



Homeland  
Security



INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT

16 April 2020

## (U) Counterterrorism Mission Center

### (U//FOUO) Lethal Domestic Violent Extremist Attacks Likely to Continue This Year

**(U//FOUO) Scope.** This *Intelligence Assessment* provides strategic warning of the current domestic violent extremist (DVE) threat and the potential for increased lethality and sophistication of DVE attacks.<sup>a</sup> It identifies the most current threats, focusing on the targets and tactics most commonly featured in these attacks, as well as relevant drivers for violence in these different movements. This assessment also recognizes the historical social and political environment in 1995 that surrounded the Oklahoma City Bombing, and how the continued emphasis on high profile, mass casualty attacks remains aspirational amongst DVEs. This parallel is also worth noting due to the impending 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Oklahoma City Bombing on 19 April 2020. This *Assessment* is intended to assist federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement and homeland security partners in mitigating these threats. The information in this *Assessment* is current as of 10 March 2020.

*(U//FOUO) Prepared by the DHS Intelligence Enterprise (DHS IE) Counterterrorism Mission Center (CTMC) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Coordinated with DHS Office for Bombing Prevention, Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team, US Coast Guard, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Transportation Security Administration, US Secret Service, and the National Counterterrorism Center.*

#### (U) Key Judgments

**(U//FOUO) The FBI and DHS assess some DVEs across ideologies almost certainly will continue to plot and conduct attacks intending to cause high casualty counts over the next 12 months. We base this assessment on sustained DVE interest in mass casualty attacks against soft targets, previous mass attacks, and the distribution of manifestos that intend to inspire future plotters and attackers.**

**(U//FOUO) The FBI and DHS judge some DVEs across ideologies likely will threaten or attempt to plot or conduct attacks against high-profile targets they perceive will garner increased notoriety or result in greater perceived impact. We base this assessment on previous attacks and associated ongoing violent rhetoric observed on social media and other online forums.**

**(U//FOUO) The FBI and DHS assess several current social and political factors likely will contribute to the radicalization and mobilization of individuals across DVE ideologies seeking to conduct increasingly lethal or sophisticated attacks.<sup>b</sup> We base this assessment on motivating factors of recent DVE violence and a review of social and political indicators present during previous periods of heightened DVE activity.**

<sup>a</sup> (U//FOUO) The FBI and DHS define a domestic violent extremist (DVE) as an individual based and operating primarily within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power who seeks to further political or social goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may not constitute extremism, and may be constitutionally protected.

<sup>b</sup> (U//FOUO) The FBI and DHS define radicalization as the process through which an individual changes from a nonviolent belief system to a belief system that includes the willingness to actively advocate, facilitate, or use unlawful violence as a method to affect societal or political change.

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**(U//FOUO) Sustained Interest in Mass Casualty Attacks**

**(U//FOUO) The FBI and DHS assess some DVEs across ideologies almost certainly will continue to plot and conduct attacks intending to cause high casualty counts over the next 12 months. We base this assessment on sustained DVE interest in mass casualty attacks against soft targets and the distribution of manifestos—particularly those of racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (RMVE)<sup>c</sup>—online that have inspired attackers and intend to inspire future DVE threats and attacks.**

- » (U) Four of five lethal DVE attacks in 2019 included the use of semi-automatic rifles to cause mass casualties against soft targets, according to press reporting. The 10 December 2019 attack in Jersey City, New Jersey, occurred at a Kosher supermarket; the 3 August 2019 attack in El Paso, Texas, occurred at a busy retail store; the 28 July 2019 attack in Gilroy, California, occurred at an outdoor-ticketed event; and the 27 April 2019 attack in Poway, California, occurred at a synagogue.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>
- » (U//FOUO) Brenton Tarrant, the Australian national who conducted the March 2019 attacks against two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, disseminated a manifesto prior to his shootings, detailing his anger and perception that society faced a “white genocide” as a result of immigration. While Tarrant’s attack did not occur in the Homeland, his manifesto contained a wide range of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim views and inspired subsequent RMVE shootings and plots in the United States and overseas. The April 2019 Poway, California, shooter allegedly viewed Tarrant as a “catalyst” for his actions and the August 2019 El Paso, Texas, shooter allegedly drew direct inspiration from Tarrant, according to their manifestos.<sup>5,6,7</sup>
- » (U//FOUO) Some RMVEs, including the April 2019 Poway, California, shooter, advance the theme of gamification, according to DHS reporting. Gamification as applied to fatality counts in attacks are referred to as “scores,” as the actor desires to accomplish “achievements” or high kill counts.<sup>8,9</sup>

**(U//FOUO) Some DVEs Continue to Seek to Attack High-Profile Targets**

**(U//FOUO) The FBI and DHS judge some DVEs likely will continue to threaten or attempt to plot or conduct attacks against high-profile targets they perceive will garner increased notoriety or result in greater perceived impact. We base this assessment on previous attacks and associated ongoing violent rhetoric observed on social media and other online forums.**

- » (U//FOUO) In October 2018, Caesar Sayoc<sup>USPER</sup> mailed 16 packages containing explosives and explosive components to known political and public figures and an identified media organization he believed posed a threat to the United States. None of these devices detonated or otherwise caused injury or property damage. Sayoc was sentenced to 20 years in prison.<sup>10</sup>
- » (U//FOUO) In January 2020, Christopher Hasson<sup>USPER</sup>, a Lieutenant in the US Coast Guard, was sentenced to 160 months in federal prison for firearms violations and possession of a controlled substance.<sup>11</sup> Hasson, who advocated for “focused violence” to “make a change,” read manifestos and memoirs of attackers with a variety of DVE and RMVE ideologies, including that of Norwegian violent extremist Anders Breivik. He conducted internet searches that implied his desire to kill politicians and television personalities, maintained a collection of weapons, and used controlled dangerous substances.<sup>12</sup>
- » (U//FOUO) Some DVEs issue online threats of unverified credibility advocating for specifically targeting high profile individuals and institutions—including politicians and critical infrastructure—due to the perceived impact as compared to an indiscriminate attack intending to cause mass casualties, according to DHS open source reporting.<sup>13,14,15,16</sup>

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<sup>c</sup> (U//FOUO) Racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism (RMVE) encompasses threats involving the potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence, in furtherance of political and/or social agendas, which are deemed to derive from bias—often related to race or ethnicity—held by the actor against others, including a given population group.

**(U//FOUO) Perceived Environmental Factors Contributing to DVE Radicalization and Mobilization**

(U//FOUO) **The FBI and DHS assess several current social and political factors likely will contribute to the radicalization and mobilization of individuals across DVE ideologies seeking to conduct increasingly lethal or sophisticated attacks. We base this assessment on motivating factors of recent DVE violence and a review of social and political indicators present during previous periods of heightened DVE activity.** DVEs often perceive these social and political indicators as threatening their way of life and are frequently outlined in DVE manifestos and online threats.

- » (U//FOUO) Tarrant’s manifesto stated one reason for his attack was “to create conflict...within the United States on the ownership of firearms in order to further the social, cultural, political, and racial divide within the United states [sic].” Other individuals in 2019 and early 2020 issued online threats of violence in reaction to discussions about changes in firearm legislation that are perceived to equate to gun confiscation or other restrictions of 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment rights, according to DHS open source reporting.<sup>17,18,19</sup> These reports did not include sufficient identifying information or threat characteristics to warrant further FBI investigation.
- » (U//FOUO) The El Paso and Poway shooters both cited immigration and resulting changes in population demographics as one of the driving factors for their respective attacks, and explained the attacks were conducted in furtherance of their belief in the superiority of the white race, according to their manifestos.<sup>20,21</sup> The July 2019 anarchist extremist arson of a Tacoma, Washington, detention center occurred in the aftermath of an announced immigration enforcement action, highlighting the potential for varied DVE reactions to the same social or political issues.<sup>d</sup>
- » (U//FOUO) DVEs also continue to exhibit anti-government violent extremist sentiments, including online threats of violence against law enforcement, political opponents, and a persistent belief that the federal government and/or law enforcement is overreaching or negligent in executing authorities, according to DHS reporting.<sup>22,23,e</sup> These reports did not include sufficient identifying information or threat information to warrant further FBI investigation. Previous incidents of attempted violence targeting individuals based on their perceived political affiliation—such as the aforementioned 2018 attempted package bombs—highlight the concern for similar violence during the ongoing presidential campaign season.
- » (U//FOUO) Some RMVEs who advocate for the superiority of the white race seek to exploit the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to bolster their narratives and encourage attacks against minorities, including Jewish and Asian Americans, according to open source reporting.<sup>24,25</sup> Some DVEs are also probably influenced by online conspiracy theories describing the pandemic as a government-perpetrated hoax, according to open source and FBI reporting. Militia extremists particularly have an enduring concern about government overreach they believe could culminate in government-led mass firearm confiscations or the imposition of martial law.<sup>26,f</sup>

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<sup>d</sup> (U//FOUO) The FBI and DHS define anarchist extremists as individuals who seek, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence, to further their opposition to all forms of capitalism, corporate globalization, and governing institutions, which they perceive as harmful to society. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may not constitute extremism, and may be constitutionally protected.

<sup>e</sup> (U//FOUO) The FBI and DHS define anti-government/anti-authority violent extremism as threats encompassing the potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence, in furtherance of political and/or social agendas, which are deemed to derive from anti-government or anti-authority sentiment, including opposition to perceived economic, social, or racial hierarchies; or perceived government overreach, negligence, or illegitimacy.

<sup>f</sup> (U//FOUO) Militia extremists are individuals who seek, wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence, based on their belief that the US government is purposely exceeding its Constitutional authority and is attempting to establish a totalitarian regime. Consequently, these individuals oppose many federal and state laws and regulations, particularly those related to firearms ownership. Militia extremists take overt steps to violently resist or facilitate the overthrow of the US government. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may not constitute extremism, and may be constitutionally protected.

**(U) Some Factors in Current DVE Environment Also Present in Pre-Oklahoma City Bombing Environment**

*(U) Firearms legislation, associated anti-government violent extremist sentiment, and the perception of threats against those advocating for the superiority of the white race featured prominently in the radicalization and mobilization of now-deceased Timothy McVeigh—one of two DVEs responsible for the 19 April 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma—according to an academic expert who interviewed McVeigh and published books related to the DVE environment of the 1980s and 1990s and a researcher who followed DVE activity and drivers in the mid-1980s for a major newspaper before publishing his research in a book. McVeigh perceived shifts in public attitudes towards firearms, changes in firearms legislation, and associated federal law enforcement actions as proof of a government-led conspiracy to confiscate firearms. McVeigh’s perception of these real-world events—including federal government sieges in Ruby Ridge, Idaho and Waco, Texas, mirrored the plot of The Turner Diaries, a 1978 novel that strongly resonated with McVeigh and other DVEs. Hunter, the 1989 prequel to The Turner Diaries, focused more on lone offender violence, an idea further popularized amongst DVEs as “leaderless resistance” by a prominent DVE in the early 1990s. Additionally, anti-Semitism, and to a lesser extent, anti-immigrant sentiment, featured prominently in the threats, attacks, and messaging attributable to DVEs in the 1980s.<sup>27,28</sup>*

**(U) Report Suspicious Activity**

**(U) To report suspicious activity, law enforcement, Fire-EMS, private security personnel, and emergency managers should follow established protocols; all other personnel should call 911 or contact local law enforcement.** Suspicious activity reports (SARs) will be forwarded to the appropriate fusion center and FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force for further action. For more information on the Nationwide SAR Initiative, visit <http://nsi.ncirc.gov/resources.aspx>.

**(U) Tracked by:** HSEC-8.1, HSEC-8.2, HSEC-8.3, HSEC-8.5, HSEC-8.8

**(U) Source Summary Statement**

(U//FOUO) This *Assessment* is based on FBI and DHS reporting, academic works, government press releases and press reporting. We have **high confidence** in the information obtained from FBI reporting because it derives from thorough investigations, including subject interviews. However, though generally corroborated by other reporting, some of the human source reporting may have been delivered with the intent to influence as well as inform. We have **medium confidence** in the information obtained from DHS reporting because some of it is corroborated by other accounts of DVE threats and activity and this information otherwise speaks to the general DVE environment, but specific reports may be indicative of aspirational plotting rather than specific or credible threats. Though the reliability of some of the social media information cannot be determined, our confidence in these reports is bolstered by corroborating information in articles from reputable press organizations. We have **high confidence** in the information obtained from academic works because the information is derived from subject matter experts, one of whom had direct contact with Timothy McVeigh. We have **high confidence** in the information obtained from government press releases and press reporting because it consists of verifiable facts.

(U//FOUO) We have **high confidence** in our assessment that some DVEs almost certainly will continue to plot and conduct attacks intending to cause high casualty counts over the next 12 months. This assessment is based on FBI, DHS, and press reporting which we consider reliable overall and which provide accurate reporting of facts. A significant change in the targets and tactics featured in DVE attacks could change our assessment.

(U//FOUO) We have **medium confidence** in our assessment that some DVEs likely will threaten or attempt to plot or conduct attacks against more high-profile targets. This assessment is based on FBI reporting, DHS reporting, and government press releases. We judge these sources to be relatively reliable and generally corroborated by other reporting. Corroborating information indicating continued DVE interest in sophisticated TTPs and/or high-profile targets would increase our confidence in this assessment.

(U//FOUO) We have **high confidence** in our assessment that several current social and political factors likely will continue to contribute to the radicalization and mobilization of DVEs seeking to conduct increasingly lethal or sophisticated attacks. This assessment is based on DHS reporting featuring generally accurate descriptions of the online activity and stated sentiments of DVE subjects and academic works which we judge to be reliable. A significant reduction in influence of environmental factors and concurrent increase in influence of explicitly personal factors could change our assessment.

- <sup>1</sup> (U); Ted Sherman and S.P. Sullivan; NJ.com; "Inside the Jersey City carnage. A day of hate, death, and heroism." 15 DEC 2019; <https://www.nj.com/news/2019/12/the-day-that-hate-came-to-jersey-city.html>; accessed on 13 FEB 2020; (U); Online News Source.
- <sup>2</sup> (U); CBS News; "El Paso shooting: Prosecutors to seek death penalty for "domestic terrorism""; 5 AUG 2019; <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/el-paso-shooting-victim-death-toll-rises-22-today-death-penalty-for-domestic-terrorism-in-walmart-shooting-2019-08-05/>; accessed on 7 NOV 2019; (U); Online News Source.
- <sup>3</sup> (U); Hannah Fry and Richard Winton; Los Angeles Times; "Gilroy shooter's target list prompts domestic terrorism probe by FBI"; 6 AUG 2019; <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2019-08-06/gilroy-garlic-festival-shooting-domestic-terrorism-probe>; accessed on 7 NOV 2019; (U); Online News Source.
- <sup>4</sup> (U); Shannon Van Sant and James Doubek; NPR; "California Synagogue Shooting Investigated As A Hate Crime After 1 Killed, 3 Injured"; 27 APR 2019; <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/27/717849871/injuries-reported-in-shooting-at-california-synagogue>; accessed on 7 NOV 2019; (U); Online News Source.
- <sup>5</sup> (U); FBI Case Information.
- <sup>6</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-1427-19, 3 AUG 2019; (U//FOUO); Alleged El Paso shooter releases manifesto; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>7</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-1113-19, 27 APR 2019; (U//FOUO); Alleged San Diego-based synagogue shooter published manifesto online before 27 April 2019 attack; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>8</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-1113-19, 27 APR 2019; (U//FOUO); Alleged San Diego-based synagogue shooter published manifesto online before 27 April 2019 attack; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>9</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS; OSIR-04001-1432-19; 04 AUG 2019; DOI 03 AUG 2019; (U//FOUO); Extremist suggests fuel bomb for future white supremacist extremist attacks following El Paso, Texas shooting; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.

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- <sup>10</sup> (U); DOJ; Florida Man Sentenced in Manhattan Federal Court to 20 Years in Prison for Mailing 16 Improvised Explosive Devices in Connection with October 2018 Domestic Terrorist Attack; 6 AUG 2019; <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/florida-man-sentenced-manhattan-federal-court-20-years-prison-mailing-16-improvised-explosive>; accessed on 7 NOV 2019; (U); Government Press Release.
- <sup>11</sup> (U) DOJ; “Christopher Hasson Sentenced to More Than 13 Years in Federal Prison on Federal Charges of Illegal Possession of Silencers, Possession of Firearms by an Addict to and Unlawful User of a Controlled Substance, and Possession of a Controlled Substance”; 31 January 2020; <https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/pr/christopher-hasson-sentenced-more-13-years-federal-prison-charges-illegal>; accessed on 25 February 2020; (U); Government Press Release.
- <sup>12</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI Case Information.
- <sup>13</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-1437-19, 5 AUG 2019; (U//FOUO); U.S. extremist social media user discusses potential targets for future attacks following El Paso, Texas shooting; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>14</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-0027-20, 5 OCT 2019; (U//FOUO); Anonymous image board user incites violence as a tactic for raising awareness and identifies targets as politicians, critical infrastructure, and mass media; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>15</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-1578-19, 27 AUG 2019; (U//FOUO); Article outlines Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs) for attacks to accelerate societal collapse; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>16</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-1448-19, 08 AUG 2019; (U//FOUO); U.S. extremist incites mass shootings; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>17</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-0360-20, 19 JAN 2020; (U//FOUO); Instant messaging user provides graphic with TTPs to attack or disable a Virginia State Police armored vehicle; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>18</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-1129-19, 30 APR 2019; (U//FOUO); Antigovernment extremist incites May Day violence against antifascists; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>19</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-0640-19, 12 JAN 2019; (U//FOUO); White supremacist extremist incites violence towards Muslims, African Americans, a journalist, an athlete, and a gun control activist; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>20</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-1113-19, 27 APR 2019; (U//FOUO); Alleged San Diego-based synagogue shooter published manifesto online before 27 April 2019 attack; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>21</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-1427-19, 3 AUG 2019; (U//FOUO); Alleged El Paso shooter releases manifesto; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>22</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-0782-19, 14 FEB 2019; (U//FOUO); Anti-government extremist incites violence against the FBI, a former FBI Acting Director, and others; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>23</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-0827-19, 27 FEB 2019; (U//FOUO); Washington State-based anti-government extremist incites violence against Muslims and US politicians; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>24</sup> (U); Anti-Defamation League; “Coronavirus Crisis Elevates Antisemitic, Racist Tropes”; 17 MAR 2020; <https://www.adl.org/blog/coronavirus-crisis-elevates-antisemitic-racisttropes?fbclid=IwAR3MXZ7g7sfxeR2bs8tP54T5Uj3m9DgKBXUuUTDxahxx7VA-dFrjsuAr2U>; accessed on 20 MAR 2020; (U); Nonprofit organization.
- <sup>25</sup> (U//FOUO); DHS, OSIR-04001-0506-20; 10 MAR 2020; (U//FOUO); White supremacist extremist Telegram channel administrator posts false flyer inciting coronavirus infected persons to visit religious centers, diverse neighborhoods, and utilize public transit; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>26</sup> (U); FBI Case Information.
- <sup>27</sup> (U); Stuart A. Wright; Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing; 2007.
- <sup>28</sup> (U); James Coates; Armed and Dangerous: The Rise of the Survivalist Right; 1987.



Product Title:

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1. Please select partner type:  and function:

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3. Please complete the following sentence: "I focus most of my time on:"

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	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	N/A
Product's overall usefulness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Product's relevance to your mission	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Product's timeliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Product's responsiveness to your intelligence needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drive planning and preparedness efforts, training, and/or emergency response operations | <input type="checkbox"/> Initiate a law enforcement investigation       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Observe, identify, and/or disrupt threats   | <input type="checkbox"/> Intiate your own regional-specific analysis    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Share with partners   | <input type="checkbox"/> Intiate your own topic-specific analysis       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Allocate resources (e.g. equipment and personnel)                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Develop long-term homeland security strategies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reprioritize organizational focus   | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not plan to use                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Author or adjust policies and guidelines  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <input type="text"/>                    |

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