

Terrorism and Targeted Violence (T2V) in the United States: Plots Targeting U.S. Schools

OVERVIEW

This research brief explores school-based violence in the United States from January 1, 2023, through March 31, 2026. The data for this brief are provided from the Terrorism and Targeted Violence (T2V) in the United States database, which includes comprehensive information on 3,216 foiled, failed, and successful attacks in the U.S. and its territories that were designed to have a significant impact on public safety or the security of critical infrastructure and key resources. More information about the T2V database can be found in the “About T2V” section at the conclusion of this brief. The analysis presented here explores 700 premeditated plots in the T2V data targeting school spaces in the United States. It analyzes the rates of school-based violence in the U.S., the locations of these plots, the weapon types used by perpetrators of school-based violence, and the intentions and outcomes of these plots. This brief also provides general statistics on the ages of perpetrators of school-based violence. It also examines the intersection of terrorism and school-based violence.

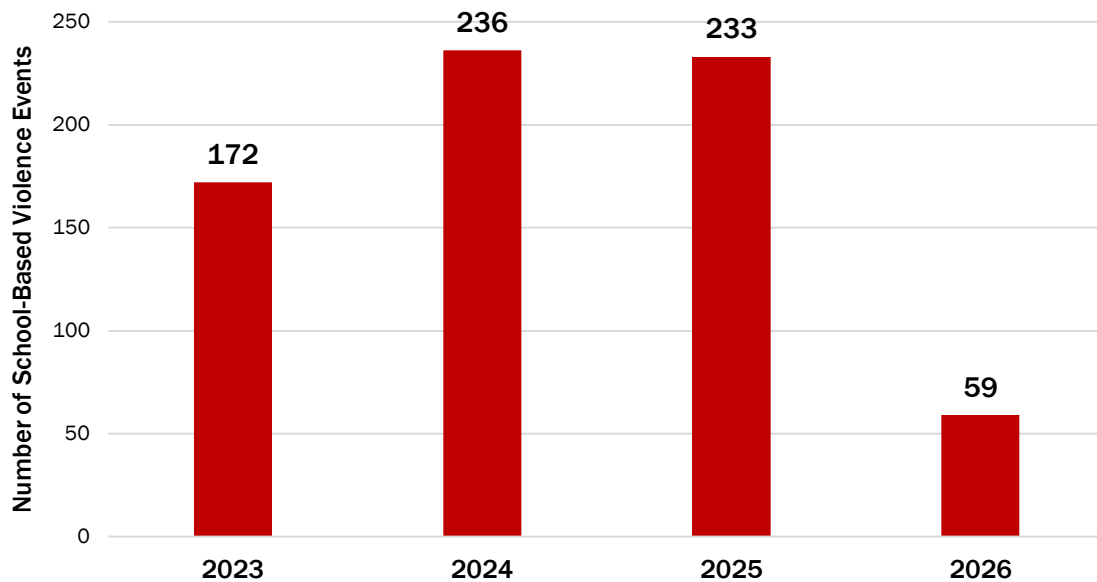
KEY TERMS

- ▶ **Targeted Violence** The T2V database uses the definition of targeted violence found in the Department of Homeland Security's 2019 Strategic Framework: "Any incident of violence that implicates homeland security and/or U.S. Department of Homeland Security activities, and in which a known or knowable attacker selects a particular target prior to the violent attack. Unlike terrorism, targeted violence includes attacks otherwise lacking a clearly discernible political, ideological, or religious motivation, but that are of such severity and magnitude as to suggest an intent to inflict a degree of mass injury, destruction, or death commensurate with known terrorist tactics. In the Homeland, targeted violence has a significant impact on the safety and security of our communities, schools, places of worship, and other public gatherings."¹
- ▶ **Premeditation** Premeditation is an intentional and thoughtful action that is instigated by the perpetrator. In some cases, premeditation is determined based on the perpetrators' statements or the results of criminal investigations into the events. In other cases, premeditation is inferred from the types of weapons used in the acts (e.g., events are assumed to be premeditated when the perpetrators of the attacks use explosive devices or other complex weapons that require assembly).
- ▶ **Plot** A premeditated act in which there is evidence that the perpetrator(s) had identified a potential target or targets for the attack and engaged in at least one mobilization activity in preparation for committing the crime, such as acquiring a weapon or the components necessary to assemble a weapon, surveilling a target, or recruiting others to participate in the attack.
- ▶ **School-Based Violence** Premeditated acts or threats of violence directed at school spaces (i.e., preschools, K-12 schools, colleges/universities) targeting students, teachers, school resource officers, and/or staff members at schools.
- ▶ **Foiled Plot** Premeditated plots to commit violent attacks or property crimes that were interrupted by law enforcement during their planning stages.
- ▶ **Failed Attack** Premeditated violent attacks in which the perpetrators failed to successfully deploy weapons due to technical malfunctions or operational errors.
- ▶ **Successful Attack** Premeditated attacks in which the perpetrators successfully deployed weapons (e.g., explosive devices were detonated, or shots were fired).
- ▶ **Property Crime** An event in which the perpetrator intended to commit, or committed, an attack to destroy the functionality of the target or render it inoperable.
- ▶ **Low Casualty Attack** An event in which the perpetrator intended to commit, or committed, an attack resulting in three or fewer casualties (deaths or injuries).
- ▶ **Mass Casualty Attack** An event in which the perpetrator intended to commit, or committed, an attack resulting in four or more casualties (deaths or injuries).

¹ https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19_0920_plcy_strategic-framework-counterterrorism-targeted-violence.pdf

PLOTS TARGETING U.S. SCHOOLS BY YEAR

January 1, 2023 - March 31, 2026

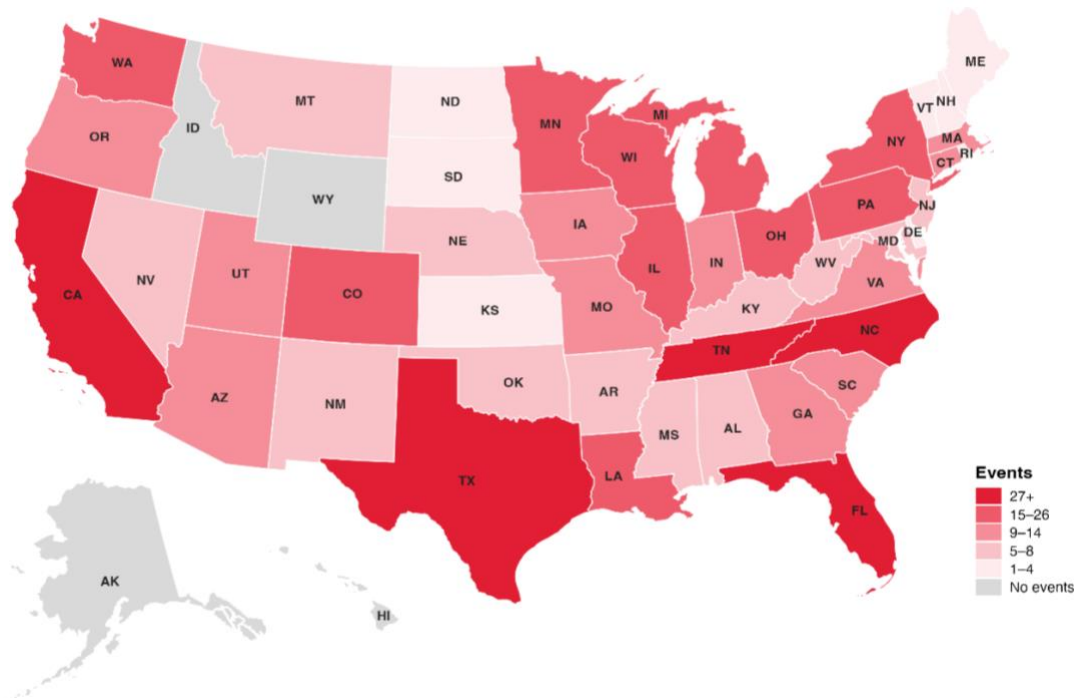


There were an average of 17.9 plots targeting U.S. schools per month from January 1, 2023, to March 31, 2026.

- ▶ There were 700 events in the United States targeting U.S. schools in the T2V database from January 1, 2023, to March 31, 2026—an average of approximately 17.9 incidents per month.
- ▶ The T2V data include 172 school-based violence events in 2023, 236 in 2024, 233 in 2025, and 59 in the first three months of 2026.
- ▶ The T2V data show that school-based violence increased by 37.2% from 2023 to 2024.
- ▶ School-based violence accounts for 21.8% of the T2V database.
- ▶ 86 events (12.3%) in the school-based violence T2V data were also categorized as terrorism or premeditated hate crime, indicating they were ideologically motivated.
- ▶ 15 events (2.1%) in the school-based violence T2V data were additionally categorized as workplace violence, indicating that an employee or former employee of the school planned the attack.

PLOTS TARGETING U.S. SCHOOLS BY LOCATION

January 1, 2023 – March 31, 2026



- ▶ The T2V data show that premeditated school-based violence occurred in 46 U.S. states and territories. There were no recorded events in Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, or Wyoming.
- ▶ One event occurred in the U.S. territory of the U.S. Virgin Islands. In this incident, a 17-year-old student was arrested for threatening his classmates at his high school in St. Croix. According to authorities, the individual threatened to shoot anyone who approached him. School staff and law enforcement searched his backpack and recovered a loaded firearm.
- ▶ One event occurred in Washington, DC, in which a 16-year-old student was arrested after threatening to carry out a mass shooting at a local school. The juvenile posted a picture on social media of himself holding a gun with the message, "[On my way] 2 school." Authorities searched the juvenile's residence and recovered seven firearms.
- ▶ 74 events occurred in Florida, 72 in Texas, 67 in California, 33 in Tennessee, and 27 in North Carolina.

AGES OF PERPETRATORS IN PLOTS TARGETING U.S. SCHOOLS

January 1, 2023 – March 31, 2026

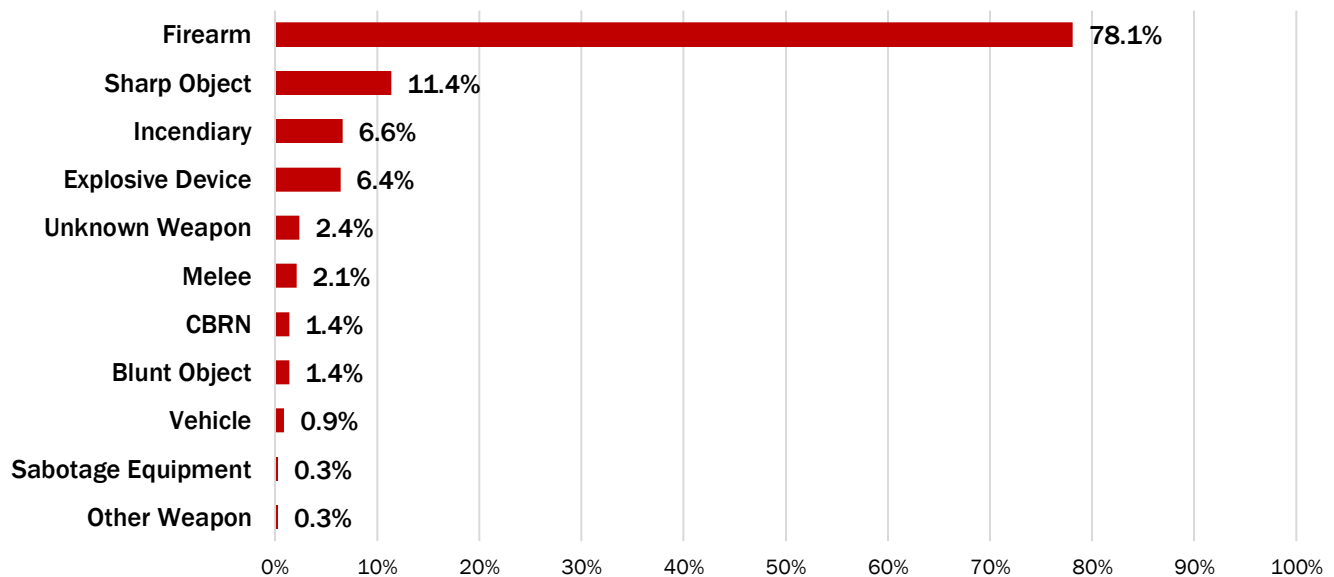
Ages of Perpetrators of School-Based Violence

Median Age	17
Percentage of Juveniles	56.2%
Age of Youngest Perpetrator	6
Age of Oldest Perpetrator	83

- ▶ According to the T2V data, the median age of perpetrators involved in plots targeting U.S. schools is 17 years old.
- ▶ Approximately 56.2% of school-based violence events in the T2V data were committed by individuals under the age of 18.
- ▶ The youngest perpetrator involved in school-based violence was just 6 years old when they committed their crime. The child shot and severely injured his teacher at a Virginia elementary school in 2023.
- ▶ The oldest perpetrator in the T2V data was 83 years old when they carried out their crime. The assailant opened fire on a high school drumline competition in Pasadena, Texas, injuring one victim.

PLOTS TARGETING U.S. SCHOOLS BY WEAPON TYPE

January 1, 2023 – March 31, 2026



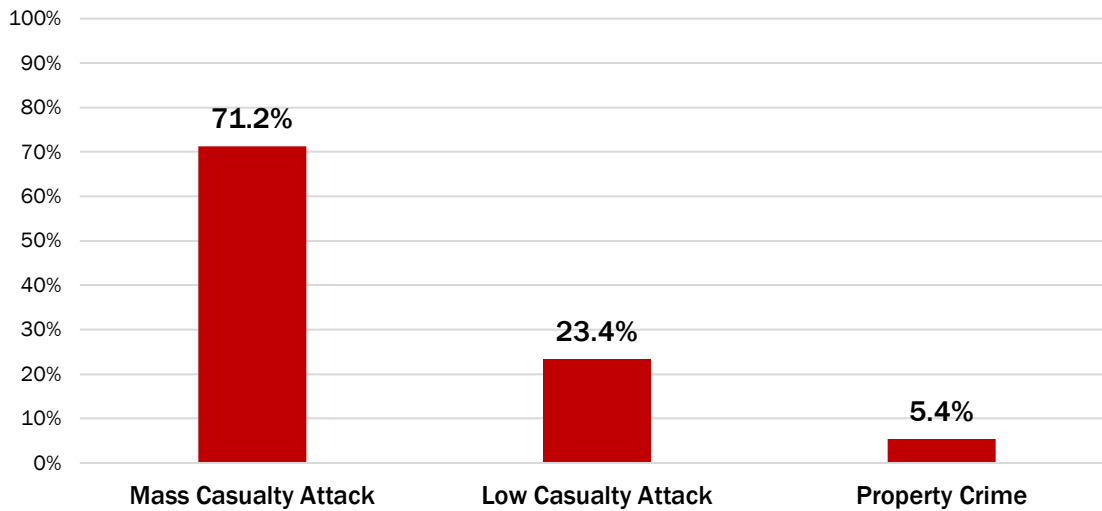
Note: Events can be coded for more than one weapon type and, thus, categories can total more than 100 percent.

School-based violence involving the use of firearms represent 78.1% of plots targeting U.S. schools in the T2V data.

- ▶ The T2V data show that firearms (78.1%) were the most commonly used weapons in plots targeting U.S. schools, accounting for 547 of the school-based violence events in the data.
- ▶ Following firearms, sharp objects (11.4%) were the second most commonly used weapon in plots targeting U.S. schools. The majority of these events involve knives. In one case, a 12-year-old stabbed and injured two students and a teacher at a middle school in Florida in 2026. Investigators reported that the juvenile brought a mask and kitchen knife to school, and surveillance footage showed the suspect changing clothes in a school restroom before carrying out the attack. The juvenile was arrested and charged with attempted first-degree premeditated murder.
- ▶ Incendiary devices (6.6%) were another commonly used weapon.
- ▶ Explosive devices were involved in 6.4% of school-based violence in the T2V data. In one case, a 19-year-old student detonated an explosive device in his college dorm room in Pennsylvania. Sources noted that the suspect told law enforcement he was “joking around” when he ignited the device; however, authorities discovered four additional bags containing explosive materials. The student was charged with aggravated arson (persons present), reckless endangerment, reckless burning or exploding, criminal mischief, recklessly endangering another person, and disorderly conduct.
- ▶ The use of Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) weapons was involved in 1.4% of T2V events targeting U.S. schools. For example, a 14-year-old student, adhering to white supremacist ideology, armed with a pellet gun and incendiary devices approached his middle school in Wisconsin. Police responded and the perpetrator was shot and killed. Sources noted that the perpetrator was in possession of a “dirty bomb” that contained five grams of uranium ore.

PLOTS TARGETING U.S. SCHOOLS BY INTENDED PLOT TYPE

January 1, 2023 - March 31, 2026



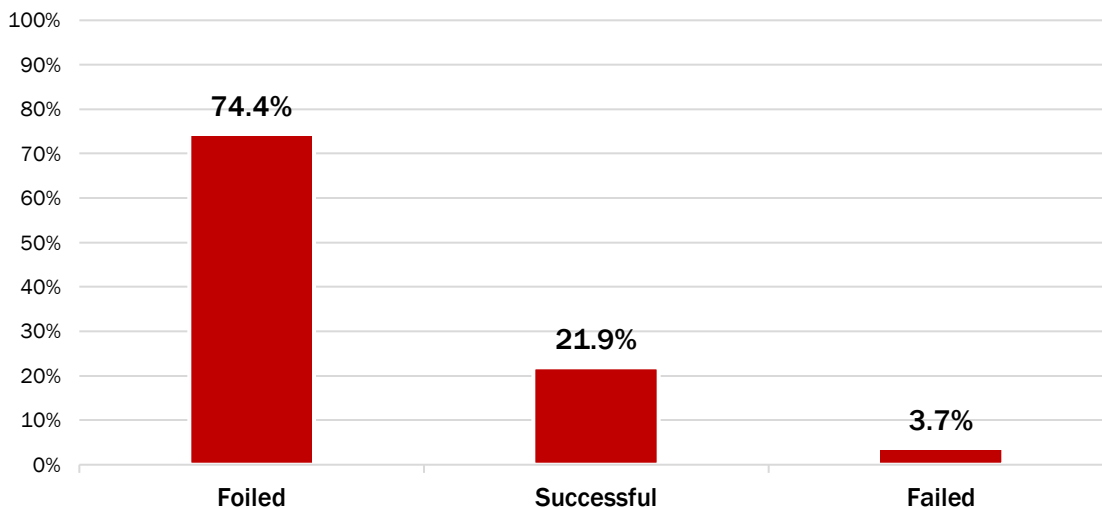
- ▶ The T2V data show that while the vast majority of school-based violence events targeted people (94.6%; 662 events), 5.4% (38 events) of these crimes targeted school property. Most of these events include perpetrators setting fire to school property, including school buildings, vehicles, and other school resources, in the late evening when no one was present on the school property.
- ▶ 23.4% of school-based violence in the T2V data were intended low casualty attacks, meaning that the perpetrators intended to target three or fewer people.

Most often these were targeted attacks of specific individuals, including students, teachers, and other school staff.

- ▶ The T2V data show that in over two-thirds (71.2%; 498 events) of school-based violence, the perpetrator intended to carry out a mass casualty attack. These include both discriminate and indiscriminate attacks.
- ▶ According to the T2V data, there were 15 successful mass casualty attacks targeting U.S. schools, in which four or more people were killed or injured.

OUTCOMES OF PLOTS TARGETING U.S. SCHOOLS

January 1, 2023 - March 31, 2026



12.9% of attacks targeting U.S. schools resulted in victim casualties.

- ▶ The T2V data demonstrate that from January 1, 2023 – March 31, 2026, 74.4% (521 events) of plots targeting U.S. schools in the T2V data were foiled, meaning that the plots were disrupted before they could be carried out. These are often the result of community and family tips to law enforcement.
- ▶ Only 3.7% of these incidents failed. For example, in one case, an 11-year-old threatened their classmates with a firearm at his school in Wisconsin. The student

pointed the gun at several students, and pulled the trigger once, but the weapon didn't fire because the chamber was empty. The juvenile found the gun at a family member's house prior to the incident.

- ▶ 21.9% of these plots were successful, meaning the perpetrators of the crimes successfully deployed their weapons.
- ▶ According to the T2V data, 12.9% of attacks targeting U.S. schools resulted in victim casualties. These attacks resulted in 45 victim deaths and 210 victim injuries. Sixteen perpetrators were killed, and nine were injured as a result of their crimes.

TERRORISM PLOTS TARGETING U.S. SCHOOLS

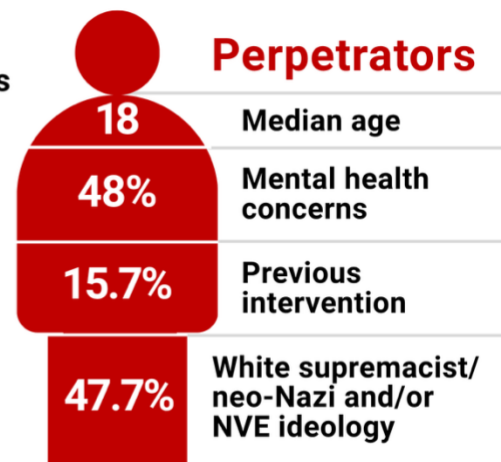
January 1, 2023 - March 31, 2026



26.7%
Illegal weapon purchases

38.4%
Plot success rate

29.1%
Victim casualties
19 victims were killed and 95 injured across these attacks



- ▶ The T2V data show that 12.3% (86 events) of all T2V school-based violence were also categorized as terrorism or premeditated hate crime, indicating they were ideologically motivated.
- ▶ In 47.7% of these events, the perpetrators adhered to white supremacist/neo-Nazi and/or Nihilistic Violent Extremism (NVE) ideologies.
- ▶ According to the T2V data, in 26.7% (23 events) of terrorism plots targeting U.S. schools, the perpetrator purchased the weapon illegally.
- ▶ The median age of perpetrators involved in terrorism plots targeting U.S. schools is 18 years old, much younger compared to the median ages of perpetrators of other types of violence in T2V, ranging from 29-37.
- ▶ The T2V data show that nearly half (48.0%) of the perpetrators involved in terrorism plots targeting schools had mental health concerns.
- ▶ According to the T2V data, the perpetrators of 15.7% of terrorism plots targeting schools were involved in some

form of previous intervention. These include suspensions/expulsions from school, psychological assessments/treatment, and previous arrests.

- ▶ The T2V data demonstrate that from January 1, 2023 – March 31, 2026, 38.4% (33 events) of terrorism plots targeting U.S. schools in the data were successful, meaning the perpetrators of the crimes successfully deployed their weapons. The success rate of terrorism plots targeting schools is higher than the success rate (21.9%) of school-based violence alone.
- ▶ More than a quarter (29.1%; 25 events) of terrorism plots targeting U.S. schools resulted in victim casualties. The percentage of victim casualties in terrorism plots targeting schools is higher than the percentage (12.9%) of school-based violence alone.
- ▶ In total, these attacks resulted in 19 victim deaths and 95 victim injuries. Seven perpetrators were killed, and three were injured because of their crimes.

ABOUT T2V

The Terrorism and Targeted Violence (T2V) in the United States database is a project housed at the University of Maryland that seeks to provide policymakers, practitioners, and researchers with comprehensive data on violent events occurring in the United States and its territories that are designed to have a significant impact on public safety and/or the security of critical infrastructure and community services. The database includes successful, failed, and foiled events that meet the following inclusion criteria:

- ▶ A premeditated act that is dangerous to, or potentially dangerous to, human life or the security of critical infrastructure or key resources and involves a degree of planning and a target;
- ▶ Is a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any subdivision of the United States;
- ▶ Is intended to intimidate, coerce, or otherwise impact a broader population beyond the target(s) of the immediate act or to generate publicity for the perpetrator and/or their grievances;
- ▶ And occurs within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States.

The T2V data include terrorism events, targeted violence occurring in school and workplace settings, public mass violence motivated by personal grievances, and other forms of violence that impact public safety and that of critical infrastructure. Mass violence events are defined as attacks that are designed to result in, or resulted in, the death or injury of four or more victims. The T2V data do not include events linked to gang activity, organized crime, interpersonal or intimate partner violence, crimes with a purely financial motive, or protest violence that were spontaneous or otherwise unplanned by the perpetrator prior to the event. For foiled plots to be included in the data, there must be evidence that the perpetrator(s) had identified a potential target or targets for the attack and engaged in at least one mobilization activity in preparation for committing the crime. This could include acquiring a weapon or the components necessary to assemble a weapon, surveilling a target, raising funds for the attack, recruiting others to participate in the attack, or writing a manifesto or preparing other legacy tokens to be released prior to, or discovered after, an attack. Threats that do not involve at least one mobilization indicator or are described as “hoaxes” or “not credible” are not included in T2V even if they resulted in criminal charges. All data for T2V are compiled using public sources, including high quality news accounts and public court records.

PROJECT TEAM

Principal Investigator: **Sheehan Kane**

Please direct questions to **Sheehan Kane** at Skane2@umd.edu.



The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) is a university-based research, education and training center comprised of an international network of scholars committed to the scientific study of terrorism, responses to terrorism and related phenomena. Led by the University of Maryland, START is a Department of Homeland Security Emeritus Center of Excellence that is supported by multiple federal agencies and departments. START uses state-of-the-art theories, methods and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics and effects of terrorism; the effectiveness and impacts of counterterrorism and CVE and other matters of global and national security. For more information, visit www.start.umd.edu or contact START at infostart@umd.edu.