



# OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

## U.S. Department of Justice

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### **DOJ OIG Releases Report on the FBI's Efforts to Identify Homegrown Violent Extremists Through Counterterrorism Assessments**

Department of Justice (DOJ) Inspector General Michael E. Horowitz announced today the release of a report examining the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) efforts to identify homegrown violent extremists (HVE) through counterterrorism assessments from October 2012 to September 2018. The FBI defines HVEs as global jihad-inspired individuals who are in the United States, have been radicalized primarily in the United States, and are not receiving individualized direction from a foreign terrorist organization. Since September 11, 2001, HVEs have carried out over 20 attacks in the United States, some of which occurred after the FBI closed a counterterrorism assessment or investigation on the individual.

The DOJ Office of the Inspector General (OIG) found that the FBI had not taken a comprehensive approach to resolving deficiencies in its counterterrorism assessment process. The specific findings in today's review include:

- **Weaknesses existed in the FBI's counterterrorism assessment process.** Following attacks by individuals previously assessed or investigated by the FBI, the FBI conducted reviews to identify weaknesses and areas for improvement in the FBI's process for assessing potential HVEs. However, the FBI did not ensure that all field offices and headquarters implemented recommended improvements and subsequent policy requirements. As a result, FBI field offices continued to conduct some counterterrorism assessments that did not meet FBI requirements or standards.
- **The FBI did not adequately execute an enterprise-wide review of closed counterterrorism assessments.** In 2017, the FBI conducted an internal review of closed counterterrorism assessments to ensure that the investigative effort and oversight of these assessments were thoroughly conducted in order to identify potential threats to national security and mitigate risks to public safety. Through this effort, the FBI identified that 6 percent of the closed assessments it reviewed did not adequately assess the potential threat, and warranted additional investigative action. However, nearly 40 percent of these counterterrorism assessments went unaddressed for 18 months after deficiencies were known to the FBI. As of February 2019, the FBI reported to the OIG that necessary investigative measures have now been taken on these assessments.
- **The FBI should identify and address inconsistencies in its reevaluation of closed assessments.** We found inconsistencies in the scope of database checks that were being conducted by some

field offices when reviewing closed assessments that may implicate legal, policy, and civil liberties issues associated with these reevaluations. As a result, the FBI must determine if some field offices missed opportunities to identify current and accurate information about potential HVEs, or if actions taken by other offices could have implicated the civil liberties of subjects of previously closed assessments.

- **The FBI must address emerging challenges to assess potential HVEs.** Another challenge facing the FBI arises from the increased the number of tips and leads being sent to FBI offices. We found that the FBI has decided to integrate criminal threat matters into its system for assessing counterterrorism threats and it is in the process of updating its protocols related to this change. However, we found the FBI has not developed an effective approach in dealing with the prevalence of assessments associated with individuals with an identified mental health issue and determining whether these individuals pose an actual threat to national security or public safety.

Today's report makes seven recommendations to assist the FBI its efforts to identify HVEs through counterterrorism assessments. The FBI agreed with all seven recommendations.

**Report:** Today's report can be found on the OIG's website under "Recent Reports" at the following link: <https://oig.justice.gov/reports/2020/a20030.pdf>.

**Video:** To accompany today's report, the OIG has released a 2-minute video featuring the Inspector General discussing the report's findings. The video and a downloadable transcript are available at the following link: <https://oig.justice.gov/multimedia/video-03-04-20.htm>.

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In addition to this report, in June 2018 the OIG issued to the FBI a [Management Advisory Memorandum](#) detailing the OIG's concern about inadequate actions taken by the FBI to mitigate a particular national security threat.