we do it." The official noted that the Division conducts community outreach so individuals feel comfortable expressing civil rights concerns, not to prevent violent extremism. To avoid interfering with this channel of communication on civil rights, he stressed "the importance of not calling civil rights outreach CVE."

Nonetheless, the Civil Rights Division has engaged in a number of activities that have aided and supported the federal CVE Initiative. A Civil Rights Division official, for example, has conducted an "Outreach 101" training with U.S. Attorneys and worked with the civil rights subcommittee of the Attorney General's Advisory Committee. The Civil Rights Division has also served as a gateway for other agencies to connect with Muslim-American communities based on the Division's preexisting relationships, including the FBI.

The Division also holds regular meetings with representatives of Muslim, Arab, Sikh and South Asian communities to "address the unique civil rights challenges of these communities." This began shortly after 9/11 when leading officials at the Department of Justice wanted to make connections with these groups but felt as if "we don't know where to start." They turned to the Civil Rights Division because it already had "a robust infrastructure" in place for outreach. The Division started holding regular meetings to address issues that arose immediately after 9/11 such as hate crimes against Muslims and bullying in schools. These meetings expanded to include other parts of Justice, the FBI, DHS and the Department of Treasury. Eventually, the regular interagency meeting was used to coordinate some aspects of CVE, but mostly remained focused on addressing the civil rights issues faced by the communities. The Division believed that the meetings were having a positive impact:

We've had positive feedback from the communities regarding both our efforts to combat hate crimes, bring cases where mosques are discriminated against, and also for the convening work we do of getting DHS and other agencies at the table. We're all talking about unique issues that are affecting these "post 9/11" groups. These groups are facing problems in two directions – victims of hate crimes and backlash, on the one hand, and also people who feel they are getting increased scrutiny [from law enforcement].

A Civil Rights Division official noted that "we always tell the community, we have a certain set of statutes that we enforce, but we will help you with anything involving civil rights writ large." These enforcement actions can include issues such as employment and housing discrimination, hate crime investigations, and land use. Religious discrimination cases are "not a big area compared to race," a Civil Rights Division official noted, "but about a quarter of all religion cases are Muslim cases."

During the Obama Administration, a significant area of concern involved cases filed under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), which prohibits localities from using zoning or other land use powers to restrict the use of property for religious purposes. A Civil Rights Division official noted that the number RLUIPA cases challenging local efforts to restrict the building of mosques remained flat after 9/11 but then "spiked into the sky" after the controversy over the building of an Islamic center near the site of the attacks on the World Trade Center (the so-called "Ground Zero mosque"). RLUIPA cases involving mosques represented 15% of DOJ's land use caseload from 2000 to August 2010, but climbed to 38% in the period from September 2010 to July 2016.⁸⁵ Cases involving mosque-building were also more difficult to resolve than those involving other

religions; 84% of all non-Muslim RLUIPA investigations resulting in a positive conclusion without litigation, but only 20% of cases involving a mosque or Islamic school were resolved without the filing of a lawsuit.⁸⁶

Community Relations Service

The DOJ Community Relations Service (CRS) was established as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to provide communities with conflict resolution services for disputes, disagreements or conflicts relating to discriminatory practices based on race, color or national origin.⁸⁷ CRS is staffed with conflict resolution specialists in 10 regional offices throughout the country, whose services are offered when “peaceful relations among the citizens of the community involved are threatened.”⁸⁸ In 2009, CRS’s jurisdiction was expanded to encompass the provision of services to “prevent and respond to” hate crimes, based on race, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.⁸⁹

Interestingly, even though the Deputy Attorney General’s office suggested our research team talk with CRS about its approach to CVE, CRS officials said, “CRS generally stays out of CVE” and CRS community mediation specialists “like to steer clear of the CVE label.” CRS officials explained that, in their view, the CVE Initiative was inconsistent with their approach to resolving community disputes and tensions.

First, CRS expressed concern that CVE seemed to be “targeted” at just one group – Muslim Americans. CRS’s approach to community outreach, however, casts a wider net by conducting training, and messaging to all groups within a community because “sharing similar messages across all groups makes the messages more palatable for minority communities.”

The CRS officials worried that CVE tended to approach communities by “asking them to attend meetings” as opposed to working through pre-existing community structures to build “community resilience.”

In addition, CRS professionals were concerned that U.S. Attorneys and FBI agents involved in CVE serve only short-term rotations which prevents them from “getting to the deep-seated issues or root of the problems.”

The CRS officials also saw tension between the goal of building community trust and the involvement of national security agencies in CVE. Agencies with national security roles like the FBI and DHS are “not viewed neutrally by communities,” the CRS officials said, which makes it difficult for CVE advocates to “appear neutral” and “build trust.” For example, the CRS officials pointed out that the FBI has a non-interaction policy with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a large Muslim advocacy organization, and questioned whether “trust is possible with this policy.” “The community won’t come to you unless they trust you,” the CRS officials noted.

Despite these misgivings, CRS participated in some activities that fell within the umbrella of the federal CVE Initiative. CRS created a training tool for law enforcement agencies on Arab and Muslim cultural awareness – *The First Three to Five Seconds* – that was distributed to federal, state, and local law enforcement officials. It also conducted direct training for federal agencies officials – for example, the Transportation Security Agency in Boston – on culture and community relations. CRS noted that its “wealth of knowledge” about communities enabled it to be a bridge between communities and federal officials when tensions arise. For example, CRS was able to arrange a session between community leaders and the U.S. Attorney in Colorado after three young girls left Denver to try to marry ISIS fighters in 2014. CRS did not attend the session, it “just set the wheels in motion.”

Bureau of Justice Assistance

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) provides grants, education, and technical support to local criminal justice programs as part of DOJ’s Office of Justice Programs. BJA developed the State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training (SLATT) program in 1996. SLATT provides in-person and on line training resources for law enforcement agencies on a range of terrorism related issues,

including but not limited to terrorism ideologies, terrorism financing, and intelligence collection and information sharing. SLATT also created a “Communities against Terrorism” program to train law enforcement agencies “to engage members of the local community in the fight against terrorism.” The SLATT program, however, did not receive a congressional appropriation starting in fiscal year 2015. The counterterrorism courses, including “Communities against Terrorism” are now being operated through a BJA grant by a non-governmental organization.⁹⁰

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS)

The COPS Office played a role in the development of CVE methodologies, especially on how to use community policing as an outreach and engagement tool with Muslim-American communities. During the Obama Administration, the COPS Office funded the development of training modules on community policing for CVE purposes and sponsored workshops for local law enforcement agencies.⁹¹

Department of Homeland Security

Policy Development and Coordination

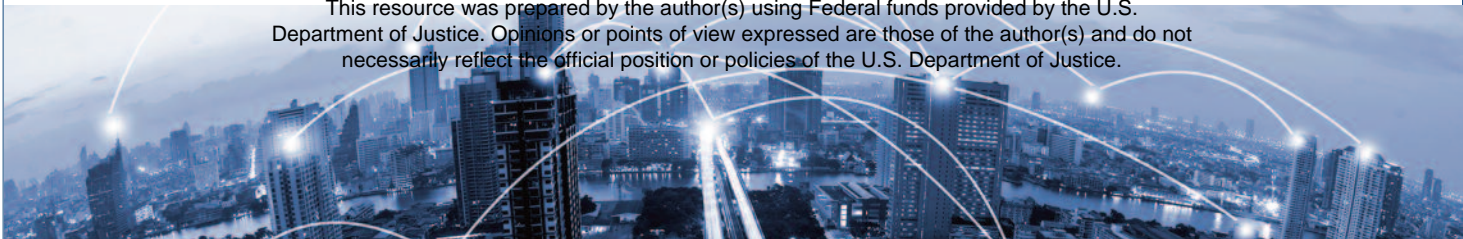
Starting in September 2015 and running through the end of the Obama Administration, DHS’s CVE activities were coordinated by the new Office of Community Partnerships. Prior to that, this function was performed by the DHS Coordinator for CVE. The first person to hold this position had other responsibilities in DHS. At some point in 2014, the Coordinator became a full time position whose job was to “leverage existing activities, create new ideas, establish a new office, and coordinate with the White House and other agencies.”

During the Obama Administration, policy formation on CVE began with the DHS Counterterrorism Advisory Board, which was chaired by the Secretary and was comprised of the leadership of relevant DHS components and offices. The DHS Office of Policy played a role, as did the CVE Coordinator, whose functions were absorbed by the Director of the Office of Community Partnerships.⁹²

During the Obama Administration, a CVE Working Group met bi-weekly to coordinate the multiple lines of effort related to CVE within DHS. The CVE activities undertaken by DHS (described in more detail below) included community engagement (primarily the function of the DHS Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties) and suspicious activity reporting related to violent extremism (the function of the Director on Intelligence and Analysis and state fusion centers). DHS also conducted “support activities” such as CVE research through the Science and Technology Director and the START Center at the University of Maryland as well as CVE training through the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. DHS also identified “CVE relevant” activities, which included functions such as screening at airports and immigration points of entry. These actions could “either positively or negatively impact CVE” depending on whether they are conducted “with respect and courtesy” or “in a way that suggests we are targeting certain individuals from certain demographics.” Those responsible for CVE work interacted with the relevant components to mitigate negative CVE impacts these activities might produce.

Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL)

The Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties was created as part of the DHS in 2003. It was charged with “promoting respect for civil rights and civil liberties in policy creation and implementation” and “investigating and resolving civil rights and civil liberties complaints filed by the public” about DHS policies or activities.⁹³



Community Roundtables

As part of this mission, CRCL began engaging with Arab and Muslim-American communities well before the national CVE strategy was issued in 2011. As a DHS official noted:

When we first started to conduct community engagements back in 2005 and 2006, we were mostly looking for communities that we felt did not have a mature ability to work with the government. [Many minority communities] had plenty of advocacy organizations that knew how to pick up the phone and call their local congressman or get meetings in Washington. The Arab and Muslim communities, however . . . were not well-established in their government relations. There were few advocacy organizations. There were very few community groups that were meeting with the government on a regular basis.

Since these communities feared that they might be disproportionately affected by DHS activities or policies, CRCL decided to use engagement to “help them have a relationship with the department.”

Although initial efforts were directed towards Arab and Muslim communities, CRCL eventually determined that this narrow approach was unwarranted: “We decided we were risking a situation where the [Arab and Muslim] community would feel that we had essentially deemed it a problem child,” a DHS official said, “so we decided to broaden the engagement to include any community group, either advocacy-based, ethnicity-based, charitable-based.” CRCL opened up engagement efforts to include “not just those communities that are particularly vulnerable to violent extremism but other communities that have an interest in dialogue with the department.” This engagement took the form of “community roundtables” where CRCL brought together community leaders with officials from various agencies – including DHS, federal, state and local agencies and law enforcement – to discuss strategies and identify problems.

Quarterly roundtables were initiated in six cities, and by 2015 were being conducted regularly in 15 cities (Portland, ME, Boston, New York, Washington, Columbus, Detroit, Chicago, Minneapolis, Atlanta, Tampa, Houston, Denver, Seattle, Los Angeles, and Phoenix).

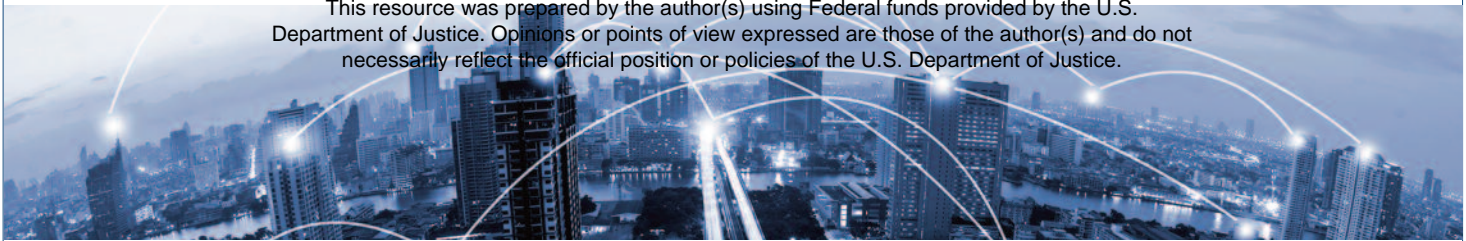
When the national strategy was rolled out in 2011, CRCL’s engagement efforts were folded into the DHS’s CVE Initiative. As one CRCL official noted, “DHS looked within to see what it could leverage in the CVE area. CRCL was “already out in the field with the quarterly roundtables, so this was an easy way in.” Another official said that “community engagement is not for CVE – it was almost an accident – DHS realized it needed a policy/strategy to address CVE and engagement became an important part of it.”

Yet, many officials took pains to distinguish between CRCL’s outreach and CVE. One official said, “When CRCL meets with communities, CVE is only one of many topics they address.” Another asserted that “DHS doesn’t do engagement just for CVE. We have engagement because it is important to have open lines with communities.” Similarly, a DHS official said, “We have always been in the business of never confirming or denying that there is any association between our engagement work and efforts to counter violent extremism because we were worried the [Muslim] community would react harshly to this.” DHS officials acknowledged, however, that CVE can be a side benefit of effective engagement with communities:

CRCL is intent on affording an opportunity for communities to learn about programs and policies, share their insights, and work on collaborative projects. If some of these happen to be CVE projects, all the better.

Community Awareness Briefings and Community Resilience Exercises

Working in conjunction with the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC), CRCL developed two CVE-related activities that could be used during outreach events with communities. The first was a power point presentation to educate community members about the threat of violent extremism – known as the Community Awareness Briefing (“the CAB”). The second was an



interactive exercise for community members and law enforcement that presented scenarios about individuals showing signs of radicalization to violence designed to promote discussions about what actions should be taken in such circumstances. Such sessions were called Community Resilience Exercises (CREXs).

The CAB was developed before the national strategy, but it eventually became incorporated into efforts by DHS and other agencies to better inform communities about the threat of violent extremism. As one DHS staff said, “it is DHS’s way of telling the community that there is a threat.” The CAB was a dynamic product, constantly updated to incorporate current events. It addressed the concept of violent extremism and theories about so-called “push and pull” factors that move individuals towards engaging in acts of ideologically motivated violence. The CAB addressed different forms of violent extremism, including extremism motivated by groups like al Qaeda and ISIS, racist extremism, anti-government extremism and other forms.

The CAB was often presented to community groups as an outgrowth of community roundtables, or engagements initiated by other agencies, such as the United States Attorneys. DHS usually pursued a sequenced approach. As one official explained:

Community engagement is a grievance driven process. Many grievances open the door to CVE. Airing of grievances begins conversation, then DHS suggests the CAB. It starts moving from there.

In the years following the issuance of the national strategy, the CAB was delivered almost exclusively by CRCL and NCTC. Later, DHS and NCTC began training other agencies on how to deliver the CAB – a “train the trainer” model. The CAB was pushed out to United States Attorneys and, via groups like the International Association of Chiefs of Police, to state and local law enforcement. State and major urban area fusion centers were also trained to deliver the CAB to local communities as part of the Building Communities of Trust program (see below).

The CREX was a more participatory engagement activity than the CAB. It was used after communities gained some comfort interacting with government officials, including local law enforcement. The CREX was organized and delivered by federal officials in conjunction with local partners. The participants were community members and local law enforcement personnel. During a CREX, the participants were divided into mixed, small groups and presented with scenarios. As a CRCL official explained, during a CREX:

They play out scenarios of proposed violent extremist incidents from an early stage extremist to an operational extremist. We have the community members and local law enforcement exchange hats and play out what they would do in different stages in the scenario. We are hoping to have law enforcement and community members explain their perceptions and roles.

DHS officials believed the CREX served multiple purposes. It began to “create understanding between law enforcement and the community about what each would face if a real-life situation unfolded” and brought “people to the table to begin a dialogue.” One official noted that “these exercises . . . have led to community members having an ‘aha’ moment, as in ‘aha, we really have to take this threat seriously.’” Furthermore, the official said that “towards the end” of the exercise, the community members come to realize that they own the space that is ‘pre-crime,’ or, in other words, that communities have the responsibility to “engage with a person who is exhibiting signs of violent extremism.” Ideally from DHS’s perspective, the community would become motivated to “notice the signs [of radicalization to violence], engage the person, get the types of services that might get them off that path . . . before law enforcement gets involved.”

DHS officials lamented that they often lacked the resources to build on the CREX, which was only provided to a limited number of people. DHS wanted law enforcement and communities to meet again after the CREX to develop an action plan. “It could be as simple as a local police department establishing a community advisory board or a local mosque choosing to hire a social worker or counselor.” However, DHS officials uniformly noted that “we don’t have a program to follow through and teach the community what they can and should do.” Even for communities that did develop an action plan, “the main grievance is . . .

they ask where to apply for funds [to implement the plan], but we have nowhere to send them.” An NCTC official involved with the CREX said, “the problem with CREX is that it’s hard to get follow-up . . . almost all [participants] recommend the need for intervention models.”

DHS and NCTC did conduct some informal evaluations of the CREX, including a five-question evaluation form that participants filled in after the sessions. Evaluations from community members, an official noted, were “usually off the charts positive.” Results from law enforcement participants, however, were often “more mixed.” “Law enforcement,” the NCTC official speculated, “are looking for a prescribed process, that if they do a set of things, then the relationship with the community will be built.” But that expectation was unrealistic. “The CREX is only intended to start the conversation.”

Office of Intelligence and Analysis

The DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) played a role in CVE through its support for state and major urban area fusion centers. These centers are operated by state and local authorities and staffed by multiple agencies and private sector partners.⁹⁴ They collect, receive, and analyze data from multiple sources and develop threat-related information and intelligence to law enforcement and homeland security agencies.⁹⁵

Fusion centers ran the Building Communities of Trust program in 15 metropolitan areas as a means for building strong relationships between local law enforcement and communities.⁹⁶ This program was part of the National Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative, which relies on community members to notify law enforcement of activities that may be criminal or precursors of criminal activity – a campaign familiarly known as “See Something, Say Something.”⁹⁷ CRCL trained fusion centers on how to deliver the CAB and conduct CREXs as a means of building relationships between communities and local law enforcement. Pushing these programs out through the fusion centers provided greater bandwidth for this CVE efforts than CRCL could muster on its own.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Although CVE is not a primary responsibility of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), CBP is one of many DHS units that can have an impact on these efforts because it interacts with a large volume of people every day. This research project did not attempt to catalog the CVE activities of every DHS unit, but instead focused on CBP as proxy for other large DHS units such as the Transportation Security Agency, the Coast Guard, or Federal Emergency Management Agency.

In some jurisdictions, a CBP official participated in community roundtables when invited by DHS or other entities like U.S. Attorneys. One CBP official from a major urban area noted that he was “pretty skeptical of involvement in CRCL events because I didn’t know how it was going to be controlled . . . but now am a total convert to CRCL’s work.” Roundtables with community members, he noted, “created a mechanism for open lines of communication that went beyond the individual experiences that filter in through the complaint box.”

During the Obama Administration, this success was achieved by allowing community members to talk about “the trials they have experienced [at borders].” “Our response has always been transparency. We tell them, give us a name and we will look into the situation that occurred. We find out how people were treated and tell them why.”

The roundtables also provided CBP a chance to explain their policies and set expectations. For example, a CBP official said the agency proved to be an effective way to address specific complaints of travelers who were held up coming into the country due to security concerns. They set up a process with CRCL so that complaints came to him “in about real time.” He could then respond quickly, again through CRCL, “to say if there was a legitimate law enforcement reason to hold a person as long as they did.”

The CBP official recalled that a traveler from Somalia was angry because he was always questioned upon re-entry to the U.S. “We told him – yes we will talk to you every time you come back from Kenya or Somalia because of the conflict going on in that region.” The official noted that even though the person was not happy, at least “we made some inroads” and were “being honest about why we do things.”

CBP also worked during the Obama Administration to improve the process for addressing complaints about the no-fly list through the CRCL roundtables:

People will come to a CRCL event and volunteer that they have a no-fly record. We leverage the CRCL connection to inform CBP of their travel plans. We can then anticipate them coming to the checkpoint and do some initial vetting before they show up. It can still take some time, but it is faster.

National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC)

NCTC serves as the “primary organization in the U.S. government for integrating and analyzing all intelligence pertaining to terrorism possessed or acquired by the U.S. government (except purely domestic terrorism) and provides all-source intelligence support to government wide counterterrorism activities.”⁹⁸ As the key repository of information about homegrown terrorism threats inspired by foreign actors, NCTC was a key partner in developing and implementing the CVE strategy and sat on the CVE Task Force.⁹⁹

NCTC was a lead agency in developing, delivering, and updating both the Community Awareness Brief (CAB) and the Community Resilience Exercise (CREX). NCTC stated that its participation in these community outreach activities was “an effort to share information about how members of our communities are being targeted and recruited to join terrorists overseas.”¹⁰⁰ NCTC also trained other local and federal officials on how to make use of the CAB and CREX.¹⁰¹

Nonetheless, NCTC officials realized that the agency was not set up to be the main conduit for CVE messaging and materials. “We have 5 people working full time on community engagement,” the NCTC official noted, “but we cannot meet the demand for training; it is too high.” NCTC told us that since it was a strategic-level organization, it was “pulling back from doing CVE outreach.” Resources would be better spent, the official said, “developing capacities,” “creating a train the trainer system,” and on “overall strategy, planning, and interagency integration.”

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

Defining the Structure and Proper Role of CVE Within the FBI

The FBI created a Countering Violent Extremism Office (CVEO) within the National Security Branch in January, 2012 to execute the responsibilities assigned to it in the White House CVE strategy. A year later, the CVEO was reassigned to the Counter Terrorism Division’s Domestic Terrorism Operations Section, under the National Joint Terrorism Task Force.¹⁰² Another reassignment took place in 2015, leading to the placement of the CVEO in the Office of Partner Engagement, where it resided at the end of the Obama Administration. There were at least five different directors of the FBI’s CVEO between 2012-16. By late 2016, the CVEO had 8 full-time equivalent employees.

This organizational churn reflected the difficulty the CVEO had defining an appropriate role in the federal CVE Initiative for the FBI in light of its responsibility as the lead intelligence and criminal investigatory agency in the United States for counterterrorism.

One official noted, “when the Initiative was created in 2012, the FBI was just answering mail.” By mid-2014, however, CVEO had developed a strategic plan and had accumulated some resources and support, at least at the FBI headquarters level. This plan identified six core focus areas: focused engagement, leveraging FBI subject matter expertise, building CVE expertise, establishing CVE training curriculum, countering violent extremist propaganda, and aligning CVE efforts with field office strategic planning. The concept behind this plan was to use a range of unique FBI resources to contribute information and expertise to the national CVE effort, while also “encouraging incorporation of CVE into every field office.” The CVEO was the locus for compiling and disseminating this CVE information and expertise – such as information about indicators of radicalization from the FBI’s Behavioral Analysis Unit – as well as arranging meetings with field offices to urge them to use outreach, engagement, and other CVE tools as part of a comprehensive effort to prevent violent extremism.

As late as 2015, however, the concept of CVE faced resistance within the FBI. The congressionally directed “9/11 Review Commission” – comprised of former attorney general Edwin Meese, former congressman and ambassador Timothy Roemer, and terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman – noted that during interviews and meetings with FBI personnel, it “heard doubts . . . regarding the FBI’s central role in the CVE program.”¹⁰³ Based on these criticisms, the Commission concluded that the FBI’s “fundamental law enforcement and intelligence responsibilities do not make it an appropriate vehicle for the social and prevention role in the CVE mission.” Starkly, the Commission recommended that “the CVE mission¹⁰⁴ should be transferred from the FBI to DHS or distributed among other agencies more directly involved with community interaction.”¹⁰⁵

Despite this high-level recommendation, at the end of the Obama Administration, the CVEO remained in existence, had a budget, participated in the CVE Task Force, and continued to implement its 6-point strategic plan. In contrast to the FBI officials interviewed by the 9/11 Review Commission, those interviewed for this study expressed confidence that the CVE mission had support at the highest levels of the FBI and was “here to stay.” Again, this report has not attempted to verify these activities during the Trump Administration.

FBI Outreach and Engagement with Muslim Communities through CVE

Our interviews indicated that the FBI perceived the community outreach and engagement component of CVE as part and parcel of its traditional role as a crime prevention agency. As one supervisor noted:

The FBI has always done outreach. It is part of everything we do . . . You are always plugged into the community. We are not successful if we aren’t engaged.

Another official echoed this sentiment:

A lot of what we do isn’t new. We socialize best practices. Our outreach efforts are the best in the federal government. But that doesn’t mean we can’t get better.

Following 9/11, however, as a lead FBI official noted, “we realized we weren’t as assertive with [outreach with] the Muslim-American community as we needed to be.” The FBI “made a push,” primarily at the local field office level, “to reach out and build relationships” in the Muslim-American community. This outreach had two core purposes: first, “to break down some of the barriers and misunderstandings of what the FBI was doing and could do,” and second, “to put a name to a face . . . so if they had concerns about threats or attacks they could come in and talk to some folks.” As one official explained, the message the FBI delivered to the community via outreach was:

I would like you to tell me if you are afraid that someone is going to commit violence – your social group, your knitting group, your Facebook friends. If you know somebody that is going to go cut people’s heads off, we want to know.

It is clear, however, that the CVEO's advocacy for "focused engagement" involved far more than pushing FBI local field offices to just extend traditional pre-9/11 FBI outreach efforts to Muslim-American communities post-9/11.

First, the CVEO characterized CVE as a more intensive effort at community outreach than had been previously attempted. "CVE is the next evolution [of outreach.] Community diners, going to bingo halls . . . this is unique for the FBI." Additionally, a CVEO official noted, "we are asking [agents] to talk to the community . . . ask them what they need . . . see if we can provide it."

Despite the FBI's desire to do more than their traditional outreach approach through CVE, the FBI acknowledged that it lacked capacity to build the kind of relationships that local law enforcement agencies can establish through activities like community policing. "We aren't a community policing arm like a local police department," an FBI official noted, "local law enforcement's ability to touch the community is greater than ours."

A second aspect of CVE, according to the FBI, was community education. As one official explained:

We want the community to be informed. We want them to know what to look for at the earliest stages when a young youth is starting to move along the radicalization line.

Another FBI official elaborated that part of the CVE mission was to educate community members about possible indicators of radicalization that the FBI had developed through its Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU):

We have our BAU science folks; they study this all the time. You can look for some commonalities. There [are] arguably different versions of [extremism], but even within these versions, there are commonalities, you can say – look for this . . . if they read certain magazines, that doesn't make them extremists, but some extremists do read that magazine. If you add that up, we need to make sure the community leaders know what that looks like.

A third way that CVE extended beyond traditional outreach and engagement for the FBI was the development of approaches to address individuals who were at risk of radicalizing to violence but had not crossed the line by engaging in criminal conduct – those in the so-called "pre-crime" space. The FBI noted that if they learned about someone who had crossed this line and was "looking to hurt someone and is finding the means to do it" then "there are few other options than law enforcement at that point." However, "if it looks like the [the person's intention] is clearly aspirational and [he doesn't] have the ability to do anything, we have to look for other tools." An important part of CVE for the FBI, therefore, was to work with communities to develop these "tools," that is, to help build capacity to address the problem of youth who might be radicalizing to violence:

I want them to be able to intervene however they can. Whether it is a coach, a teacher, an imam, I want them to be able to take that person under their wing and try to help us police the community in a positive way. A positive role model who can see that occurring.

The effort to develop non-criminal law enforcement "tools" in these circumstances was currently labeled "intervention" under the 2016 strategic plan. When asked if the Bureau had a role in "intervention," an FBI official responded:

I think we have a small one . . . We are law enforcement. That is what we do. Mostly, I would turn it over to community leaders . . . They don't want the FBI coming to these interventions. They understand what we can do and what we can't do.

Another official put it this way:

If we can get it early enough, the community can get engaged and we have a chance of success . . . If the only tool is a law enforcement tool, which means at the end of the day an arrest . . . that is not a solution since we can't arrest our way out of this problem.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Outreach and Engagement by the FBI with Muslim-American Communities

Our interviews with two FBI field offices showed that multiple agents had been involved in extensive outreach and engagement with Muslim-American communities for years prior to the onset of the CVE Initiative in 2011. In fact, as of mid-2015, these local FBI agents were conducting outreach and engagement, but were generally unaware of the 2011 national strategy or the efforts to implement that strategy by the FBI's CVEO.

One of these offices identified multiple ways they interacted with Muslim-American leaders and communities. The primary effort was to meet and build relationships with as many imams as possible across the state. In their view, "getting to specific imams is important because they have the kind of power that when they say it, the congregation will follow." They also invited Muslim-American community members to attend an FBI Citizens Academy, an eight-week course to educate a wide range of constituents about the FBI's purpose, policies, and practices. A third strategy was going to as many community events as possible, both in the Muslim community and those held by various businesses or religious and ethnic groups, to encourage people to contact the FBI if they needed help or saw suspicious behavior. As one agent explained:

Anytime an FBI agent goes out and speaks with someone, he or she is representing the bureau. I'll give out my card. I hope that if something ever happened that worried that person, he would remember: "I met that guy from the FBI, he was a half decent guy, I'll give him a call." So, no matter what we do, we are shaking hands, giving out cards—putting a personal face on the FBI. We will get tips from that . . . We serve the people of the country, the people of the state. You have to be accessible to do that.

The field office agents made clear that, in their minds, the purpose of outreach is to meet people, start relationships, and build trust, not to recruit community members to inform on individuals who are possibly radicalizing to violence. As one agent said, "it is not necessarily that we are asking [imams] to look inside their mosques to identify somebody that is there." Another noted that when he goes to a community event:

I don't ask for names, business cards. This is one guy showing up by myself. Hopefully, I walked out with a friendship. I don't know how you can change the perception that we are asking for something. But in the meetings I have around the state, I don't ask for anything. Nonetheless, these same agents referred to imams they had built relationships with as "trip-wires" and "liaisons." The FBI "brings folks in and gives them an understanding of what we do and why we do it," hoping that "when something does happen, they will reach out and call us."

Agents noted that when a trip-wire or liaison imam sees an individual who is "acting very radical:"

The mosque has two options, it can run him off and not say anything, or it can run him off and then contact us and say, "this happened." We want the second option.

They also said that the imams "want to help us identify . . . radical people in their mosque . . . they bring things forward to us." "I don't know that anyone has knocked on our front door and said, 'I am a terrorist, come look at me.' We rely on those people who are in the community."

Another agent reported being more overt in his communications with the Muslim community. He said, "If we talk to people at the mosque or in the schools, that is to make sure that there's nobody in their community that's going to do harm." He reported telling community members that:

I would certainly be interested in hearing about those people and would be interested in doing so in a way that did not compromise your identity.

The field office agents also said that another important purpose of outreach is to cure misperceptions of the FBI in the Muslim community. One agent explained:

A lot of people don't understand what we do. [Outreach is] about taking away their misconceptions. There is a lot of stuff on the internet that is not true. People read this and they have this wild imagination about what the FBI does. And it is just not true.

For example, the field office agents believe that community outreach can help the FBI change community perceptions that the FBI routinely uses undercover operations or confidential informants to convince Muslim youth to commit crimes so they could be prosecuted. In one example, an agent reported that an imam had told him that people in the community believed that the FBI was “framing people.” The imam asked the agent about a specific arrest that troubled the community. The agent said he answered those questions so that the imam, with whom he had established trust, could go back to the community and explain, “with the additional information,” how the case had unfolded. “Hopefully,” the agent noted, “he was able to go out and change that perception.” “If it is [just] us putting it out there,” he admitted, “I don’t think it is going to resonate.”

Another agent had a very different approach. He said, “A large part of what I do is educate people . . . as to what a jihadist thinks.” During his presentations at mosques, he said, “I cite the writings of bin Laden, of Anwar al Awlaki, and even [ibn] Tamiyah.” He noted that for “many in the modern Muslim community . . . it’s the first time they’ve ever heard of it.”

Besides the development of intervention programs, the FBI believes that part of CVE is intensified communication with community members on specific cases, especially those involving youth. For example, in a case regarding a young person under criminal investigation, the FBI reported that:

The parents call up, we can put on a show. Black suits, ties. You are doing something bad. You are breaking the law. We talked to [the person] eight times. We brought an imam in because the parents wanted us to. We said, hey you are not even understanding what this religion is about . . . It is [like] scared straight.

FBI Efforts to Push CVE to Field Office Level

Our interviews indicated that efforts to incorporate CVE into the culture and operations of the 56 regional field offices remained a work in progress at the end of the Obama Administration. The CVEO had responsibility for communicating FBI policy to the field office Special Agent in Charge (SAC) and Assistant Special Agents in Charge (ASACs), educating field office leadership, agents, and civilian communications specialists, and providing tools such as briefings, slides, and “indicators of radicalization cards” to the field offices.

Officials admitted that at first, the entire CVE concept was a hard sell: “The first response is no, not us; we aren’t going to do that.” That resistance was based on two concerns: first, that much of CVE was a departure from the traditional role of a law enforcement agency and second, that CVE duties drained limited resources away from higher priority issues faced by field offices. An official described the field office attitude as being, “we really can’t afford to take away from something else . . . we don’t have a lot of fat anymore . . . so am I going to take someone off of al-Qaeda to do CVE?” Eventually, however, the CVEO found that SACs would “get it,” meaning they understood that prevention efforts could enhance community safety and reduce the burden on the FBI by, hopefully, reducing the number of criminal investigations and prosecutions.

FBI officials described the process of familiarizing field offices with CVE as labor intensive, highly personalized, and regionally variable. Success at a field level office depended on factors such as the attitude of the SAC, the relationship between the SAC and the U.S. Attorney, the population density of the field office, and the receptivity of the relevant Muslim-American community to the CVE concept.

By the end of 2015, the CVEO was reporting markers of success. A lead person (which could be an ASAC, an agent, or a communications specialist, depending on the office) had been identified for all 56 field offices. Also, CVE had been incorporated into the field office annual report card through a requirement that each office sponsor two CVE events per year. As a supervisor noted, "it sounds silly . . . but getting on [the report card] was a huge step." Putting CVE into the "integrated program management tool" meant that CVE was now on the FBI director's "radar." A CVEO official noted that after CVE became a report card item, "SACs in hard to reach offices were asking us to fly out and tell them what this was all about."

Officials recognized that the FBI's rotation policy negatively impacted community engagement activities, because after 2-3 years, SACs, ASACs, and agents with whom the community had built a relationship were replaced with new personnel. "A problem, no; but it's a challenge," an FBI official conceded. However, he noted, the rotation policy had the benefit of providing an opportunity "for new leaders to come in with fresh ideas and the ability to think differently about a problem set."

FBI Role in Building CVE Interventions

During our interviews in 2015, FBI officials expressed a keen interest in developing programs for youths who the FBI believed were at-risk of radicalization to violent extremism. As a high-ranking FBI official noted:

What we would like to have someday is a system that allows an "off ramp," a tool in the space between the law enforcement answer and doing nothing . . . The problem in this country is that there is no middle tool.

By 2016, this had become the top focus of the CVEO. When a CVEO official was asked the "specific problem the [CVE] program was trying to address," the curt answer was, "taking a young person off the path of violence – that's it. Pretty simple."

Our research shows that the FBI was developing the concept of intervention at the field office level prior to 2015, but then moved more aggressively to begin developing a more formal and widespread intervention capacity in 2015 through the "Shared Responsibility Committee" concept. As an FBI official noted, "the FBI has been doing intervention for a long time . . . the [SRCs] are just formalizing a process that has been ad hoc in many areas." The SRC approach, however, was criticized both within and outside the government during 2016 and then modified through the CVE Taskforce.

Development of Shared Responsibility Committees

The FBI's envisioned creating a nationwide network of intervention teams, organized on an FBI field office basis, to provide counseling services for individuals under law enforcement investigation. The hope was that treatment could render the criminal investigation and possible prosecution unnecessary.

The intervention teams – given the awkward label Shared Responsibility Committees (SRCs) by the FBI – were comprised of six to eight persons trained and cleared to receive classified information. SRCs were comprised of primarily mental health professionals, but also included religious authorities, educators, or counselors on a case-by-case basis. SRCs were modeled on other intervention efforts the FBI had used in different contexts.

Prior to joining an SRC, potential members were asked to attend a briefing session and required to sign an "informed consent letter." This consent letter discussed, among other things, the possibility that SRC members could be subpoenaed to testify or sued, and therefore should purchase insurance. It also outlined the privacy and other statutory rights of individuals referred to the SRC, including the right to have confidential communication with a mental health professional. According to the FBI, this disclosure letter contained standard information familiar to most mental health professionals.

The FBI could refer individuals to these teams only under specific circumstances. The referral could be made after the Bureau had opened a preliminary investigation, but then determined that the individual could benefit from some form of professional

treatment and that the treatment might obviate the need for a criminal prosecution. While the SRCs arose out of the CVE effort, an FBI official noted that “labels such as CVE muddy the waters” and that referrals could have been made regarding violent extremists from any ideological group, gangs, or suspected school shooters. Officials from the CVEO, the relevant FBI field office, DOJ, and prosecutors were all involved in deciding whether to refer an individual to an SRC.

The FBI emphasized that referral of an individual to an SRC did not terminate a criminal investigation or indicate a conclusive determination that a law enforcement approach would be not be pursued. Criminal investigations of referred individuals remained open and continued to gather facts. The progress of the individual in the treatment process, as well as the judgements of the SRC team members, however, could be considered by the FBI in deciding how to ultimately handle a case. As an official stated, “the SRC outcome is just one data point in that determination.”

However, SRCs were independent from the FBI. The members did not need to inform the FBI about what they were doing or how they were doing it. The FBI could make inquiries of an SRC to learn “if the intervention is failing . . . or if they think they are finished and have been successful.”

Our research team was told in mid-2016 that this system was in a “demonstration” phase, with fewer than a dozen SRCs in place (At the time, FBI Director James Comey publicly stated the concept was being piloted in 3-5 cities).¹⁰⁶ The FBI confirmed that individuals other than those inspired by ISIS and al Qaeda had been referred to SRCs but would not provide more detailed data or a breakdown of the proportion of SRC referrals by ideology.

Roll-Back of the SRC Program

Muslim-American advocacy and civil rights organizations were briefed on the SRC approach in 2015 and many expressed their concerns to the FBI about both the concept and its implementation. While many of these advocates supported the concept of intervention and welcomed efforts to divert individuals from the criminal justice system, they opposed the SRC program.¹⁰⁷

By March–April 2016, criticism of the SRC concept and pilot program became public. Some of the criticisms arose from initial press coverage of SRCs that inaccurately characterized them as part of a “sophisticated, if sometimes intrusive, outreach-and-informant program.”¹⁰⁸ This characterization resulted in SRCs being wrapped into a broad set of concerns about the FBI’s counterterrorism efforts in general.¹⁰⁹

Advocates also raised specific concerns about the SRCs, many derived from the informed consent letter, which also became public. These concerns included information sharing provisions of the letter which advocates interpreted as authorizing the FBI to “seize notes by SRC religious leaders and mental health professionals.”¹¹⁰ Advocates also worried that “people on the committees would be ordinary citizens with little training who may well have individuals biases.”¹¹¹ Some groups also argued that SRCs could undermine community-based counseling and intervention efforts because individuals who were being counseled by an imam or therapist would wonder if they are “working with the FBI – an entity that could very well arrest him/her.”¹¹²

Advocacy groups reported that they were informed that the SRC program was being canceled in early November 2016. Our research did not confirm cancellation of existing SRCs, but rather that the government was taking a different approach to interventions and that the FBI would not be taking the lead or have a direct supervisory role over the SRCs. This change in approach was developed through the interagency CVE Task Force. A DOJ official stated that future intervention programs would be developed organically from communities. Under the new approach, the FBI could refer cases to these programs, but the FBI would not play a role in organizing, funding, or providing a legal framework for the interventions.

We do not have information about the status of SRCs, or other intervention efforts, under the Trump Administration.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Outreach and Engagement by FBI Agents with Non-Muslim Communities

FBI officials acknowledged that CVE “can’t just focus on one community and has to be broader.” Nonetheless, this same official argued that preventing radicalization of Muslim youth “happens to be the [concern] that is most urgent right now because of the issues we see with homegrown violent extremism and the ability of ISIL to prey on susceptible youth.” He continued:

We deal with every community differently. I wish it wasn't like that. Even ideologically, we have to deal with each differently.

An FBI official explained, for example, that to address the threat from sovereign citizen extremists, the FBI had supported a “massive initiative” to educate communities about the risk that sovereign citizens present. Yet, the FBI noted challenges in doing traditional outreach like community meetings, building relations with leaders, and attending events with communities to discuss this form of extremism. “The problem is,” the official noted, “that it is more difficult to find a group to focus on.” He continued:

It is just so broad, it is not like [sovereign citizens] are coming out of one community. They are coming out of all communities. We are seeing them blend into many of the other groups. Some of the white supremacists are sovereign citizens; some of the anti-abortion [extremists] are sovereign citizens, so it is very, very difficult to do it.

Another official agreed that traditional outreach methods will not work with sovereign citizens:

The sovereigns are the biggest anomaly ever. They won't speak to anyone . . . They don't even recognize that we exist.

The FBI’s approach to preventing white supremacist violent extremism also departed from the CVE model. Efforts to prevent white supremacist violence, one official said, are conducted primarily through quiet communication with known group leaders. Meetings cannot be in public, the official noted, because in public “they have to say: ‘screw you” to the FBI” So contact is made on the telephone, a context in which leaders are more willing to identify individuals who they believe may be interested or willing to engage in violence. An official said that when the FBI threatened to come down hard on a group if any of its members engage in violence:

50 percent of the time – they come back with a list. And I'll tell you, when a white supremacist leader tells me: "This guy is too crazy for us," that is someone we need to get on right away, because that is a nut. . . . Sometimes the response is "screw you." But almost 100 percent of the time, two hours later, we get a phone call, "why don't you look at [person x], here is his phone number." That is the baseline.

The FBI official also reported that the Bureau’s relationships with leaders of certain extremist groups enabled it to serve as intermediaries with other agencies and stave off confrontation. For example, the official said that when militia groups were headed to the Bundy Ranch in 2014 where there was a confrontation with the Bureau of Land Management and law enforcement, “we were able to contact [the militias] and say, hey guys, this is wrong . . . this is not going to end well.”

We found a similar approach to addressing white supremacy, sovereign citizens and other forms of domestic extremism at the FBI field office level. Communities that are “anti-government,” the field office officials said, “aren’t always open to contact.” As one agent put it, “You can’t walk up to the door to a militia group and say ‘Hi, we are the FBI, we’d like to talk to you.” So, the FBI tries to “establish trip-wires,” and “from time to time we make attempts to reach out to them . . . to see their willingness . . . to provide information about people who they believe might be threats.” But in identifying potential “trip-wires,” the FBI field agents made clear that they were searching for potential insiders, “where we develop confidential sources.” When asked if the

FBI reached out to non-violent, established leaders or other contacts inside communities to serve as domestic terrorism “trip-wires” as it does with law-abiding Muslim communities, one agent clarified that:

FBI: I want to stay away from identifying particular groups, like if I said we were going to tattoo parlors [to develop trip-wires] that would be . . .

Questioner: Stigmatizing?

FBI: Yes, I don't want to imply that everyone that hangs out at tattoo parlors are domestic terrorists.

Questioner: Of course, Muslims say the same thing, that you are doing outreach to us because you think we are terrorists and we feel stigmatized.

FBI: That is mischaracterized though . . . We are asking them to help us about the new threats . . . of youths being radicalized in their basements . . . Folks in the community want the same thing.

FBI Policy on the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR)

A discussion of the FBI's policy toward the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is necessary because, as we detail later in the report, we found that the policy impacted Muslim's attitudes toward the FBI, and therefore its ability to engage fully with the Muslim-American community.

CAIR is a non-profit group with a stated mission “to enhance understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil rights, promote justice, and empower American Muslims.”¹¹³

In 2008, the FBI restricted non-investigative contacts with all CAIR personnel and branches. This policy was established in response to a criminal terrorism financing investigation and prosecution by the Department of Justice that uncovered evidence showing a “relationship” between members of CAIR leadership and Hamas, which was designated as an international terrorist organization in 1995.¹¹⁴ CAIR was listed as an unindicted co-conspirator in the criminal case – United States v. Holy Land Foundation. That unindicted co-conspirator status, however, was never subjected to evidentiary scrutiny or affirmed in any way by a court.¹¹⁵

CAIR has consistently denied its association with Hamas and bitterly protested its listing as an unindicted co-conspirator in the Holy Land Foundation case. CAIR, along with 245 other groups and individuals, challenged this designation in federal court after the Holy Land Foundation case was concluded. A federal district court held that the government's unindicted co-conspirator listings violated the complainants' Fifth Amendment rights. The court ordered the documents naming these groups and individuals to be sealed retroactively and subsequently, the U.S. government conceded that the failure to file the original filing under seal was “an unfortunate oversight.”¹¹⁶ When the trial court filed its written opinion under seal, the complainants appealed. The court of appeals ordered the lower court opinion to be released to the public so that CAIR and the other groups could attempt to “mitigate the damage done by its public identification as a possible coconspirator.”¹¹⁷

According to official statements by the FBI, the purpose of the policy is “to ensure that the FBI is not supporting individuals who support extremist or terrorist ideologies.”¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the FBI stated that until it could “resolve whether there continues to be a connection between CAIR or its executives and HAMAS, the FBI does not view CAIR as an appropriate liaison partner.”¹¹⁹

The policy affects community outreach interactions between the FBI and CAIR and does not preclude FBI officials from meeting with CAIR to address criminal or civil rights investigations.¹²⁰ Various communications from FBI headquarters to FBI field offices detailed that CAIR officials could not be invited to any FBI sponsored events, FBI officials were prohibited from attending CAIR sponsored events (including annual banquets), and that CAIR could no longer provide sensitivity training on Islam to FBI agents.¹²¹ FBI headquarters informed their field offices that if CAIR was their “primary point of contact” with the local Muslim-American community, “the field office must establish an alternative point of contact for any future community outreach

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Intervention Activities in FBI Field Offices

Our research showed that the FBI was using the concept of intervention to address individuals who the Bureau suspected of radicalizing to violence even prior to the creation of SRCs. As one field office agent noted:

Everyone thinks we just arrest everyone . . . But in this office, we help some of the youths get back on the right track.

These intervention efforts mainly involved imams or other community leaders counseling to young people who might have been radicalizing on-line. Agents involved in the process believed that this kind of community-based intervention was far more effective than bringing a 15-year-old kid into an FBI office and having an agent “read him the riot act” and tell him “what he is doing is wrong and not what Islam is teaching.” Rather, this field office “has an imam that will do this.” Including the community in such interventions, the agents believed, “will go a long way to establishing trust in the community.”

These intervention techniques were used when an individual’s activities “warrants our attention.” The FBI field office agents noted that individuals did not come under FBI scrutiny solely because of things they had said, or other First Amendment protected activity. “It is more than just the video watching,” the agent said, “they have hit a threshold . . . like saying ‘I want to join ISIS.’ That is not something we would want to wait to see if it materializes.” Another said that:

You have a person who has gone from watching radical videos to taking overt steps to do things like travel or making contact with people overseas who can facilitate travel. Sometime the information we have is from families . . . who are trying to stop something worse from happening.

When such an individual came to the FBI’s attention, the agent said that “we meet with the family and with the person and offer them an opportunity to meet with an imam.”

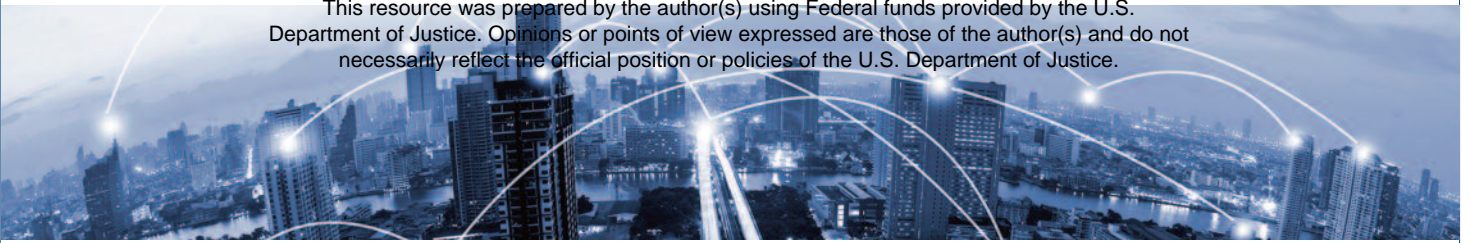
This is not an FBI scared straight kind of thing . . . this is trying to give a good kid some correct spiritual guidance. So, when they are looking at [beheading] videos they know that this is a perversion of Islam. We are giving him every opportunity to get on the right track.”

activities.”¹²² In a 2013 study, the Department of Justice Inspector General reported that some of the field offices saw the policy as “an obstacle to the overall implementation of their outreach strategy for the Muslim community.”¹²³

During the Obama Administration, the Department of Justice, which has supervisory responsibility over the FBI, did not have a similar policy barring DOJ officials, including federal prosecutors, from interactions with CAIR officials. In a report accompanying an appropriations bill in 2013, Congress urged the Attorney General to adopt a policy similar to the FBI’s.¹²⁴ The Department declined. In a letter to a member of Congress, the Department noted the “significant complexities” associated with intentional interactions between the FBI and CAIR, but stated that it preferred to deal with these issues on an “event-by-event” basis.¹²⁵ DOJ noted that it would continue to use a “context-specific approach” rather than adopt the policy exercised by the FBI.

During our interviews, we asked a high-ranking FBI official whether the FBI policy made building trust and relationships with the [Muslim] community harder for the FBI. He responded:

That is a fair question. I haven’t seen [the policy] interfere with our ability to do our job. Many times, CAIR will tell people not to cooperate with the federal government, which is unhealthy, period . . . and further builds walls between the government and the community. That is the balance we are trying to fix.



There are times when CAIR does not look out for the best interests of the community. Some leaders do. Some local leaders are fabulous. But some of the direction given to the community to flat out not cooperate. I have a problem with the way they give direction nationally. That would have to change.

When the official was reminded that the policy precluded the FBI from having discussion about this very issue with CAIR officials, he said:

That is true. And some of that is coming from Congress.

PART TWO

ANALYSIS OF THE CVE INITIATIVE

This section of the report outlines the virtues of developing a set of programs to prevent violent extremism that run alongside traditional law enforcement approaches to counterterrorism, while also detailing the significant challenges the Obama Administration faced in its effort to establish and then implement its CVE Initiative. The section concludes with a critical review of how the Obama Administration executed the program.

THE BENEFITS OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Before discussing our research findings on the problems with both the structure and implementation of the Obama Administration's CVE Initiative, it is important to underscore our core belief that the federal government should engage with Muslim-American communities and that a component of this engagement should be directed toward preventing violent extremism in the United States. This view is informed by our interactions with federal officials responsible for the Obama Administration's CVE Initiative and Muslim-American community members through this research project, as well as our policy engagement with government and non-governmental organizations, scholars, and activists over many years. Our support for federal government outreach and engagement to prevent violent extremism is based on our view that such efforts are a good faith (albeit imperfect) policy response to the serious problem of homegrown violent extremism in the United States. We are unaware of any other set of ideas, programs, or initiatives to address the underlying causes of this problem. Doing nothing but relying on law enforcement to preempt acts of violent extremism, is untenable.

To demonstrate the need for a preventative approach, this section of the report details the magnitude of violent extremism in the United States and then explains the difficulties faced by law enforcement in attempting to preempt violent extremists before they perpetrate their crimes.

The Problem of Violent Extremism in the U.S. Since 9/11

Politically motivated violence has been a feature of American life since the founding of the country. Over the centuries, a variety of ideologies have inspired both individuals and groups to use violence to attempt to advance their political causes. The September 11 attacks, of course, were the most dramatic and lethal acts of violent extremism in modern U.S. history and were remarkable because they were executed by foreigners who entered the country for the specific purpose of killing civilians for a political cause. However, violent extremism in the United States both prior to and since 9/11 has primarily been undertaken not by foreigners, but by individuals either born or raised in the United States – thus the term “homegrown violent extremism.”

Homegrown violent extremism in the United States has been motivated by a variety of ideologies. The two main sources of violent extremism in the United States in recent years have been inspired by 1) the al Qaeda/ISIS ideology and 2) ideologies falling under the umbrella term “far right extremism,”¹²⁶ which includes white supremacists, Neo-Nazis, anti-government

extremists, sovereign citizens and other sub-groups. Of course, violence associated with white supremacy has been endemic and pervasive in the United States both prior to its founding and for much of its history. These ideas continue to motivate individuals and groups to engage in violence today. In recent years there have also been deadly attacks by black nationalists and some individuals inspired by left-wing beliefs, including the mass shooting at a Republican congressional baseball team practice. In earlier decades, violent “left-wing” organizations, such as the Weather Underground and various Puerto Rican nationalist groups, were more active than they are today.¹²⁷

Data on the incidence of different forms of violent extremism between 9/11 and the end of 2018 varies from study to study, but the conclusion across studies is similar – the two main sources of threat (al Qaeda/ISIS inspired and far right extremism) produce close to the same amount of violence. According to the New America Foundation, about 50 percent of the homicides committed by violent extremists (104 out of 207) since 9/11 are attributable to individuals inspired by the al Qaeda/ISIS ideology, with just under half of the fatalities (49) occurring during the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando in 2016.¹²⁸ However, if one counts the number of deadly attacks, far right extremism accounts for a greater portion of the violence (69 percent of 55 attacks).¹²⁹ Using a different set of definitional criteria, the START Center at the University of Maryland reports that from 9/11 to the end of 2016, there were 158 deaths committed by “far right” extremists during 81 attacks and 119 deaths during 31 attacks committed by “Islamist extremists.”¹³⁰

The various data sources report that, by any measure, violent extremism has accounted for only a small percentage of the violence in America since the 9/11 attacks. From 9/11 to the end of 2018, there have been approximately 276,000 homicides in the United States.¹³¹ Yet, as the data presented above shows, fewer than 300 homicides were caused by violent extremism of any form. Put another way, violent extremism has accounted for about 1/10th of 1% of all the lethal violence in the U.S. since 9/11.

The vast majority of Americans inspired to engage in violence by al Qaeda and likeminded groups have been arrested before they could act. According to the New America database, from 9/11 to June 1, 2019, 469 individuals have been charged with “jihadist” terrorism offenses in the United States and abroad or have been killed while engaging in terrorist violence.¹³² This is about 26 perpetrators per year. Only 15 of the 469 perpetrators (3%) successfully engaged in murder.¹³³ Another 19 attackers (4%) engaged in violence in the United States but did not kill anyone.¹³⁴

Almost all of the al Qaeda/ISIS inspired violence (and attempted violence) in the United States since 9/11 has come from homegrown extremism. Eighty-four percent of the 469 perpetrators identified by New America were born in the United States or had lived in the U.S. long enough to gain legal resident status.¹³⁵ Of the 34 perpetrators that successfully engaged in violence inside the United States, 74% of them were either born in the United States (17) or had immigrated to the United States as young children or teenagers (8).¹³⁶ At least two of the six perpetrators who immigrated to the United States as adults then engaged in violence, had lived in the U.S. for an extended period before radicalizing to violence.¹³⁷ Only three of the successful perpetrators were non-immigrant foreign nationals when they committed violence in the U.S.¹³⁸

Homegrown extremism inspired by al Qaeda and ISIS peaked in 2015, but has been in steep decline since then, whereas far right extremism, especially white supremacist extremism, has increased dramatically in recent years. According to the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, a record 81 Muslim-Americans were associated with violent extremist plots in 2015, but the number of Muslim-American terrorism perpetrators dropped to 14 by 2018.¹³⁹ However, according to data compiled by the Anti-Defamation League, ideologically motivated murders by white supremacists increased from 9 in 2016, to 18 in 2017, to 39 in 2018.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, of the 50 extremist murders committed in 2018, 94% were by far right extremists (78% by white supremacists and 16% by anti-government extremists, but only 2% by domestic Islamists extremists).¹⁴¹

Despite the low incidence of violent extremism compared to other forms of violence in the United States, violent extremism in the United States imposes a vast range of societal, economic, and governmental costs. These include the incalculable costs to

the victims, their families and their communities, federal and local law enforcement resources dedicated to intelligence collection and other efforts to preempt attacks, and massive security costs to all levels of government and the private and non-profit sector for securing infrastructure and public gathering places, including everything from airports, power plants and shopping malls to religious institutions and high school sporting events.¹⁴² Strengthened security and intelligence collection policies also imposes costs, whether in the form of lost time and convenience, reduction in civil liberties, or opposition to overbearing government.

Finally, and perhaps most critically, public polling data suggests that violent extremism, of all varieties, weighs heavily on the American people and is fraying national unity. These psychic costs appear to have been caused not only by the 9/11 attacks, but also by the consistent threat of homegrown terrorism inspired by al Qaeda and ISIS in the ensuing years. For example, the portion of Americans who report being “very concerned” about “Islamic extremism” in the U.S. rose from 31% in 2005 to 53% in 2015; and the percentage of the public claiming to be “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” rose to 70% in 2017.¹⁴³ These concerns about homegrown extremism have affected how many Americans feel about Islam, Muslims in general, and Muslim Americans. A Gallup poll conducted immediately after 9/11 reported that 66% of Americans had a favorable impression of Islam, but this support has degraded over time. Every poll taken by a major news organization after 2006 has shown that more Americans have an unfavorable impression of Islam than a favorable one.¹⁴⁴ A Brookings Institution survey in 2015 found that 61% of Americans have an unfavorable opinion of Islam, and 46% have an unfavorable opinion of Muslims.¹⁴⁵ “Feeling thermometer” ratings of religious groups by the Pew Research Center consistently show that Americans rank Muslims lower than any other religious group and also lower than atheists.¹⁴⁶

Antipathy towards Muslim Americans is growing as well. Polling in 2010 reported that 25% of Americans believed that Muslim Americans are “not patriotic.” But more recent surveys by the Pew Research Center showed that about half of all Americans believe that “at least some” U.S. Muslims are anti-American. Over a third of Americans (35%) believe there is a fair amount or a great deal of extremism among Muslims living in the United States.¹⁴⁷ And half of all Americans believe that Islam is not part of mainstream American society.¹⁴⁸

Partisan differences on issues relating to Islam, terrorism, and counterterrorism policies are growing as well. A Pew survey in 2002 showed that Republicans and Democrats had very similar views about the patriotism of Muslim Americans, with 40/39 percent respectively reporting that “just a few” Muslim Americans were anti-American and 47/42 percent stating that half or more Muslim Americans were anti-American.¹⁴⁹ By 2016, a chasm in attitudes had developed: 54% of Democrats believed that few Muslim Americans were anti-American compared to 29% of Republicans.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, 63% of Republicans believed that half or more of U.S. Muslims were anti-American, whereas only 41% of Democrats thought so (with twice as many Republicans than Democrats believing that “almost all” Muslim Americans were unpatriotic).¹⁵¹ These partisan differences carried across related issues. Well over half of Republicans (56%) believed there is a fair amount or great deal of support for extremism among Muslim Americans, whereas only 22% of Democrats held this view.¹⁵²

Muslim Americans are feeling the brunt of this hardening of American’s attitudes. According to a 2017 survey by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 60% of Muslims reported experiencing religious discrimination in the past year and 42% of Muslims with children said their children had been bullied in school.¹⁵³ Over a third of Muslim Americans expressed fear for their personal or families’ safety from white supremacist groups.¹⁵⁴ These feelings reflected what was happening on the ground. The number of reported assaults against Muslims rose by 72% in 2016, surpassing the high-mark established in 2001, right after the 9/11 attacks.¹⁵⁵

Unfortunately, there is a paucity of public opinion polling on perceptions of far-right extremism in the United States. Surveys on attitudes about racial inequality are a poor proxy. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that during the resurgence of white supremacist violence from 2016-2018 and after the Charlottesville riot, views of race relations in the United States have also

soured. The percentage of Americans who believe that race relations are bad has increased from 48% to 58% from 2016 to 2019 and the percentage who believe race relations are getting worse has also increased from 38% to 53%.¹⁵⁶ A wide partisan gap on these issues has developed as well. Large majorities of Republicans (77%) believe that the people seeing racial discrimination where it doesn't exist is a bigger problem than genuine racial discrimination going unrecognized, whereas only 22% of Democrats hold this view.¹⁵⁷

The Challenge of Preventing Violent Extremism

Despite the substantial resources dedicated to preventing acts of homegrown violent extremism, federal and local law enforcement agencies have consistently emphasized the difficulty of identifying and preempting violent extremists living in the United States before they attack.

The fact that homegrown extremists are in the United States and enjoy protections under U.S. constitutional and statutory law present substantial challenges to law enforcement. Unlike international terrorists, homegrown violent extremists do not need to avoid the scrutiny of U.S. foreign intelligence collection agencies and their international partners or find a way to enter the United States. Instead of trying to infiltrate the U.S., for a decade or more, groups like al Qaeda and ISIS have focused their efforts on recruiting and indoctrinating vulnerable individuals inside the United States. They conduct this work through sophisticated social media campaigns and direct forms of person-to-person contact via messaging platforms.¹⁵⁸ While the FBI can observe communications on open social media platforms or try to obtain warrants to conduct surveillance on other communication channels, the Bureau has expressed concern in recent years about the proliferation of encrypted communication apps that it cannot access, even with a valid warrant.¹⁵⁹ Even if the domestic targets of recruitment are identified, the FBI must obtain at least probable cause of illegal conduct before it can conduct electronic surveillance. Mere discussions of extremist ideologies are constitutionally protected free speech and cannot be the basis for a search warrant, under either U.S. criminal law or even the more permissive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA).¹⁶⁰ Round the clock surveillance of suspected homegrown violent extremists is extremely cumbersome and expensive and therefore cannot be conducted for extended periods of time.¹⁶¹ Indeed, the FBI has admitted openly that it cannot conduct surveillance on all known homegrown extremist suspects.¹⁶² In 2015, soon after the attack in Garland, Texas that was only stopped because police officers were on the scene for prophylactic purposes, the FBI director at the time, James Comey, noted:

*It's an extraordinarily difficult challenge task to find . . . and then assess those who may be on a journey from talking to doing and to find and assess in an environment where increasingly . . . their communications are unavailable to us even with court orders.*¹⁶³

Finally, as many attacks in recent years have demonstrated, it does not take sophisticated planning, assistance from skilled operatives, substantial resources, or specialized expertise to execute a terrorist incident inside the United States. In an open society with limitless places where large numbers of people congregate and firearms are readily available, it does not take a mastermind to kill or injure a large number of people and spread fear throughout the populace.

Preempting violent extremism motivated by domestic political ideologies, whether white supremacy, other forms of far-right extremism, black nationalism, or anti-capitalism, is even more challenging for law enforcement than dealing with extremists inspired by al Qaeda and ISIS.

First, law enforcement has fewer tools for investigating domestic extremism. Individuals motivated by the al Qaeda/ISIS ideology have been investigated and prosecuted most frequently for illegally providing "material support" to a foreign terrorist organization.¹⁶⁴ The term "material support" is defined quite broadly, and can include virtually any expenditure of funds, labor, or providing tangible goods to any group on the federal foreign terrorist organization list.¹⁶⁵ Attempting to provide material support is also a crime, so, for example, buying a plane ticket with the intent to join a foreign fighting force is a prosecutable

offense.¹⁶⁶ However, there is no law outlawing providing material support to domestic terrorist organizations or any list of domestic terrorist organizations equivalent to the foreign terrorist organization list.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, creation of such a legal framework could raise multiple constitutional issues regarding freedom of speech and association.¹⁶⁸ So, whereas law enforcement might be able to obtain a search warrant or wiretap order based on evidence that a suspect might be planning to provide material support to al Qaeda or ISIS, this productive tool is not available during investigations of white-supremacists or anti-government extremists.¹⁶⁹

Second, law enforcement has fewer surveillance authorities for addressing terrorism based on domestic ideologies as opposed to the al Qaeda/ISIS ideology. Under the normal standards, white supremacists or other extremists in the United States may only be subjected to various forms of electronic surveillance if there is probable cause they have engaged in criminal behavior, a high standard of proof to meet. However, under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), even U.S. citizens can be surveilled if there is probable cause they have gathered intelligence for a foreign terrorist organization, prepared for or engaged in international terrorism, entered the U.S. fraudulently, or aided, abetted, or conspired with others to engage in or prepare for international terrorism.¹⁷⁰ Not only can such individuals be the subject of a FISA warrant, but their communications could also be obtained by the government, without a warrant of any kind, if they happen to be communicating with people outside the United States who are targets of foreign intelligence gathering by the government. Indeed, the target of a 2010 sting operation in Portland, Oregon was initially identified when he communicated with terrorist operatives outside the United States who were subject to warrantless foreign intelligence collection.¹⁷¹

Although these barriers exist, the FBI uses traditional law enforcement tactics and techniques to attempt to prevent homegrown violent extremism. As mentioned previously, FBI officials discussed with us at length the relationships they have built within domestic extremist organizations to obtain information about possible attacks or suspect individuals. Open source intelligence on domestic extremists is also readily available, not only on popular platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, but websites that are frequented by domestic extremists. While the number of successful attacks by domestic extremists is on the rise, there have also been numerous examples of preemptive arrests, such as the imprisonment of ex-Coast Guard white supremacist Christopher Hasson, who was arrested on weapons charges and has been characterized by the government as a “domestic terrorist . . . bent on committing acts dangerous to human life that are intended to affect government conduct.”¹⁷²

The Benefits of a Preventative Approach

In light of the societal impact of homegrown violent extremism and the difficulty of preempting attacks, developing preventative approaches to address this threat is appropriate. On paper, the Obama Administration’s CVE Initiative represented a good faith effort to do just this, principally by engaging with communities and developing interventions for youth at risk of radicalizing to violence. In practice, however, the Initiative remained a work in progress when the Obama Administration ended. Efforts to develop methodologies to evaluate the effectiveness of CVE are still in their infancy – so no one can say with certainty that the Obama Administration’s efforts either worked or failed.¹⁷³ Our research suggests, however, that at a minimum, important progress was made during the five and a half years the Obama Administration CVE Initiative was in operation.

First, these programs undoubtedly developed and strengthened lines of communication and relationships between communities and federal agencies that could form the basis for deeper and more meaningful engagement, education, and cooperation in the future. Importantly, these relationship-building efforts were beginning to penetrate to the local level through the U.S. Attorneys’ Offices and FBI field offices. Stronger relationships can lead to building trust, building trust can lead to increased flow of information, increased information can possibly help prevent an individual moving toward violent extremism. While it is difficult to draw a direct line between outreach efforts and the disruption of acts of extremist violence, improved community relationships and communications has potential to prevent acts of violent extremism.

The CVE Initiative also stimulated strategic thinking and programming about education, community building, and, most importantly, intervention for at-risk youth that could ultimately become pillars of a preventative approach to violent extremism. Again, it may be difficult to ever demonstrate with scientific confidence that community-based programming and interventions reduces terrorism. However, we will never be able to evaluate the potential of this approach unless creative, multifaceted experiments are tried and tested, which is exactly what the CVE Initiative had started doing in late 2016.

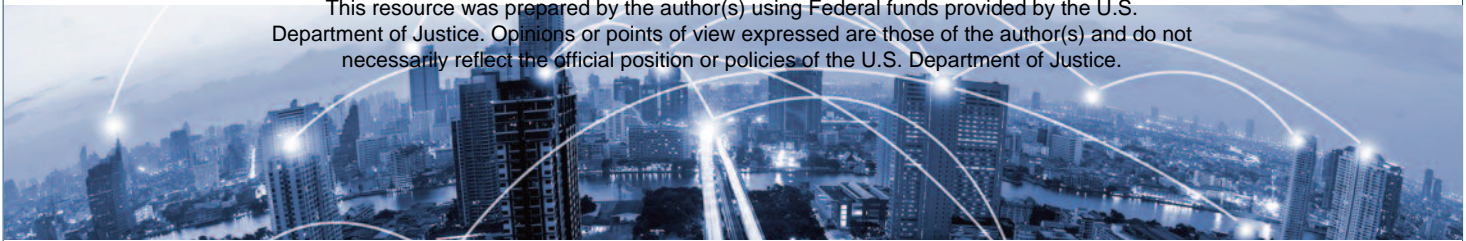
Finally, the CVE Initiative provided a forum and mechanism for addressing many problems experienced by Muslim Americans in the post-9/11 era. Ironically, as discussed at length below, the CVE Initiative itself became a grievance for parts of the Muslim-American community. But, putting that aside, the CVE Initiative created a focal point for the Muslim-American community within the heart of the federal government's national security apparatus. It allowed concerns to be aired and provided an administrative structure through which these issues could begin to be addressed. As such, the CVE Initiative had the potential to be an effective source of positive change, regardless of its impact on violent extremism.

Enhancing Trust between Communities and Government Officials to Preempt Hard to Detect Cases of Violent Extremism

To preempt violent extremist incidents, law enforcement officials need an early warning that an individual may be considering an act violence. Such information is often not readily available. As noted above, homegrown extremists often leave few clues for law enforcement regarding their intent to commit violence. Even when law enforcement has information that individuals may be attracted to a violent extremist ideology, such individuals may move so quickly from being non-criminal ideologues to mobilized violent criminals that law enforcement misses the chance to intervene.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, many of the large scale homegrown attacks in the United States since 9/11 have been committed by individuals who had been subject to FBI scrutiny prior to their violent action but were not arrested because there was no evidence they had committed crimes.¹⁷⁵

Research shows that building community trust in law enforcement and other intervention networks may increase the likelihood of friends, and possibly family members, expressing their concerns about potentially violent individuals before they act. As Gill, Horgan and Deckert have found, in a large percentage of lone-actor terrorism cases, other people knew "something concerning some aspect of the offender's grievance, intent, beliefs, or extremist ideology prior to the event or planned event."¹⁷⁶ According to their study, in 64% of the 119 cases examined, "family and friends were aware of the individual's intent to engage in terrorism-related activities because the offender verbally told them."¹⁷⁷ Yet, studies also show that these "by-standers" often fail to notify authorities of their concerns due to "fear of repercussions for such actions."¹⁷⁸ This finding suggests that law enforcement agencies might increase the number of early warnings of possible violent incidents they receive by building trust with community members, convincing communities that cases will be handled appropriately, and assuring them that community members who do come forward will not be subjected to inappropriate scrutiny.

Our research suggests that the CVE Initiative was beginning to inculcate this philosophy within some parts of the federal government. Our interviews with U.S. Attorneys involved in CVE and DHS' CRCL, for example, reflected an understanding that building trusted relationships with communities was an important governmental function. CVE also had the potential to spread these values to other federal agencies whose employees who routinely interact with the public such as TSA and CBP. Enhanced trust between government and communities is a positive result in and of itself. Properly nurtured, these relationships could also have the by-product of fostering a potential early-warning system about individuals the community fears may be moving towards violent extremism.



The CVE Initiative Stimulated Community-Based Efforts to Prevent Violent Extremism

The announcement of a federal violent extremism prevention policy in 2011 and the ongoing development of the CVE Initiative started a dialogue on terrorism prevention and stimulated community-based efforts to undermine violent extremism that otherwise might not have developed. From the outset, the Initiative was not meant to be a top-down, federal-led, governmental program. Rather, as the title of the national strategy document suggested, the Initiative set out to “empower partnerships” with local and community entities. The Initiative used the convening power of the federal government to encourage and assist community-based organizations, the not-for-profit sector, and local entities to build efforts to counter extremist ideologies. This approach recognized the appropriate limitations on governmental authority to suggest what people should believe, while empowering community, religious and other leaders to build an ethos that promotes social cohesion and rejects intolerance.

Although the pilot projects launched in Boston, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis were led initially by the federal government, they evolved toward an emphasis on community-based leadership and participation. The pilots began under the auspices of the U.S. Attorneys in these cities, but over time were rebranded and reorganized to reflect local control and community involvement. For example, the Boston project was eventually renamed “Promoting Engagement, Acceptance and Community Empowerment” and transferred to the Massachusetts Office for Health and Human Services.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, A Muslim leader in Los Angeles noted that “non-law enforcement agencies are taking the lead. It’s about civic engagement, honest conversations, and providing mental health support where needed.”¹⁸⁰

The 2016-17 CVE grant program was also a positive step towards stimulating local, community-based efforts. Approximately 200 groups applied for grants; including law enforcement agencies, state and local governments, non-profits, and universities.¹⁸¹ These organizations sought to develop intervention programs, create materials to challenge extremist narratives, build capacity for prevention activities, and work within communities to develop resilience against extremism. Unfortunately, the program was terminated by the Trump Administration after a single round of grants. Had the program been continued, there would now be even more models to evaluate and draw best practices from, with the ultimate goals of creating a menu of programs that communities could use to address the problem of violent extremism.

The CVE Initiative Developed Much Needed Intervention Programs for Youth At-Risk of Recruitment to Violent Extremism

Although the 2011 national strategy did not initially include a program to develop non-criminal justice interventions for youth at risk of recruitment to violent extremism, developing such interventions became a focus of the CVE Initiative as it evolved. Interventions can take many forms: psychological treatment for youths exhibiting mental health problems, social services for youths experiencing family problems, bullying in school, or other difficulties, religious counseling to expose young people to the contradiction between extremist ideologies and established religious principles, or some combination of these services. The purpose of such interventions is to make violent extremism less attractive to these individuals and thereby reduce the pool of individuals that law enforcement believes it must investigate to determine if they are radicalizing to violence.

As the CVE Initiative progressed, developing interventions became a significant focus for various reasons. First, Muslim-American communities advocated for them. Many of the individuals we interviewed for this project firmly believed that young Muslims Americans who were trying to travel abroad to join ISIS or expressing an intention to engage in violence in the United States were mentally ill or suffering from other social problems. As such, they believed that these youths should be diverted from the criminal justice system if possible. Second, the FBI recognized that it, in the words of a top official, “we can’t arrest our way out of this problem.” The FBI came to this conclusion based in part on the sheer volume of potential cases it felt compelled to follow, especially after the emergence of ISIS. As the number of individuals brought to the FBI’s attention grew, the FBI also

realized that successfully diverting individuals from the criminal justice process could reduce the burden on the FBI when compared to the expense of investigation, surveillance, arrest, prosecution and incarceration. The FBI further realized that more and more cases involved minors over which there is very limited federal jurisdiction. As one official noted, “no one wants to prosecute juveniles” and intervention could be effective in “taking a young person off the path toward violence.” The FBI also recognized that widespread investigation and prosecution of individuals that the community believed were vulnerable, mentally troubled, or guilty of just plain stupidity undermined community trust, at a detriment to the overall counterterrorism mission. The development of intervention programs, therefore, served multiple purposes: they diverted youth from possible incarceration, saved federal resources, and helped build trust and confidence in the community.

Federal Outreach and Engagement Provided Vulnerable Communities with Greater Access to Important Government Services and Sent Strong Message of Inclusion

The Obama Administration’s CVE Initiative also provided Muslim American, immigrant, and other vulnerable communities with new lines of communication to high-level federal government officials and forums to air their grievances. For Muslim Americans, access to these resources was especially important at a time when they are facing dramatic increases in hate crimes and discrimination.¹⁸² Many federal officials noted that providing such access was a core purpose of federal outreach and engagement that superseded the counterterrorism aspects of CVE. As an official with the Executive Office of U.S. Attorneys noted, “The U.S. Attorneys really want the community to know that they can come to us when they have a problem in their communities, just like any other vulnerable population.” These interactions also helped educate community members about their rights and how the federal government could vindicate them. As one U.S. Attorney noted, “We’ve gone to all different types of communities just to talk about what the U.S. Attorneys’ office does . . . we educate them on what constitutes a hate crime, what constitutes a civil rights violation.”

Our research also showed that community members believed that access to federal services and protection was an important benefit of enhanced outreach and engagement. As one interviewee noted:

Why do we care about a relationship with law enforcement? We care because when we’re affected, we want to make sure the FBI is there. If there is a hate crime, we want to make sure the FBI is there.

Similarly, another Muslim-American community member noted:

I’ve gone through some difficult problems when I was building the mosque. The mosque was attacked a couple of times. The [outreach programs with the government] gave you all the stuff about who to contact.

The federal CVE Initiative also stimulated activities that sent a strong public message signifying unity and inclusion of Muslim Americans. Our community interviews indicated a deep concern among Muslim Americans that negative portrayals of Muslims in the media and anti-Islamic sentiment prevalent throughout society made them feel isolated, excluded, and disenfranchised. Interactions between Muslim Americans and high-ranking federal officials like the United States Attorneys and Special Agents in Charge of the FBI can help ameliorate feelings of exclusion.

Our research found that Muslim Americans who had participated in federal outreach and engagement activities had strong, positive reactions to these interactions. They said:

[The U.S. Attorney] sees us as a very open community. He knows we have nothing to hide.

We are happy to have [the U.S. Attorney] visit our center . . . We invite members of our community to come and talk to him and voice our concerns. And they do.

I was honestly very happy and surprised to see the invitation to meet with the [U.S. Attorneys] office. I've never had any interaction with the federal government as far as being a Muslim other than that experience.

There have been different attempts to mend shattered relationships [with the Muslim community]. His visits fall within that.

As the CVE Initiative evolved, the DHS Office of Community Partnership (OCP) became an important bureaucratic entry point for Muslim Americans to communicate with the federal government. White House liaison to the Muslim-American community, Zaki Barzinji, said that “even Muslim groups that were critical of CVE felt they could talk to [OCP head George Selim] and express their criticisms.”¹⁸³ A Muslim-American activist opposed to CVE agreed that the OCP was important: “We didn’t buy CVE . . . but at least there was the communication with the community.”

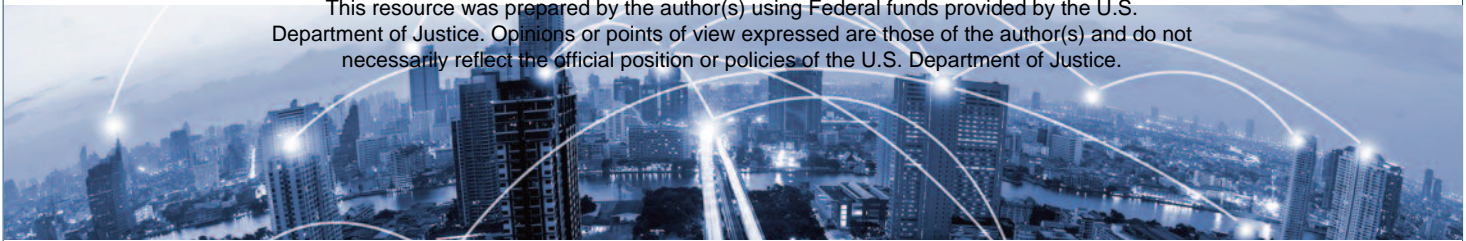
Interactions between federal officials and Muslim communities also sent the message that the federal government considered Muslim-American communities to be an important constituency entitled to fair treatment and equal access to government services. This positive message was communicated even more strongly when such interactions occurred in public and received media attention. In those instances, the message of inclusion and equal treatment was communicated both to Muslim Americans and the entire community. As one Muslim American put it, “The message should be that we get treated just like everyone else, like any American.”

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE CVE INITIATIVE

Although there is a compelling case for federal outreach and engagement to prevent violent extremism, our research suggests that the Obama Administration’s CVE Initiative faced multiple, severe challenges. The Initiative’s primary difficulty was that outreach and engagement efforts were taking place against the backdrop of a difficult social environment in which Muslim Americans were grappling with deep societal anti-Muslim sentiment. Some Muslim Americans believed that federal government law enforcement policies and practices were illegitimate and that federal counterterrorism policies were unfair because they focused almost exclusively on Muslims. In this environment, efforts to build trust between the Muslim-American community and the federal government faced an exceedingly steep hurdle. Indeed, many Muslim Americans overtly opposed the Initiative because they perceived it to be a component of federal counterterrorism policy, which they already opposed. Any future effort to develop a community-based preventative effort through government outreach and engagement will need to consider and address these environmental factors more effectively than did the Obama CVE Initiative.

Pervasive Societal Anti-Islamic Sentiment and Overt Discrimination Presented Substantial Challenges for the CVE Initiative

Any examination of the efficacy of federal outreach and engagement activities to Muslim Americans must consider the current mindset and life experiences of that community. Our discussions with focus groups of Muslim Americans during the Obama Administration found that many community members felt besieged by negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims in the news, popular culture, and social media. Muslim Americans also felt that they were targeted by a hostile network of anti-Islamic foundations and organizations, as well as individual anti-Islam activists. They believed the combination of these messages negatively impacted public opinion toward them and their faith. These concerns emanated from our focus group discussions even through our interview questions did not specifically seek commentary from Muslim Americans about their perceptions of societal discrimination and fears for their personal safety. The unsolicited comments from focus group participants included:



Whenever something is in the news, we always have a worry . . . We have this with ISIS, . . . Syria and Iraq. And, of course, we worry about backlash.

TV has a weird way of controlling what everybody thinks. So, when you see in movies that Muslims are the bad guys and the U.S. government is out to get Muslims, it's really hard to change that in anybody's mind.

The media creates impressions that make us cautious. There is always this feeling of being scared and cautious.

Because of the manner the media portrays our Muslim image, we're always under pressure . . . we always feel that pressure.

There are established groups in America . . . who have been heavily funded . . . to denounce Islam and Muslims forever. They're out there on a mission.

The [anti-Islam activists] are trying to keep Muslims leader-less. Whoever is confident, intelligent and can speak up is targeted. The whole thing is designed to keep Muslims from reaching leadership roles in politics, education and other fields.

When something happens overseas, we have no control over it. The person happens to be Muslim . . . Just by association, all of us feel guilty.

It's almost every day in the news. Muslim did that. Muslim was about to do this. And that makes our life really difficult, although we try to reach out, we try to be part of the community.

There was a lot of media blitz [after a press conference where Muslims denounced a terrorist incident]. That place will get threats galore. Violent threat on their voicemails.

When something happens in the media, anything happens in the name of Muslim, it's broadcasted over the area. They point to us and they do not see us as human beings, as citizens of this country.

We have slipped into a deep identity crisis for fear of reprisal, judgement.

I fear that somebody that watches the news might get so mad and gets his gun and comes into my store and shoots just because we're Muslim, because my wife works [wearing] the veil.

You spend your whole life to develop relationships and reputation. Just thinking that possibly my neighbor is suspicious just because I'm Muslim. Suspicion is difficult, difficult for us to deal with. It doesn't matter where it comes from or what it's about.

Events since the focus group interviews took place in 2015-16 must also be taken into account in assessing the challenges that the federal CVE Initiative faced in working with communities to prevent violent extremism. Starting in late 2015, questions about the connection between Islam and violent extremism became a central issue in the 2016 presidential campaign. Some candidates proposed an explicit religious test for refugees entering the United States, arguing that Syrian-Muslim refugees should be barred, but Christians permitted.¹⁸⁴ Another argued that a Muslim should not be elected president and that Islam was inconsistent with the Constitution.¹⁸⁵ Following the November 2015 Paris attacks, then candidate Trump called for "heavy surveillance" and possible "shutdown" of American mosques.¹⁸⁶ He also suggested creating a federal database to register and track Muslim in the United States.¹⁸⁷ Eventually, after the attack in San Bernardino, California in December 2015, he called for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States."¹⁸⁸ In March 2016, candidate Trump stated on CNN that "Islam hates us."

Violence against Muslim Americans spiked during this period. The rate of anti-Muslim violence in the United States tripled after the attacks in Paris in November 2015. A total of 88 incidents of anti-Muslim violence took place in November and December, 2015 alone.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, 2015 marked the most dangerous year for Muslim-Americans since 9/11, with hate crimes rising by 67% and bias-motivated criminal assault up 70% over 2014.¹⁹⁰ These hate crimes against Muslims in 2015 involved physical violence against the victim far more than hate crimes against other religious groups, with 70% of the anti-Islamic victims experiencing personal violence compared to 29% of the anti-Jewish hate crime victims experiencing violence (with the remainder being crimes against property).¹⁹¹ The FBI's official tally of hate crimes against Muslims surged again in 2016 (up 19%), with an the number of violent assaults hitting a record of 127 (up 39%).¹⁹²

Attitudes of Muslim Americans toward the federal government have also been shaped by the current political climate. Following the presidential election, multiple faith leaders and Muslim advocacy groups expressed deep concern about individuals appointed to senior national security positions because of their prior statements about Islam and Muslims.¹⁹³ One appointee had called Islam "a cancer" and claimed "that fear of Muslims is rational"; another suggested that the terrorism threat is caused by "the toxic ideology of Islam," and a third accused Muslim-American leaders of "silence in the face of extremism" in response to the Boston Marathon bombing.¹⁹⁴

Concerns of Muslim Americans have been exacerbated by official actions of the Trump Administration. For example, one week after his inauguration, President Trump issued an executive order barring entry to the United States for 90 days of any individual from seven predominantly-Muslim countries. The order also suspended the U.S. refugee program for 120 days and halted the entry of Syrian refugees into the country indefinitely.¹⁹⁵ Before the order was enjoined by the courts, some Muslim Americans who had been living and working lawfully in the United States, but had been traveling abroad, were prevented from returning home.¹⁹⁶ Muslim-American civil rights and advocacy organizations characterized this order and the successor orders issued in March 2017 as discriminatory "Muslim-bans."¹⁹⁷ The Trump Administration issued a third revised travel ban order in September 2018, which opponents continued to characterize as a Muslim ban. Although the injunction against the order was lifted by the Supreme Court in June 2018,¹⁹⁸ Muslim American advocacy groups continue to litigate against it and advocate for legislations that would overturn it.¹⁹⁹

In sum, while the Obama CVE Initiative was being implemented and in the years since then, Muslim Americans have experienced growing societal anti-Islamic sentiment, increased levels of hate crimes and violence, a presidential campaign featuring overtly discriminatory rhetoric, and statements and actions by federal officials they believe target Muslims unfairly. In such an environment, trust building activities with Muslim Americans face steep obstacles.

Federal Law Enforcement Policies and Practices Generated Substantial Mistrust Among Muslim-Americans

Our focus group interviews with Muslim Americans also documented widespread, indeed virtually uniform, mistrust of federal government law enforcement agencies, especially the FBI. This mistrust stemmed from perceptions among our interviewees that Muslim Americans were subject to routine, unjustified surveillance, that federal law enforcement agencies deployed paid informants into mosques, and that young Muslims were entrapped by undercover agents or informants into committing crimes that they would not have committed otherwise. Many interviewees also said that they were singled out for special scrutiny at airports and subject to discrimination by airport security and immigration officials. As one interviewee put it: "There's quite a bit of mistrust between Muslims and the federal government. Because of surveillance, the watches, different fears of being arrested even if you haven't done anything, or who you are giving your money to. There is great distrust."

Despite their deep opposition to certain federal policies and practices, many interviewees expressed confidence in the law enforcement officials with whom they interacted personally, including the U.S. Attorney and, on occasion, the FBI Special Agent in Charge. Many interviewees appreciated efforts by these officials to develop relationships with Muslim communities and the assistance, support and services that they and their agencies provided. Yet, the goodwill generated by federal outreach and engagement activities could not overcome the Muslim interviewees' general feeling of mistrust.

In this section of the report, we explain our interviewees' perceptions of federal law enforcement and security practices. By reporting their claims, however, we are not validating them. Indeed, the law enforcement officials we interviewed vociferously rejected suggestions that they have treated Muslim Americans differently than members of other communities or that they were failing to comply with their constitutional or other legal obligations in any way. We are highlighting these disputes because they are a major source of tension between Muslim Americans and law enforcement agencies that are impeding the development of trust between them. Addressing these disputes must be a core focus of any federal effort to prevent violent extremism through community outreach and engagement.

Muslims Americans' Perceptions Regarding Surveillance, Informants & Entrapment

In all of our focus groups sessions, a large majority of participants expressed the view that Muslim Americans were being subjected to religious-based surveillance by the FBI, that informants were pervasive in mosques, and that young people were being "tricked" into committing crimes by paid-informants or undercover FBI agents. These views were not exclusive to focus group participants who were generally hostile to the government or had personally experienced unfair treatment. Even focus group participants who had attended events with their U.S. Attorney, who were appreciative of federal outreach efforts and had good things to say about federal law enforcement officials routinely expressed unequivocal views that these practices were occurring.

Many focus group participants strongly objected to what they believed was an established FBI practice of using informants to conduct surveillance against Muslim community members:

For sure, the FBI is in the mosques. They are trying to persuade youth who are open minded.

One of the biggest fears Muslims have is the fear of informants in the Muslim community.

People feel like they are constantly spied upon. They are paranoid and they are always looking over their shoulder. Anytime they come into contact with the government in any form, they do not trust.

We know the FBI has . . . implanted many people in the community. We know that very well.

The Feds seem to have a certain outlook on the Muslim community and that image doesn't go away. A large part of it has to do with the programs that the FBI has of putting informants in the Muslim community. That continues to be the case.

In fact, many interviewees believed they could visually identify informants:

We see infiltration, especially with converts. We see someone new; we think they are an informant for the FBI. One time we had a former military person; he took the oath to convert to Islam . . . Then he started talking about fighting and asking about terrorism . . . You know if they start talking like this, they are informants.

Multiple individuals expressed concern that FBI agents recruited individuals from their community to become informants, and that this practice had a destructive impact on the community itself:

I have two state law enforcement or corrections officers that handle security for all my events. Federal agents approached them at their jobs and tried to get them to make more money by informing. They said, "Please don't propose this to me, I don't want it. Don't ask me again." So, they not only approach good law-abiding citizens, but law enforcement officers who are on my [mosque] board. It is undermining trust in the government.

Some imams also said they were distressed by frequency of FBI requests for information, which suggested to them the Bureau did not trust them to automatically report signs of possible violence. One said: "Listen, it's from my faith that if I know some harm is going to happen, I stop it . . . If there is something I am really concerned about, you'll get the information." However, another imam said that FBI agents had gone beyond requesting threat information to what he perceived as a request to serve as an informant:

We agreed on a face-to-face meeting, but that is when things deteriorated. I had established that I don't want to be approached ever about informing . . . Things were stated that were very unfortunate. I think it was unprofessional.

Concerns about informants impacted attitudes toward the overall federal efforts to build relationships with Muslim communities. As one focus group participant asked: "If you are trying to get the government to engage the community, why would you allow the police to spy on them? They may be trying to engage the community, but what the federal government does is spying." Another participant noted, "We're trying to have a good relationship [with the government]. And then you are doing this informants stuff?"

Similarly, another said, "I don't think the FBI should ever come for outreach if there is an open investigation . . . they can't come to the mosque." In fact, one participant said he viewed CVE as a subterfuge for surveillance: "I think they want to develop a relationship, so it makes it a little be easier to infiltrate with informants."

We found strong opposition to FBI use of informants in mosques. Our interviewees also expressed the widespread belief that these informants were being paid and pressured to foment discussions of violence and to persuade impressionable young people into adopting radical views. One imam said that for an informant to be "presenting an idea to someone in my mosque that is against Islamic teaching . . . or trying to get them to become extremists . . . is the most reprehensible disgusting thing I've ever heard of." He expressed confidence that "it's been done by the FBI."

Multiple interviewees expressed their belief that informants were coercing Muslims into making statements or doing things that triggered criminal investigations and sometimes prosecutions. They used the term "entrapment" to describe this phenomenon, using a general understanding of the term rather than its specific and nuanced legal definition. As one participant said:

We have seen dozens and dozens of cases across the United States where Muslims have been trapped by undercover FBI agents. Then the case is blown out of proportion and becomes national news.

Another interviewee expressed his view that:

Billions of dollars a poured into homeland security and the FBI and the whole thing is used to trick people. The informants are tricking vulnerable kids with mental issues, schizophrenia, and low I.Q.

One focus group participant said he believed that "99% of the cases of so-called terrorists in the United States are cases of entrapment." Another said that informants are "very corrupt human beings who want their green cards or want their charges dropped" who then "target and manipulate people who have mental problems." Another said, "parents are more worried about

government entrapment than the influence of the internet.” Yet another interviewee believed that “there is a track record of over a decade in our community of entrapment.” This practice, he noted, has “done a really good job of losing the trust of the community.”

Finally, one interviewee explained his view that FBI activities negatively reinforced the suspicion Muslim immigrants have of law enforcement agencies because of government oppression in their home countries:

Your typical Muslim immigrant, they came from a place where there [was] a crummy, intrusive, oppressive government. There's this sense post-9/11 that with . . . our relationship with the FBI . . . now there's a large body of cases that suggest vis-à-vis Muslims . . . our own government is tending to be crummy and intrusive too.

Muslim Americans' Perceptions of Treatment in Airports and at Immigration Checkpoints

Many Muslim Americans we interviewed felt that they were unfairly singled out at airport security and immigration checkpoints. As one participant noted, “[My wife] felt that she had to go through greater security at the airport. It was humiliating. They do not do it to everyone, only to people like her.” Another interviewee complained, “I have been pulled out all the time at the airport.” Yet another said that the Department of Homeland Security is “not even close to even trying to work with the Muslim community.” A young woman expressed her perception that she was treated differently at an airport checkpoint simply because she wore a hijab:

My mother and younger sister don't wear a scarf. My older sister and I do. On one of our family trips to Florida, they clearly pulled me and my sister that wears the scarf off to the side to give us all the extra pat downs and the wand and the swab on our hands. My mom, my dad, my younger sister all went right through.

Despite these negative comments, we also found that these experiences did not result in as many overt expressions of hostility towards the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and its employees as our focus group participants directed towards the FBI. One interviewee explained “we have people constantly traveling back and forth . . . that is the reason we work closely with DHS.” Another participant described positive experiences dealing with officials at Immigration and Customs Enforcement, stating, “I am a Muslim attorney in the community . . . but there are some officers in ICE that I can turn to . . . I think it's a good relationship.” Another interviewee expressed a sense of resignation about the situation:

We are used to it. [Airport security and immigration officials] are just doing their job. . . . You can take steps to make sure you aren't hassled . . . Maybe they are doing a better job.

Unidimensional Focus on Muslims Undercut CVE Efforts

Our focus group interviews indicated that another important obstacle to the success of the Obama Administration's CVE Initiative was the widespread belief among Muslim Americans that U.S. security and counterterrorism policies focused predominantly on Muslims, even though many non-Muslims also committed acts of violent extremism in the United States.

Our focus group interviews uncovered a strong consensus that Muslim Americans supported counterterrorism measures, so long as they perceived that they were being treated fairly and the same rules applied to everyone. As one interviewee put it:

The message should be that we get treated just like everyone else. Like any other American.

Another focus group participant said:

There is just this yearning for normalcy, this desire. We just want to be like everybody else.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

FBI Officials Respond to Muslim-Americans' Concerns About Surveillance, Informants & Entrapment

FBI officials at both the headquarters and field offices were well aware of Muslim Americans' concerns regarding surveillance, informants and entrapment. The officials we spoke with unequivocally rejected claims of discriminatory or otherwise improper use of criminal law enforcement tactics. They also expressed some frustration with the Muslim communities' repeated claims of discrimination and unwillingness to accept the FBI's explanations.

The FBI strongly rejected any suggestion that it conducted surveillance on Muslims based on religion or mosque attendance and without the proper evidentiary threshold of criminal wrongdoing (that is, "predication"). As one high ranking officials stated:

I can say with rock solid conviction, the FBI has never conducted an unpredicated surveillance. . . . When we do follow somebody, there has to be a full investigation, there has to be legal review, we have to have probable cause to look at the person . . . that is the law.

Regarding concerns about use of informants or undercover agents to investigate terrorism cases, the official said:

We don't have undercover agents who are off the books. We are very well regulated.

Noting that the no lawsuits had been brought against the Bureau in connection with its use of informants in terrorism cases, the official continued:

We obey the law . . . Our undercover or source operations are the most regulated, there is the most oversight . . . lawyers, high executives, analyze [it] constantly.

The official acknowledged that undercover agents or paid sources are used in homegrown terrorism investigations: "It is a tool that we use," he said, "even though we know it will be distasteful when it comes out." He continued:

We realize it is very sensitive, it is viewed as an intrusion, it is very aggressive. We only do it in the most egregious cases where we cannot prove that someone violated the law by other means.

FBI officials also rejected claims that they tricked or coerced young Muslims into committing terrorist offenses. They noted that there has not been a single finding of entrapment by a judge or jury in any homegrown terrorism case, even though the entrapment defense is frequently raised. The FBI official pointed out that, "Community members will say it was an agent provocateur, but the judge and jury said no, it was not." He also noted that in every undercover case, "you have to offer somebody a way out, we always ask them, 'Are you sure you want to do this?'" In one controversial case, he noted "the defendant said, 'I want people hurt, I want to do this,' yet the defendants were "portrayed as poor naïve people who would never do this."

An agent in an FBI field office explained that, "predisposition has to be established." "The evidence has to exist to show— independent of what a confidential human source established . . . that the person was already predisposed to take that action, to take those steps, commit a crime."

In multiple interviews FBI officials expressed frustration and some degree of exasperation that what they perceived to be inaccurate, conspiratorial views about the FBI persist within Muslim-American communities. With respect to informants, one official said:

When we educate the community, we tell them that to follow one person requires 21 agents. I ask the community, let's do the math. How many people are we following in your one community? They say . . . 50. I

have 70 agents in my entire office, where am I hiding the agents. It doesn't make sense.

Similarly, a field office official said that the community was “shortsighted” to believe that a group of individuals were prosecuted due to their political beliefs. He said:

People who say that are not well educated about what we are doing. Whether they chose not to listen when we do community outreach . . . or when they come to listen to the evidence, they are not listening to all of it.

Similarly:

The crowd got angry at an open forum with the top official in the FBI [field] office. There is a misperception. What are they not hearing when we convey what we are allowed to do and not to do? There is a deafness to it.

Similarly, another focus group participant explained that if he was required to follow a set of special security rules, he expected that these same rules would be applied fairly to everyone:

You are following every single part on your end. You would expect the same kind of respect from the government agency . . . to follow their own policies. If you are going to give this level of scrutiny to me, I'd appreciate it if you did the same to X, Y, or Z.

Another said: “If they did it to everybody, I wouldn't mind. If you're treated in a special way . . . and you keep getting all these 'random' security checks . . . then there is an agenda.”

Other interviewees said the unequal application of security policies meant Muslim Americans had less freedom than other Americans. “Free speech,” one participant noted, “does not apply to the Muslim people.” “It is a common perception,” he continued, that surveillance and security prosecutions are “used against Muslims who speak publicly.” Another interviewee claimed, “we are not living a free life.” She added, “I have to tell my kids not to put anything on Facebook that might get them in trouble.”

Some interviewees argued that the concept of CVE was unfair. One noted that “you are asking the Muslim community in the mosque to try to identify these people who are crazies,” but, “you are not asking churches or synagogues to do similar things.” He asked:

Why does the Muslim community have to be under this microscope because the Boston bomber was in one mosque out of [thousands] in the United States? What happened at Columbine? What church did that guy attend? Did they go check his church?

Another focus group participant echoed his remarks: “This is really unfair. If [a violent incident] is committed by a Christian or a Jew . . . then it's mental illness. It is never associated with their religion . . . But if a Muslim does it, then it is automatically terrorism.” She lamented, “We always have to defend ourselves.”

Parts of the Muslim-American Community Strongly Opposed the CVE Initiative

The CVE Initiative was also hampered by the strong, vocal opposition of a portion of the Muslim-American community. Simply put, a program that depends on partnerships between government and communities cannot function effectively if large portions of the relevant communities oppose the program, refuse to participate in it, and encourage other not to participate as well.

Broad-based, organized opposition to the CVE Initiative arose soon after the Attorney General announced the *Three Cities Pilot Program* in September 2014. Three months later, a coalition of 27 groups wrote to the Obama Administration's lead counterterrorism official, Lisa Monaco, extensively criticizing both the intellectual foundations of the CVE concept and specific CVE policies and practices.²⁰⁰ This coalition included many large Muslim civil rights and advocacy organizations, such as the Council on Islamic American Relations (CAIR), the Islamic Circle of North America, the Muslim American Society and the U.S.

Council of Muslim Organizations, as well as civil and human rights organizations such as the ACLU, the Brennan Center, Amnesty International, and other advocacy groups representing Muslims and non-Muslim faiths and ethnic groups.²⁰¹

These groups argued that the CVE Initiative's emphasis on encouraging Muslim Americans to report suspicious behavior and individuals believed to be at risk of engaging in violent extremism was a form of governmental surveillance that encroached on their privacy, freedom of speech, and free exercise of religion. The groups also maintained that CVE's exclusive focus on Muslims "stigmatizes them as inherently suspect."²⁰² Even well intentioned governmental efforts to engage with Muslim communities could be stigmatizing, the groups warned, because they unfairly associated Muslims with terrorism in ways that impacted media coverage and inflamed public opinion.²⁰³ Finally, the groups expressed concern that CVE-related educational, social service and mental health programming would fail to treat the community "holistically." Instead of addressing a range of social problems, they argued, it was focused through "the singular lens of national security or law enforcement."²⁰⁴

Nonetheless, other elements of the diverse Muslim-American community chose to work with the CVE Initiative in a variety of ways. As described in prior sections of this report, hundreds of mosques across the nation hosted sessions with U.S. Attorneys; thousands of community members attended engagement roundtables sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security, and multiple Muslim organizations directly participated in developing CVE strategies in the three pilot project cities of Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and Boston.²⁰⁵ Similarly, in 2015, the leader of the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), Salam al-Marayati, advocated government-community partnerships to address extremism (while, at the same time, calling for an overhaul to the federal CVE Initiative).²⁰⁶ Marayati argued that "we must engage the government to effectively deal with the ISIS threat while adhering to standards of civil liberties . . . [t]he problem is ubiquitous and amorphous . . . [m]osques and Muslim organizations need resources."²⁰⁷ MPAC initially won a CVE grant from the Obama Administration in 2016, but the funding was withdrawn after the grants were re-reviewed by the Trump Administration in 2017.

The strong critique of CVE by parts of the Muslim-American community and the participation in CVE by others reflects a schism in the community. This divide was captured in an academic study of Muslims in Los Angeles by the START Center at the University of Maryland.²⁰⁸ The study noted a divide between "engagers," who believe that CVE programs appropriately empower communities to be part of the solution to violent extremism and "disengagers," who question the need for preventive activities and are suspicious of governmental intentions.²⁰⁹

KEY FLAWS IN THE CVE INITIATIVE

The systemic barriers to CVE would have been difficult to overcome with even a perfectly conceived and executed program. Unfortunately, the Obama Administration's CVE Initiative was flawed in many respects. These flaws will need to be addressed if the federal government attempts a CVE or CVE-like program again in the future.

Poorly Defined Programmatic Goals Undercut the CVE Initiative's Efficacy

A key flaw of the Obama Administration's CVE Initiative was the failure to explain precisely what activities fell within the domain of the CVE Initiative and how these activities would reduce violent extremism. Because of this failure, the Initiative lacked focus, especially in the early years, and different agencies and sub-agencies pursued different objectives, all under the CVE moniker.

The initial 2011 strategy document reflected this strategic confusion. The strategy laid out three major areas of activity – engagement with local law enforcement to build trust with communities (a community policing model), enhancing and disseminating threat information (an intelligence model), and countering extremist messaging (a counterinsurgency/"hearts

and minds” model).²¹⁰ It then referenced three different government-community partnership programs, each of which used different methods and theories of change to bring about desired outcomes.²¹¹ As a result of this overbroad approach, virtually any type of program or activity focused on communities targeted by violent extremists with the purpose of community empowerment, government-community partnership, information sharing, or improving social services for communities and individuals, could conceivably have been labeled CVE.

The government compounded this problem in the “strategic implementation plan” issued five months later. In an effort to demonstrate prior federal government activity in this area, the plan listed dozens of different actions, often pursuing different objectives, as examples of CVE. The strategic implementation plan cited each of these activities as an example of on-going CVE-activities:

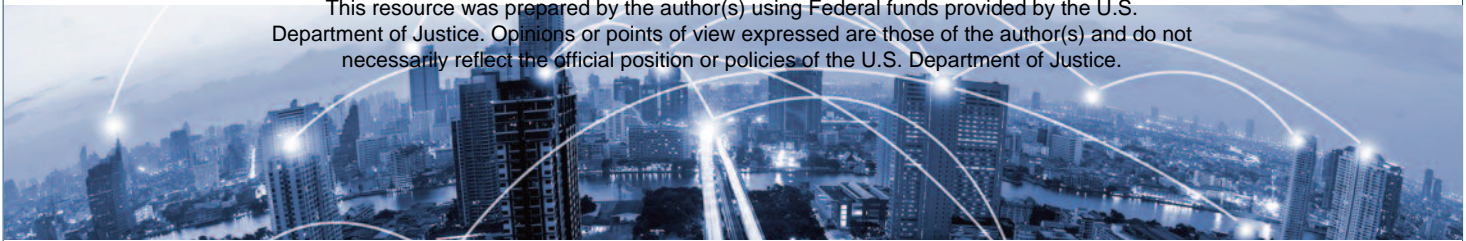
- Community outreach
- Suspicious activity reporting
- Civil rights enforcement
- Information sharing with law enforcement and intelligence
- Human behavioral research
- Community policing
- Educational programming
- Violence prevention programming
- Law enforcement training
- Business group outreach
- Correctional reform
- Terrorism case studies
- Intelligence network analysis
- Law enforcement intelligence briefings
- Cultural awareness training
- Law enforcement training
- Educational curriculum development
- Technology development
- Strategic communications planning

Our research found that even within the federal law enforcement community there were diverse views about the ultimate goal of CVE. One group of officials asserted that gaining community assistance in identifying individuals who might engage in acts of violent extremism was a key goal of CVE. For example, an FBI supervisor said:

The outcome [of CVE] is a good relationship. [In a foreign fighter situation], my question to community leaders is why did they go, why didn't you stop them? If you couldn't stop them, why didn't you call us? Could we have done this together? If you couldn't do it alone and it was getting out of hand . . . then you should have called us.

A U.S. Attorney made a similar point:

I think you have to say, obviously a part of what we want is if something is happening, you can trust law enforcement by saying something about it.



An official at DHS also said that CVE might help identify radicalizing individuals:

The odds of reaching someone on the cusp of extremism are slim. We're trying to reach by-standers – coaches, teachers, other students, etc. – if we can give them the tools to, they can identify people on the cusp.

An FBI agent added:

A mosque has two options [when an individual raises suspicion through his speech and conduct]. They can run him off and not say anything. Or they can run him off and then contact us and say: "this happened." We want the second thing to happen.

Other law enforcement officials rejected that the purpose of CVE was to identify radicalized individuals. Instead, they argued, CVE's goal was to protect and provide services to communities to prevent the social isolation that can give rise to radicalization.

DOJ: The goal of our outreach is to strengthen the community so that it never gets to us . . . it is a strong, robust community that can help the person so that he never comes to the attention of our office.

Questioner: Is the purpose of building trust partially with the hope that the Department will get some sort of early warning of individuals who are headed toward violent extremism?

DOJ: I never saw that as the purpose. If that was a by-product, if someone felt the need to report something . . . so they went to the community engagement coordinator . . . that's great. So that certainly could be the by-product, but not the purpose.

A lead DOJ policymaker on CVE echoed this sentiment:

The purpose of CVE is to empower local communities to be part of the solution to the problems they see rising in their communities.

One U.S. Attorney made clear that there was a division between what security officials in Washington hoped to get out of CVE and the view of local officials on the ground:

People at the National Counterterrorism Center or the National Security Division . . . they are interested in CVE because combatting terrorism is our number one priority But our perspective as U.S. Attorneys is different because we don't just wear the national security hat . . . It is one of the things we do, but these are members of our community.

Other officials expressed a third purpose of CVE, claiming that the program aimed to divert at-risk individuals from the criminal justice system:

Questioner: What is the specific problem your program is attempting to address?

FBI: Taking a young person off the path of violent extremism – that's it. Pretty simple.

In addition to causing internal confusion about the goal of the CVE Initiative, this lack of definitional clarity exposed CVE to a diffuse set of criticisms, with different parts of the American political spectrum objecting to different strands of the Initiative. As noted above, parts of the Muslim community and many civil rights advocates believed that CVE was essentially a law enforcement and intelligence surveillance program masked as beneficent social service. They did not see CVE as a means of aiding communities in their own efforts to stop youth radicalization, but rather as a trap resulting in more young Muslims being arrested and prosecuted.²¹² Some conservative groups and thought leaders objected to CVE's emphasis on community-building and social service provision. Many of them expressed skepticism that this social service approach to CVE was necessary or could

be appropriately targeted on the small number of people truly at risk of committing extremist violence.²¹³ Some who supported the concept of prevention programming criticized the CVE Initiative for the meager size of the investments.²¹⁴

In summary, the sprawling nature of the CVE Initiative, which lacked a clear definition of its goals and theory of change, hampered its development, leaving it open to widespread criticism while undercutting its political support.

Administration Communications Missteps Hardened Opposition to CVE, Especially Among Muslim Americans

The Obama Administration erred by rolling out a major expansion of the CVE Initiative in September 2014, when concerns about the power and barbarism of ISIS was running rampant in the United States and around the world. Many Muslim Americans felt as if the timing and the content of this announcement linked their community, in the eyes of many Americans, with the rise of ISIS and cast a cloak of suspicion over them. While this was certainly not the Administration's intention, this was one of missteps that irreparably damaged the CVE Initiative.

The September 2014 announcement took place at the apex of global fears about ISIS. The militant group had broken out of its stronghold of Syria in late 2013 and early 2014, capturing many of the cities and towns in Iraq that American soldiers had died liberating from insurgents a decade earlier. After capturing Mosul, Iraq's second largest city in June 2014, ISIS declared a new Islamist "caliphate" spanning the Iraq/Syria border and covering 81,000 square miles of territory.²¹⁵ In August 2014, ISIS beheaded U.S. journalist James Foley and posted the gruesome video on the internet. A steady drumbeat of additional barbarities followed throughout the summer, including the beheading of American-Israeli Steven Sotloff on September 2. In response, President Obama began limited airstrikes against ISIS in August, and then announced a comprehensive strategy against ISIS on September 10 in a televised address to the nation.

Five days later, Attorney General Holder announced the new "Pilot Program to Counter Violent Extremism."²¹⁶ The press release referenced the 9/11 attacks and the emergence of ISIS, and then connected them to the need to "detect American extremists who attempt to join terrorist groups abroad." Holder noted that the Initiative would be led by the White House and three national security agencies which would work with law enforcement, community representatives and "religious leaders."²¹⁷ The press release noted that the government had engaged in "extensive outreach" with communities "to identify threats before they emerge, to disrupt homegrown terrorists, and to apprehend would-be violent extremists."²¹⁸ But the release also implied that the efforts had been inadequate, noting that "we can, and we must, do even more."²¹⁹ This characterization framed the program as a call to Muslim Americans to contribute to mitigating the threat from Islamist terrorist groups, especially ISIS.

By rolling out the CVE pilot projects in this manner, with specific references to al Qaeda and ISIS, Holder firmly characterized CVE as part of U.S. counterterrorism efforts, a set of policies that many Muslim Americans felt were discriminatory and unfair. But more importantly, the timing of the announcement made CVE seem like a domestic auxiliary to Obama's anti-ISIS military campaign. Muslim Americans had already been feeling increased hostility from American society as the ISIS threat expanded throughout 2014.²²⁰ The pilot project announcement ratified this linkage. It suggested that more efforts needed to be targeted at the Muslim American community in light of the increased threat from ISIS while expressing the fear that some Muslim Americans were motivated to travel to Iraq and Syria to join the barbaric, extremist movement. CVE, in effect, became a symbol for what Muslim Americans believed was an unjustified association between their community and ISIS.

The Administration compounded this error by holding a White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism in February 2015 that again linked domestic CVE efforts with the threat from ISIS and international terrorism in general. The summit spanned three days, with the first day focusing on domestic threats and the CVE pilot projects, and the other days dedicated to a major international gathering to discuss ways to counter the rise of ISIS and other forms of extremism in the Middle East, South

Asia, and Africa. By addressing the domestic issues under the same umbrella as the international challenges being posed by ISIS, al Qaeda, and likeminded movements, the Obama Administration equated the magnitude of these problems even though the number and seriousness of homegrown attacks was miniscule compared to the barbarity and pervasiveness of the ISIS threat abroad. Furthermore, the core message of the summit was that CVE is a common remedy for addressing violent extremism both at home and abroad, when the problems inside the U.S. were of an entirely different nature and magnitude than the mass insurgencies occurring in many parts of the Middle East.

Sending this message through the forum of a high-profile White House Summit exacerbated the fear and isolation Muslim Americans had been feeling as the rise of ISIS fueled growing anti-Islamic sentiment in the United States in 2014 and 2015. In this context, CVE became a convenient target for Muslim-Americans to express their outrage and disappointment about their treatment by American society, and overall dissatisfaction with U.S. counterterrorism policies. Opposition was so widespread in the Muslim-American community that even the strongest supporter of CVE among major Muslim-American groups, the Muslim Public Affairs Council, could only issue halfhearted support for the Initiative, noting in a tweet that, "Yes, there are problems with CVE policy but that is why we have to engage the government and rebuild the trust."²²¹

Including the FBI as a Lead Agency Deeply Harmed the CVE Initiative

The most significant flaw in the Obama Administration's CVE Initiative was including the FBI, the country's lead counterterrorism investigatory agency, as a core participant. First, including the FBI in the CVE Initiative failed to recognize the inherent conflict of interest of the FBI simultaneously investigating terrorism offenses and conducting community outreach and engagement. In addition, concerns about FBI counterterrorism tactics inhibited trust-building between the community and the federal government, which was a core principle of the Initiative. Moreover, some of the FBI personnel we interviewed were poor fits for community outreach as we found that they dismissed Muslim Americans' concerns about FBI tactics and policy as unjustified complaining and were skeptical about the willingness of Muslims Americans to provide assistance to law enforcement. Furthermore, the FBI's policy prohibiting many forms of contact between the FBI and the Council on American Islamic Relations undercut the Bureau's ability to interact with important parts of the Muslim-American community and created an additional barrier to the development of trust. Finally, the FBI's three-year rotation policy for agents weakened its ability to develop long-term relationships with local communities.

The FBI's Counterterrorism Responsibilities Inherently Conflicted with the Community Trust-Building Function of CVE

As the nation's lead agency for counterterrorism, the FBI faced insurmountable conflicts of interest in attempting to be a lead partner in the CVE Initiative. At its core, CVE was about building trust between the government and communities. Although we believe the FBI had pure intentions in its outreach with communities, the FBI's counterterrorism intelligence collection and investigatory responsibilities required it to do too many things that raised community suspicions for it to be an effective partner in CVE.

Examples of the FBI's use of investigatory tactics that raised suspicions and distrust within Muslim communities have been reported extensively including elsewhere in this report.²²² These tactics included recruitment of intelligence sources from the community, use of undercover agents or confidential sources in mosques, building cases through sting operations, and widespread open source intelligence collection. It is true that the FBI uses these identical tactics to investigate all types of crime. However, the application of these techniques in counterterrorism cases in the post-9/11 era, primarily focused on Muslim Americans, gained such notoriety within the Muslim-American community that the resulting distrust was difficult, if not impossible, to overcome. Indeed, despite our efforts to discuss a wide range of issues relating to many federal agencies during

our interviews with Muslim community members in this and other studies, all of the community interview sessions were dominated by discussion of the FBI and its use of these tactics.

The key conflict of interest was having local FBI agents serve as the points of contact for community outreach and engagement while simultaneously participating in counterterrorism investigations in that same community. In these instances, the very agents who were working with the community to build a strong relationship and increase trust, were also directly participating in the types of investigatory tactics that many Muslim Americans vehemently opposed. Another inherent conflict arose from the FBI's policy of encouraging community leaders to identify individuals that they believed may be radicalizing to violent extremism and then setting up face-to-face meetings between the FBI and such individuals to have "discussions about their behavior." In such instances, the FBI was using community outreach to facilitate meetings where individuals might be placing themselves in legal jeopardy (for example, by lying to an FBI official during their discussions) but were not represented by counsel or advised of their rights. In these instances, the participation of imams or other community leaders in "outreach and engagement" may have resulted in individuals being pressured to attend meetings with the FBI, when it may have been in these individuals' best interests to either not submit to the meeting or attend only with counsel.

We found examples of each of these conflicts during our community interviews. One example involved an imam with broad regional responsibilities and positions of authority who said he had a strong and longstanding working relationship with the Department of Justice that was "based on mutual respect and trust." The United States Attorneys' Office confirmed the nature of this relationship.

The imam provided the exact type of cooperation the FBI wanted. He was watched out for individuals in his community who were expressing violent extremist ideas and intervened as a religious leader with their families to try to dissuade these individuals from embracing that ideology. The imam also kept the FBI abreast of his work with these individuals. He engaged in these activities, he said, because "I am very interested in safeguarding my community and the overall community." However, the imam said he had a condition for maintaining this working relationship with the Justice Department and FBI:

We ask very clearly and specifically not be recruited or asked to be recruited as informants because that would compromise our lead, compromise our integrity in our community. We have no interest in that.

Yet, this imam told us that at the time of the interview he only had a "mixed" relationship with the FBI because of two instances in which he believed the agreement was violated. On one of those occasions, an FBI agent had asked the imam to provide specific information about a young person the imam had already brought to the Bureau's attention because of his extremist views and concern that the individual "might do something." The imam also expressed frustration and suspicion relating to reports that FBI agents had dropped by a local mosque unannounced and asked congregants to let the agents know if they saw or heard anything suspicious. The imam believed these visits were contrary to the "protocols" that he had worked out with the U.S. Attorney and FBI Special Agent in Charge, relating to the scheduling of outreach contacts and an agreement not to actively recruit sources at mosques.

FBI officials and community members involved in CVE activities that we interviewed both confirmed that the FBI encouraged community leaders to "bring individuals in for a sit-down" with FBI agents if they believed they may be moving toward acts of violent extremism. As one community leader noted, "sometimes, we get to the point where we don't believe there is anything else we can do as a community to counsel an individual to get them to change their ways."

We found that some members of the Muslim community believed that community leaders who cooperated with the FBI in this way, and who urged face-to-face interactions with the FBI without legal counsel, had put the individuals in possible legal jeopardy. One interviewee accused the cooperative community leaders of "selling out" young people who had done nothing wrong. One interviewee went as far as to say that these mostly older, more established members of the community were "Muslim Uncle Toms."

While other studies have noted that urban police departments have been able to use community policing tactics in Muslim-American communities and still avoid conflicts of interest, we do not believe this is possible for the FBI. First, unlike large urban police departments, the FBI does not have enough personnel to remove agents from investigatory responsibilities and dedicate them exclusively to community outreach. Second, local police departments engaged in community policing can maintain separation from counterterrorism investigations because they can refer useful counterterrorism information provided by community members to the FBI. In contrast, the FBI has been engaging in both community outreach and investigation at the same time, and in some instances, a single agent is involved in both activities with the same community. Conflicts of interest are unavoidable.

The Breach in Trust Caused by the FBI's Counterterrorism Tactics and Policies May Not Be Surmountable

Including the FBI in the CVE Initiative was also problematic because the Bureau's tactics in many counterterrorism cases involving Muslim Americans were perceived as unfair and discriminatory by many Muslims. Despite the FBI's best efforts to explain that these tactics were lawful and used in a wide variety of cases against all different groups in American society, the animosity of Muslim Americans towards FBI tactics was pervasive. This issue dominated every one of the focus groups, despite our efforts to steer the discussion towards other aspects of the federal CVE Initiative. It is not apparent from our research whether this breach of trust is reparable.

Some FBI Officials Questioned Muslim Americans' Willingness to Assist Law Enforcement

Including the FBI in the CVE Initiative may have also been counterproductive because of skepticism within the FBI about the willingness of the Muslim community to work towards solving issues relating to violent extremism. This skepticism made the FBI a dubious partner in an Initiative dependent on mutual respect and trust-building. It did not make sense for the FBI to be one of the lead agencies for CVE since many of its personnel didn't believe that CVE would work.

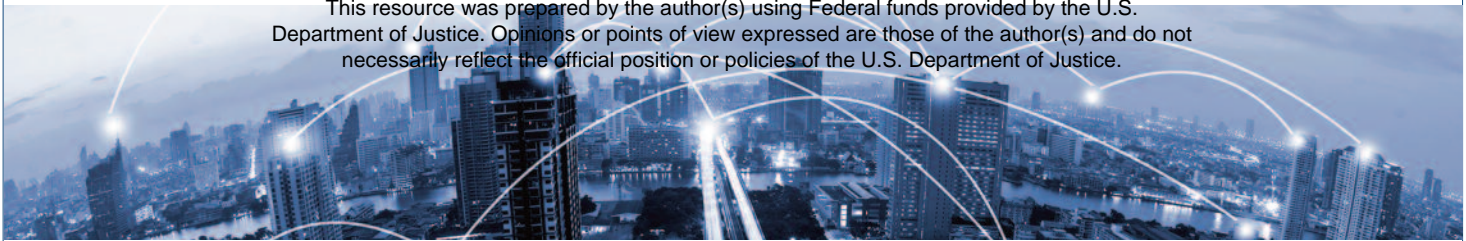
Our interviews found that some FBI agents were frustrated with what they perceived to be the failure of Muslim communities to provide greater levels of assistance to law enforcement.

In one case, an agent said that a suspect (now convicted) had been "running around the mosques here and everybody knew what he was doing." The agent noted that when community members were questioned about the individual's radical activities, they said "what he was doing was wrong," but did not come forward "because they thought he was crazy." The agent expressed disappointment in the community:

What is sad is that when you do have . . . the extremist element who do go to a mosque . . . not at the behest of the mosque but are utilizing aspects of it . . . to radicalize the youth . . . we are not getting any information relayed back to us of people who understand. They are not participating in it. But [they] are turning a blind eye to it.

Multiple FBI field agents expressed that they believe Muslim community members know about individuals who are radicalizing others or are potentially dangerous but are not providing information to law enforcement. One agent said:

The person we are speaking to is not inclined to speak out on an individual we are asking about . . . they are just not inclined to tell us . . . or in fact, they might even flat out lie.



Another agent said that he believed there was a religious or cultural basis for these attitudes:

I've worked in and around Muslims, not only here but in other parts of the world, and I can tell you absolutely for certain there's a segment of that community that believe that it is a sin . . . to help the United States government, a non-Muslim government.

He continued, "We know that for maybe the religious reason . . . or suspicion or whatever it may be, we're not getting an honest answer." He summed up, "Let's be frank, there's not an outpouring of persons within the Islamic community coming forward to turn in their fellow Muslims for suspected terror activities."

Even at the supervisory level, we found that FBI officials expressed doubts about the willingness of Muslims in particular to aid law enforcement. One supervisor said that following an incident of right-wing domestic extremism, the FBI's "phones were ringing off the hook" with leads from members of the "white supremacy community." But, he said, "I have yet to see this from other communities." He also expressed frustration that the FBI did not receive sufficient information from the Muslim community about U.S. people traveling to Syria to join ISIS. "We are sitting here at the table being friends and having Iftar dinners and you say you trust the FBI," he commented, "yet members of your community in mass quantity are going over to fight for a foreign power and every time we ask, you say, 'nope, didn't know anything about it?'"

FBI Policy Regarding CAIR Undercut its Capacity for Meaningful Community Engagement

The FBI's policy excluding CAIR from any outreach and engagement activities with the FBI was another obstacle to the CVE's success because it cast doubt in the eyes of many Muslim Americans on the Bureau's willingness to build a strong relationship with the Muslim-American community.

It is important to understand that CAIR is a highly respected organization among many rank and file Muslim community members. We consistently found in our interviews that community members counted on CAIR to help them understand their rights when they interacted with the government agencies and they relied on CAIR representatives to assist with issues like public relations and media inquiries.

In a number of instances, people that we invited to participate in focus groups checked with their local CAIR chapter before agreeing to be interviewed. We observed that CAIR served as a gateway to community members much more frequently with this project than it had during other field work in Muslim communities in 2008-09, suggesting that CAIR's strength and popularity had only grown since the FBI put its policy in place. If the FBI's policy was designed to punish CAIR or undermine its standing in the Muslim community, it appeared to be backfiring.

Multiple focus group participants questioned why an organization they respect had, in essence, been blacklisted by the FBI. The FBI's policy toward CAIR, therefore, severely undercut the CVE Initiative's goal of building mutual respect and trust with the Muslim-American community. It is very difficult to develop a trusting relationship when some of the community's leaders are excluded from participation. As one interviewee noted:

If, let's say, we have a good-hearted FBI agent and U.S. Attorney, but there is a national level policy . . . that FBI should not attend CAIR events, should not basically mingle and mix with them. Even though they are nice people in this office, they will not do it because they're going to violate their own policy and probably get fired.

FBI's Rotation Policy Hampered Community Outreach

The FBI's policy of rotating agents to different field offices every three years or so, presented another challenge to the FBI's community engagement work. Everyone involved in this field emphasized that effective trust building depends on relationships. Unfortunately, when it came to the FBI, agents with whom community leaders developed good relationships, and possibly some element of trust, left after three years and were replaced, sometimes by agents that have no knowledge of the region and possibly no experience with Muslim-American communities. This destabilizing practice occurred not only at the field agent level, but also with the senior field office leadership, up to the Special Agent in Charge.

The CVE Initiative Focused Almost Exclusively on Muslim Americans

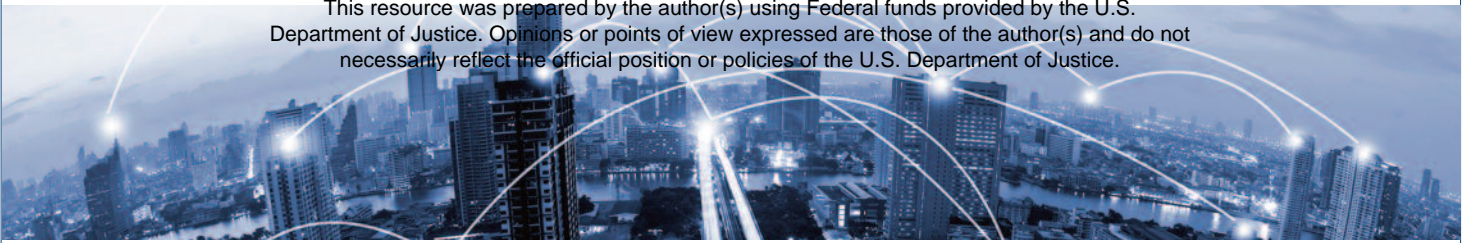
Research from this project and information from open sources support claims by Muslim Americans that the CVE Initiative focused primarily on Muslim-American communities. As such, the program was viewed by many Muslim Americans as discriminatory and inherently unfair.

The initial White House CVE strategy overtly acknowledged that federal efforts would concentrate primarily on Muslim Americans. Although the strategy claimed that solutions to violent extremism should not focus on "a single, current form of extremism without regard to other threats" it also stressed that al-Qaeda and likeminded groups are "the preeminent threat to our country," that the number of Americans inspired by al-Qaeda's ideology were increasing, and that these individuals posed "an on-going and real threat."²²³ The words Muslim and Islam were used seven times in the document; there were, by contrast, no references to any other group of people or religions. Al-Qaeda was mentioned 13 times in the document; no other terrorist organization or ideology was identified.²²⁴

Official statements also confirmed that the CVE Initiative was directed primarily at building relations with Muslim Americans and developing programs that involved Muslim Americans. In a speech on the federal CVE Initiative in 2016, then-Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson defended the program against charges that it was "targeting Muslims."²²⁵ He said, "our CVE mission is a generic one. We are not targeting a religion or even a specific group."²²⁶ However, he conceded that "when I talk about building bridges to communities, most often I am talking about American-Muslim communities."²²⁷ Johnson explained that this focus was necessary because "the Islamic state is targeting American Muslims so we must respond in counter to that effort."²²⁸

Secretary Johnson also admitted that the CVE Initiative was not doing significant outreach and engagement with communities targeted for recruitment by other forms of extremism. He noted that "those here in the homeland with a purely domestic focus are, frankly, difficult to engage. . . . I don't have roundtables with violent white supremacists."²²⁹

Johnson's sentiments were echoed by the government officials interviewed for this project. As discussed in prior sections of this report, we identified no examples of U.S. Attorneys, their staff, FBI agents, or other government officials who did outreach events with communities that may be targeted for recruitment by various forms of right-wing extremism. It is true that the Community Awareness Briefing (CAB) – created by NCTC and used by both DHS and DOJ – contained examples of multiple forms of extremism, but we found that most presentations of the CAB were directed at Muslim audiences. Similarly, many of the 2016-17 CVE grants were directed to Muslim community organizations, to police and sheriff's departments in areas with high Muslim populations like Dearborn, MI and Hennepin County, MN, and to organizations that focused exclusively on Islamist forms of extremism, like the Counter Extremism Project. A grant was initially awarded to only one group known to be working to build resiliency against domestic hate groups and right-wing extremism – Life After Hate. That grant was withdrawn, however, during the Trump Administration's re-review of the grants.



In sum, officials verbally claimed the CVE Initiative was a neutral, all-hazards approach, but in practice it was directed almost exclusively at Muslim Americans and aimed primarily at preventing extremism inspired by ISIS, al Qaeda and like-minded groups. As a high-ranking official at the FBI said:

We do realize that we can't just focus on one community and it has to be broader. This just happens to be the one that is most urgent right now because . . . of the ability of ISIL to prey on susceptible youth . . . The optic needs to be wider. But I do think there needs to be focus because of the threat.

The CVE Initiative was Profoundly Under-Resourced

The CVE Initiative set lofty goals and was rolled out as a major presidential response to the high-profile topic of terrorism. Oddly, however, it had no administrative structure to support it and a budget of zero. This was a recipe for policy failure. First of all, to demonstrate that “something was being done,” agencies were all tasked with providing examples of CVE activities they were already doing, which, as noted above, made the program scattershot and incoherent. Second, because no agency had ownership of the Initiative, no agency could be held accountable for delivering a set of programs and policies to achieve a set of concrete, definable objectives. Finally, without any new resources, CVE became a burden for all the participating agencies which were essentially asked to do more activities without any way to pay for them or any reduction of other duties. Even agencies that scrambled together resources to dedicate staff towards CVE ultimately could not sustain those efforts over time. For example, a U.S. Attorneys’ Office developed a community liaison staff position to support a range of CVE activities in a large district. Although this staff member was uniformly admired and community members praised the outreach efforts of this office, no funds were made available during the life of the program to sustain this staff position.

Ironically, the Obama Administration’s CVE Initiative was beginning to develop both an administrative structure and a budget in 2015, toward the end of its existence. But that four-year gap between the initial announcement in 2011 and the deployment of staff and resources sapped the Initiative of its momentum and dramatically hindered its development.

PART THREE

RECOMMENDATIONS

As explained above, the Obama Administration’s CVE Initiative faced many structural and political challenges, and there were flaws in its design and execution. Nonetheless, it was gaining momentum and had achieved some notable successes when the Obama Administration ended. The Trump Administration terminated most elements of the CVE Initiative and it is beyond the scope of this report to explain or assess its approach to this issue. Yet, there are many lessons to be learned from the five and a half-year experience of the CVE Initiative that have been illuminated by the research conducted for this project. Federal policymakers who endeavor to establish a violent extremism prevention program in the future should adopt a set of core principles for this effort and consider taking the specific actions listed below:

CORE PRINCIPLES

Programs to prevent violent extremism will fail unless they apply to all communities targeted by extremists and all forms of extremism.

Al Qaeda perpetrated the 9/11 attacks, adherents of the al Qaeda/ISIS ideology continue to cause mass harm across the globe, and individuals inspired by this ideology continue to commit acts of violence inside the United States. However, the data is now unambiguous that violence inspired by white supremacy and other related ideologies is a parallel, substantial threat, especially inside the United States. There is simply no justification for focusing domestic violent extremist prevention efforts on the form of violent extremism perpetrated primarily by Muslims, but not the form of violent extremism perpetrated primarily by white people. Indeed, the CVE Initiative failed to take root in much of the Muslim-American community because it was perceived as directed exclusively at Muslims and therefore discriminatory. All Americans have an obligation to prevent acts of extremist violence emanating from our communities; therefore, all Americans have an obligation to build resiliency against these extremist ideologies and take action against individuals who exhibit support for violent extremism.

The federal government should promote, but not lead, efforts to prevent violent extremism.

The federal government is ill-equipped to engage in the sensitive, day-to-day work with groups and individuals required to prevent the emergence, spread, and adoption of violent extremist ideologies. The federal government is also inherently conflicted in this task because it has responsibility for gathering intelligence, criminal investigations, and prosecuting criminal cases relating to violent extremism. Yet, since preventing terrorism is a national priority, the federal government cannot simply ignore the issue. It should use its convening power, its ability to stimulate local activity through federal funding, and its research capabilities to promote and support violent extremism prevention programming across the nation.

Violent extremism prevention programs should be developed with the input of state and local government agencies and community organizations to ensure there is buy-in and participation by those needed to execute the programs.

The Obama Administration's CVE Initiative was developed primarily inside the National Security Council staff, without extensive consultation with localities, non-governmental organizations, and community groups. It took three years for an effort to be made to incorporate communities via the Three City Pilot Projects, but even this effort was top-down, through the United States Attorney in each pilot city. Any new effort to build a violent extremist prevention program will need to be bottom-up, starting with identifying key local and community partners and determining their needs, and then designing programs to empower them to act.

Prevention programs should be limited in scope and carefully constructed to ensure they do not create or reinforce stereotypes.

While violent extremism is a substantial problem because of the high attention these attacks garner and the divisiveness they create, the number of perpetrators and casualties are low compared to other social problems in America. Violent extremism prevention programming, therefore, ought to be targeted, low-key, and operate behind the scenes. For example, we do not need a broad-based violent extremist prevention curriculum in every public school (whereas such a preventative approach might be appropriate for widespread problems like youth obesity or teen vaping). Due to the problems Muslim Americans have faced with the terrorist stereotype being applied to them, infusing violent extremist prevention programs on a widespread basis into multiple public institutions may do more harm than good.

All entities involved in violent extremism prevention programs should explicitly state that providing counterterrorism intelligence to law enforcement or identifying individuals for potential criminal investigations are NOT the purposes of the program.

Violent extremist prevention cannot succeed if communities suspect that those running the programs are attempting to collect intelligence and identify individuals for surveillance and possible criminal investigation and prosecution. The purpose of such programs is to build trust between communities and public institutions, especially in communities that are underserved or generally suspicious of government or civil society organizations. The only way to build trust is complete separation of counterterrorism and violent extremism prevention. Of course, the relationships and channels of communication that are built may eventually serve as a pathway for information community members choose to provide law enforcement about individuals that may be radicalizing to violence. But providing such information should be the choice of community members, and based on trust that has been built, possibly over the course of years, not weeks or months, of interactions with public officials. Programs built with the specific purpose of identifying "persons of interest" to law enforcement, are in essence, intelligence gathering, not violent extremism prevention.

Federal security and law enforcement agencies should engage with local communities to build trust and improve public services, but these activities must be independent from violent extremism prevention programs.

Many positive results flowed from the outreach and engagement undertaken by U.S. Attorneys and other federal security and law enforcement officials under the auspices of the CVE Initiative. This interaction should continue and will likely yield benefits for both the communities and the federal agencies. Yet, for many of the reasons set forth above, the engagement should take place outside the realm of a violent extremism prevention effort. The Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security, and FBI should engage with their communities, explain what they do and how they do it, and respond to community concerns. If improved counterterrorism results as a side-benefit from this outreach and engagement, that is good, but it cannot be a stated or intended purpose of the government-community interactions.

To repair the breach of trust between federal law enforcement agencies and some Muslim-American communities, these agencies should enhance their outreach and engagement with Muslim-American communities and take affirmative steps to improve the relationship.

Repairing the breach of trust that was identified in this research project between some Muslim Americans and federal law enforcement agencies should be a high priority. This can only be accomplished by both sides taking steps to build a relationship. The government needs to approach this task from two directions. First, federal law enforcement agencies need to serve the community. This can be accomplished by educating the community on what federal law enforcement agencies do and establishing lines of communication to hear what the Muslim American community needs, with special attention to hate crime prevention, civil rights enforcement, and physical protection of mosques. Second, the government must improve transparency about its counterterrorism policies and do a better job explaining how it investigates and prosecutes cases against individuals inspired to engage in violence by the al Qaeda/ISIS ideology.

Federal violent extremism prevention programs should be adequately staffed and funded.

The initial structure of the CVE Initiative was ill-conceived, with no lead agency, no permanent staff, and no budget authority. Any future violent extremism prevention program should be built on a more secure foundation, with authorization and funding from Congress, a mission statement, a set of program objectives, and an administrative structure. Federal agencies should not be expected to take on additional responsibilities for outreach and engagement without dedicated staff and funding. Mandates to add additional responsibilities, without staff or funding, are not sustainable.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS

The Federal Government's Role in Violent Extremism Prevention Programs

- The federal government should not lead violent extremism prevention programs, but rather should promote the development and growth of such programs nationally through its convening power, research, technical assistance, and, most importantly, funding.

- The federal government should implement violent extremism prevention programs primarily through grants to local governments and non-governmental organizations focused on at-risk youth, crime and delinquency prevention, youth mental health, and community education.
- Lead federal security officials like the United States Attorneys and FBI Special Agents in Charge should not be involved with these efforts
- Congress should provide at least \$50 million in violent extremism prevention grants (the final Obama Administration budget request).
- Congress should also provide regular oversight and require the federal agency supervising the program to develop metrics and conduct regular, independent program evaluations.

Goals of Local Violent Extremism Programs

- Communities should be empowered to identify the educational, and community building activities that they believe will provide a bulwark against violent extremist ideologies.
- Programs should be directed primarily at youth and young adults, including programs that are designed and operated by young adults.
- Violent extremism prevention programs should emphasize the creation of locally based interventions to address mental health or other issues connected with youths at risk of engaging in violent extremism.
- One-half of federal funding should be allocated to programs that address violent extremism based on ideologies other than those advanced by al Qaeda, ISIS, and likeminded groups.

Outreach and Engagement by Federal Law Enforcement Agencies

- Federal security and law enforcement agencies should build trust with communities targeted by violent extremists because trust-building activities will advance their missions.
- There should be no explicit or implicit quid pro quo between trust-building activities and specific forms of law enforcement cooperation by community leaders or members.

Department of Justice

- United States Attorneys should continue outreach and engagement activities with a wide range of communities.
- Outreach and engagement activities should emphasize how the Department of Justice can serve the needs of the community.
- Congress should appropriate staffing funding to United States Attorneys' Offices to support community outreach and engagement activities.
- Discussions with communities should cover a wide range of potential threats, not exclusively counterterrorism.
- United States Attorneys should continue their efforts to build trust and strong relationships with Muslim-American communities.
- Issues of special concern to the Muslim-American community – such as hate crimes, discrimination, and immigration enforcement – are fertile areas for dialogue and education.
- Counterterrorism should be raised with Muslim-Americans only in the context of community involvement in a wide range of crime prevention efforts.

- In order to build more trust in all federal law enforcement, United States Attorneys should discuss with Muslim-American communities their role in supervising electronic surveillance by the FBI and determining whether a criminal referral from the FBI will be prosecuted.
- United States Attorneys should discuss with Muslim-American communities official Department of Justice policies regarding the use of informants in criminal investigations and preventing entrapment.
- The Executive Office of United States Attorneys should develop training modules for new U.S. Attorneys and other Department of Justice employees on outreach and engagement practices.
- The Department of Justice should develop clear guidelines for determining when acts of violence motivated by religious animus will be charged as a federal hate crime and discuss this topic with Muslim-American organizations and communities.
- Decisions regarding whether to bring federal hate crime charges against a perpetrator of violence against Muslim Americans should be made deliberatively, and Muslim-American communities should be provided the same opportunity for consultation on such issues as other communities.

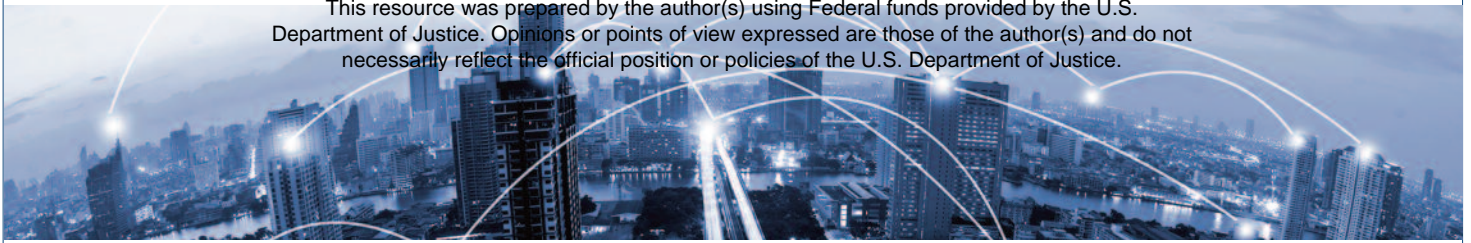
Federal Bureau of Investigation

In the field of counterterrorism, the FBI should continue to do what it does best, use the full range of its investigatory powers to preempt and deter acts of terrorism in the United States.

- Consistent with the Meese Commission report, however, the FBI should not be involved in violent extremism prevention programming.
- Special Agents in Charge should conduct outreach and engagement with a wide range of communities in their jurisdiction, including, but not exclusive to, Muslim-American communities.
- The goal of such outreach should be to encourage communities to support law enforcement efforts in their communities and contact the FBI if they have concerns about public safety.
- FBI Headquarters should develop presentations for SAC's to use to explain FBI policies regarding surveillance, use of informants, and entrapment to Muslim- American communities and train SAC's on best practices in community engagement.
- Line FBI special agents, however, should not conduct community outreach and engagement due to conflicts of interest with their investigatory activities.
- Line FBI agents, of course, should continue developing useful law enforcement contacts in all communities and encourage community leaders and members to provide information to the FBI about potential criminal activity. But at all times, such agents should make clear that they are acting as criminal investigators.

When appropriate, the FBI should refer individuals of concern to community-based intervention programs, but the FBI should not organize, fund, and operate these intervention programs.

- The FBI should continue and expand its Citizens Academy and recruit a diverse set of community members to participate, including Muslim Americans.
- The FBI should consider rescinding its ban on interaction with CAIR in light of its questionable utility and the damage it causes to community relations with Muslim Americans.

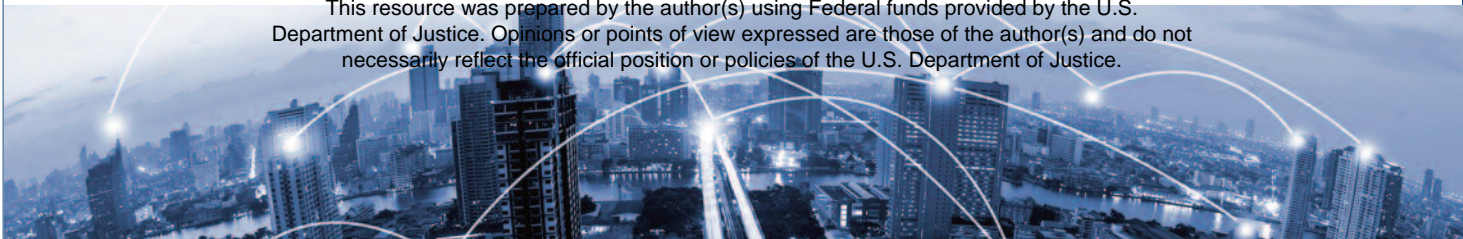


Department of Homeland Security

- Outreach and engagement with Muslim-American communities via the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties should continue.
- Officials from other key elements of the Department of Homeland Security, such as the TSA and CBP, should regularly attend these outreach and engagement events.
- Outreach and engagement with Muslim Americans should address a broad range of issues and not focus exclusively on counterterrorism. Consequently, DHS should discontinue use of the Community Awareness Briefing (which addresses only terrorism), but rather integrate terrorism awareness materials into educational materials that discuss a broad range of issues and threats.
- The Community Resilience Exercise that brings together Muslim community members and law enforcement officials to discuss terrorism prevention is a beneficial activity, so long as similar exercises are conducted with a broad range of other communities as well.
- Lead local officials from the Transportation Security Agency and Customs and Border Protection should also conduct outreach and community engagement independent of CRCL with Muslim-American and other communities to address community concerns about travel and immigration.

Federal Government Actions to Build Trust with Muslim-American Communities

- The president should visit a mosque.
- Elected officials should attend Muslim-American civic events and be pictured with Muslim Americans.
- The president and other elected officials should speak out when bigoted actions and statements are directed against Muslim Americans.
- Muslim Americans should be appointed to high level federal government positions.
- Federal security agencies should take affirmative steps to recruit Muslim Americans.
- Communications from the White House or federal agencies following violent extremist incidents by Muslim Americans should mention statements by Muslim American organizations condemning such violence.



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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The FBI's PENTBOMB investigation resulted in the detention of approximately 762 aliens; most were deported, none were charged with offenses directly related to the 9/11 attacks. Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Department of Justice, "The September 11 Detainees: Review of the Treatment of Aliens Held on Immigration Charges in Connection with the Investigation of the September 11 Attacks," April 2003. This investigation, however, ultimately did result in federal terrorism charges against Ali Saleh al-Marri, a resident alien arrested in Peoria, Illinois in 2011. After initially being held in FBI custody as a material witness, President Bush designated him an enemy combatant and placed him in military custody. After lengthy judicial proceedings regarding the validity of the enemy combatant designation, the Obama Administration removed al-Marri from military custody and filed counterterrorism charges against him for providing, and conspiring to provide, material support to al Qaeda. Al-Marri pled guilty, served his criminal sentence in federal prison until 2015, and was repatriated to Qatar. United States Department of Justice, "Ali al-Marri Pleads Guilty To Provide Material Support to al Qaeda," April 30, 2009. Zacarias Moussaoui, another al Qaeda affiliate inside the U.S. on 9/11, was already in federal custody on immigration charges when the attacks took place. Moussaoui pled guilty to charges relating to the 9/11 attack and after a jury trial on the penalty phase, he was sentenced to life in prison without parole. "Zacharias Moussaoui Fast Facts," CNN.com, last modified May 29, 2019.
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- ³ *Id.*
- ⁴ *Id.*
- ⁵ *Id.*
- ⁶ Pierre Thomas, Jason Ryan, and Theresa Cook, "Holder: Homegrown Terror Threat Increasing," ABC News.com, July 29, 2009.
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- ⁹ The White House, "Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States," August 2011, 2.
- ¹⁰ "Secretary Johnson on Countering Violent Extremism," CSPAN.org, April 6, 2016.
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- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ The White House, "Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States," December 2011.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 9.

²¹ Ibid., 10.

²² Ibid., 9-10

²³ Ibid., 10-11.

²⁴ Ibid., 12.

²⁵ Department of Justice, "Attorney General Holder Announces Pilot Program to Counter Violent Extremism," September 15, 2014, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-holder-announces-pilot-program-counterviolent-extremists>

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

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²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Philip Marcelo, "A federal pilot effort to combat extremist recruitment in Boston, Los Angeles and Minneapolis has been slow to start since it was announced nearly two years ago," *U.S. News & World Report*, March 24, 2016.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Department of Homeland Security, "Statement by Secretary Jeh C. Johnson on DHS's New Office for Community Partnerships," September 28, 2015.

³⁵ Department of Justice, "Countering Violent Extremism Task Force Fact Sheet," January 8, 2016.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ For example, the National Institute of Justice has been funding research on radicalization to violence and other issues related to violent extremism since fiscal year 2012. However, Congress provided these funds as a carve-out from the Byrne Justice Assistance Grants Program; they were not a specific line item in the President's budget. See Department of Justice, "FY 2016 Performance Budget: Office of Justice Programs," 234 (2015).

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⁴³ The White House, "Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States," 2, December 2016.

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- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.
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²²² For a small example of the reporting on this subject, see *The Newberg Sting*, directed by Kate Davis and David Heilbroner, April 20, 2014, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3645982/>; *This American Life*, episode 471, "The Convert," Aug. 10, 2012, <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/471/the-convert>; Connor Friedersdorf, "Does the FBI Use Stasi-Like Tactics Against Muslims," *The Atlantic*, Apr. 24, 2014; Human Rights Watch, "Illusions of Justice: Human Rights Abuses in FBI Investigations," July 21, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/07/21/illusionjustice/human-rights-abuses-us-terrorism-prosecutions>; Paul Vitello and Kirk Semple, "Muslims Say FBI Tactics Sow Anger and Fear," *New York Times*, Dec. 17, 2009.

²²³ The White House, "Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States," 2, August 2011.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2, 3, 6 & 7.

²²⁵ "Secretary Johnson on Countering Violent Extremism," *CSPAN.org*, April 6, 2016.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.* is a senior research methodologist at RTI International with over 22 years of experience studying the adoption of new programs and technologies by federal agencies. He has worked on numerous studies for the National Institute of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security to inform the development of new solutions for counter-terrorism and violent extremism.