





Understanding and Mitigating Threats Against Public Officials

Sergeant Glen Armstrong
Captain Thomas A. Bradshaw, DSL, MPA
January 7, 2026

VALOR • SERVICE • PRIDE



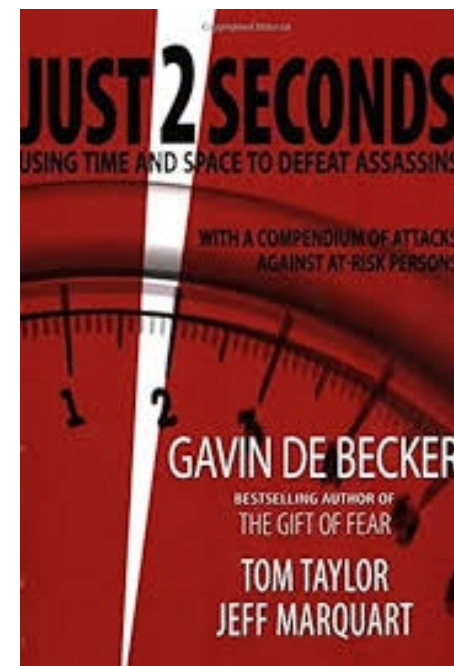
Agenda

- Why do people attack public officials?
- Status, target of opportunity, wrong place, and wrong time.
- How are people attacked?
- What can be done to mitigate attacks?
- Importance of securing your domicile; most vulnerable.
- Benefits of a personal protection team.
- Who are the people who attack others?



Attack/Assassination Facts

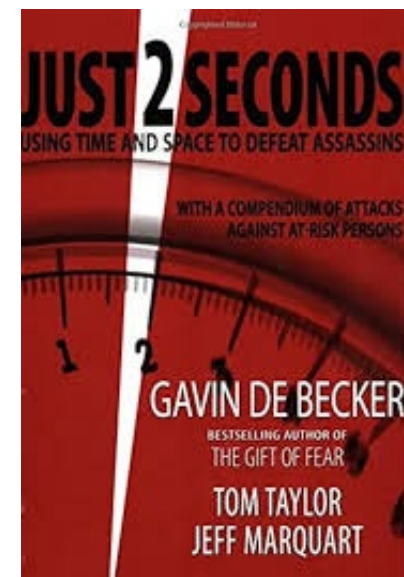
- In the U.S., most attacks are more likely to be undertaken by a lone assailant 87%.
- Attacks in the U.S. are about as likely to be indoors as outdoors, 53%.
- Firearms are the most likely weapon of the attack, 71%.
- In the U.S., handguns are more than twice as likely to be used as long guns 51%; outside of the U.S., the reverse is true.



Attack/Assassination Facts

- Attacks in the U.S. are more likely to be at close range, less than 25 feet 81%.
- Bombs succeed at killing intended targets only slightly more often than they fail, in 57%.
- The most dangerous place to be is in or around the protectee's vehicle 77%.
- 70% of attacks have occurred in the daytime.

- Just 2 Seconds (2008, DeBecker & Taylor)



The Why

Why Are Public Officials Attacked?

A. Status and Symbolism

- Public officials represent authority, governance, and policy.
- Individuals with grievances - political, ideological, or personal - may see you not as a person, but as a **symbol of the system**.
- Even mild or misdirected anger can escalate when someone views attacking a public figure as a way to “send a message.”

B. Target of Opportunity

- Many attackers are not sophisticated planners. They strike because:
- They see **easy access** or **predictable routines**.
- In public, pay attention to your surroundings and maintain situational awareness instead of focusing on your iPhone.
- They are time and place-predictable.
- They encounter you in public venues - events, offices, or community engagements - where you appear unprotected.
- Opportunity often matters more than intent.
- Start thinking like an attacker.
- How and why could someone hurt you?

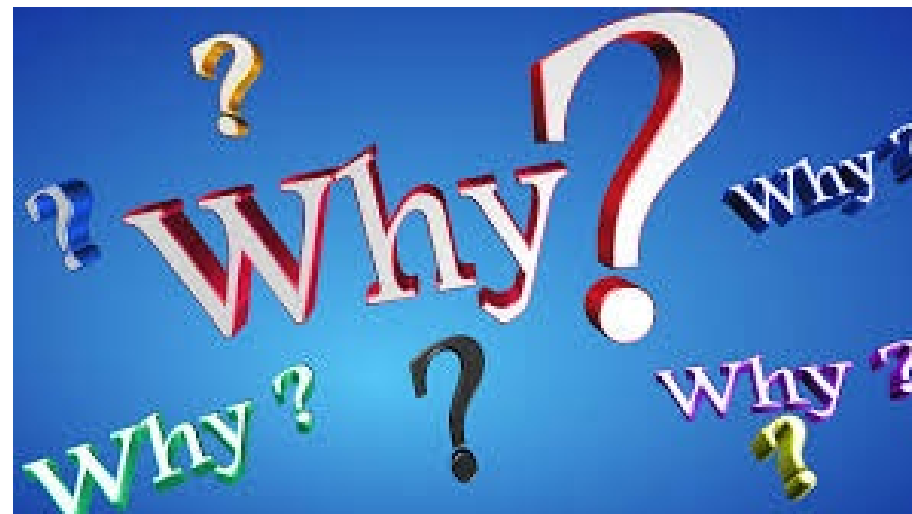


The Why

C. Wrong Place, Wrong Time

Some attacks occur simply because a public official was present during:

- A volatile protest.
- A dispute involving others.
- A spontaneous criminal act.
- Your role attracts attention, but your presence at the wrong moment can further escalate risk.



How Are People Attacked?

While the methods vary, most attacks fall into several categories:

A. Physical Attacks

- Punching, pushing, or grabbing.
- Edged weapons or blunt objects.
- Firearms (assessable, highest lethality).
- Attacking a family member, e.g., son, daughter, or family pet.

B. Close-Range Confrontations

- Most confrontations occur within a few feet—often during handshakes, greetings, or crowd interactions.

C. Digital Threats Leading to Physical Encounters

- Doxxing (address or personal info online).
- Cyberstalking.
- Harassment that escalates into in-person confrontations.

D. Ambush or Approach During Routine Activities

When arriving/departing home. Most attacks occur here; why?

- Entering vehicles. (Decals on your personal vehicles)
- Walking into public buildings.
- Predictable routines create predictable vulnerabilities.



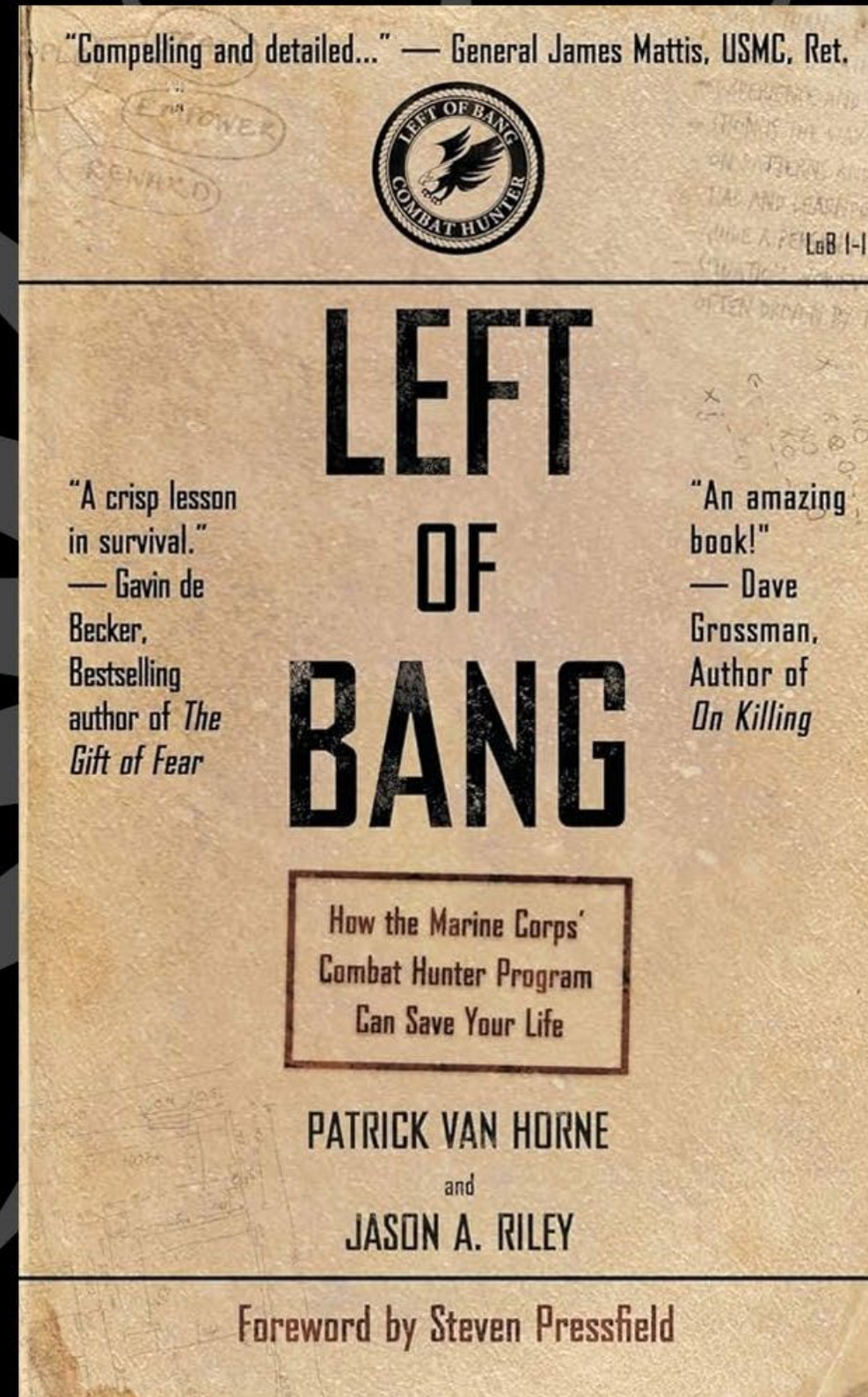
Why Attacks on Political Leaders are Increasing?



- **Threats are more common than attacks:** The vast majority of incidents targeting political leaders begin as **communications—emails, social media posts, letters, or in-person statements—**long before any violence occurs.
- **Grievance, not ideology, is often the driver:** Research consistently shows that attackers are more often motivated by **personal grievances, perceived injustice, or fixation on a single issue** than by organized political extremism.
- **Local leaders face a higher risk than national figures:** Mayors, council members, school board members, and judges often have **less security, greater public access, and more direct involvement in contentious local decisions.**
- **Familiarity increases vulnerability:** Many attacks occur in **routine locations** - homes, parking lots, offices, or community events—rather than during major public appearances.



Thinking In a Proactive vs. Reactive Paradigm



VALOR • SERVICE • PRIDE





The Pathway to Violence

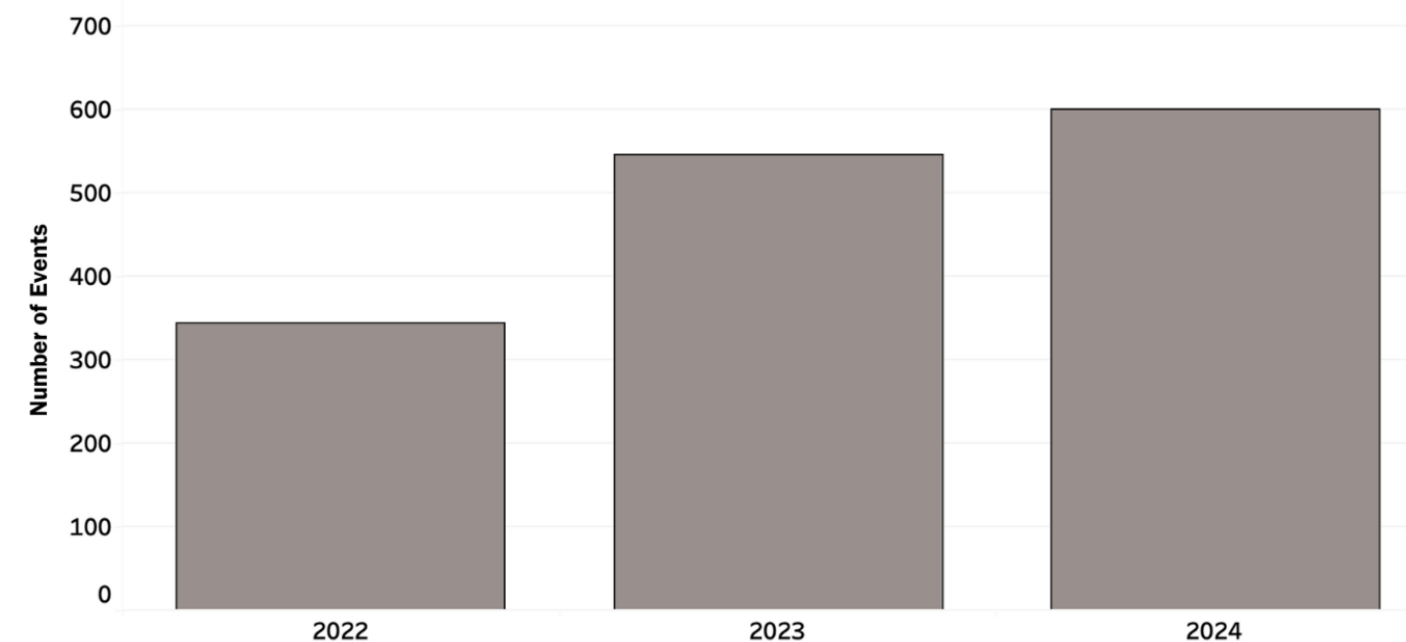


Types of Threats

- **Conditional** - "I'll hurt you if you don't pay."
- **Veiled** - "You'll regret this."
- **Indirect** - "Someone will pay."
- **Direct** - "I'll kill you."



Threats and Harassment Against Local Public Officials



Data Source: BDI's Threats & Harassment Dataset (THD)



VALOR • SERVICE • PRIDE

What information are you DRIVING around?

Let me introduce you to our children, and because they're involved with extracurriculars, we'll be gone most evenings and/or weekends for practices or games.

We like expensive toys that you can probably find in our garage.

We have a small-breed dog that answers to the name "Max."

This is where we live/work.

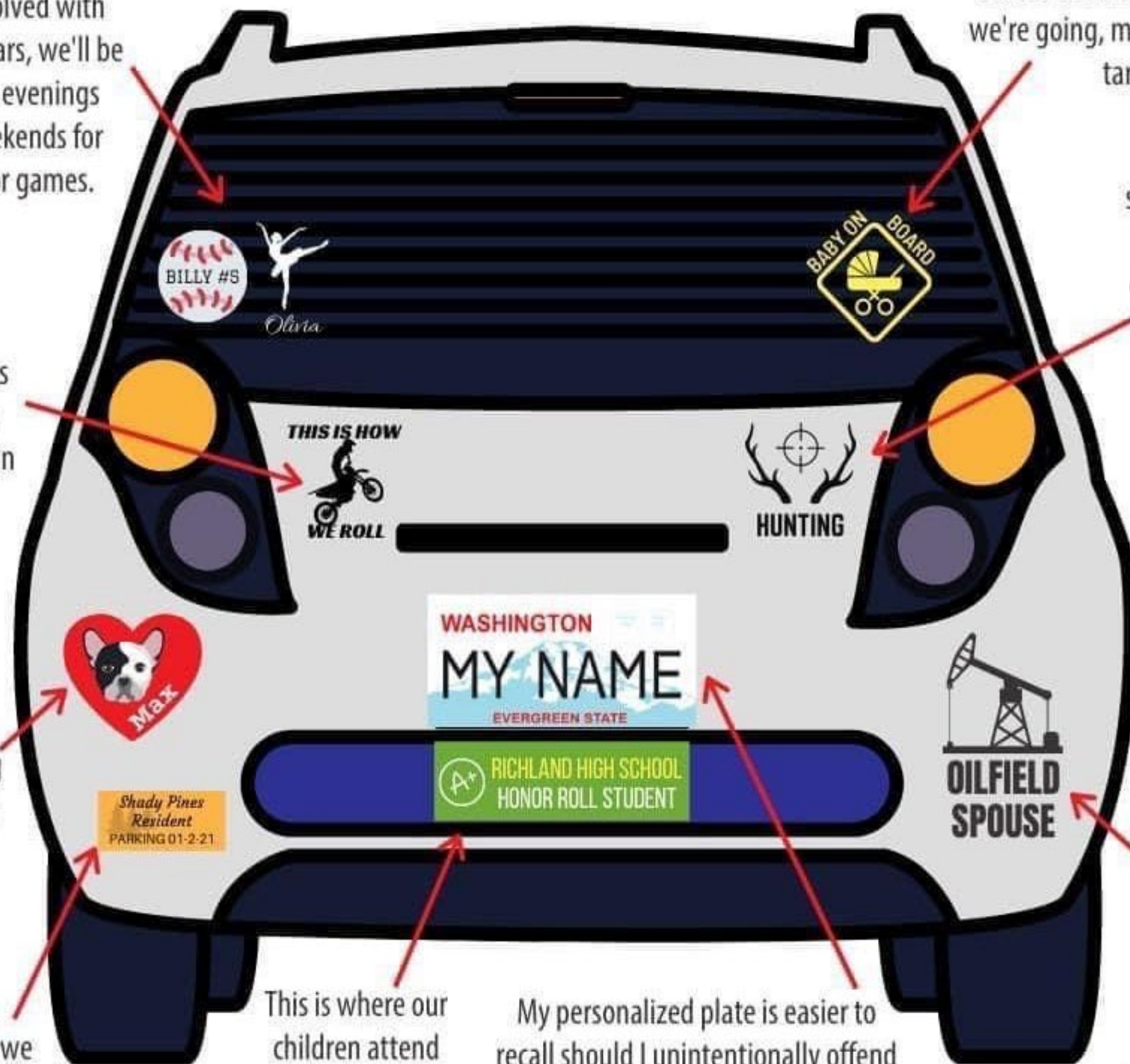
This is where our children attend school.

My personalized plate is easier to recall should I unintentionally offend someone or if someone wants to keep track of my vehicle.

We'll have our hands full and be distracted when we get where we're going, making us an easy target.

We like outdoor sports and may have expensive equipment at home or possibly in our car. We'll also be gone on most weekends during peak seasons, leaving our house unattended.

My spouse is away for extended periods of time.



.vsp.virginia.gov

What Can Be Done to Mitigate An Attack?

A. Awareness and Predictability Reduction

- Vary routes and times for travel.
- Limit publicly posted personal schedules.
- Limit your social media footprint.
- Maintain situational awareness at events and in transitional spaces (parking lots, building entrances).

B. Professional Threat Assessments

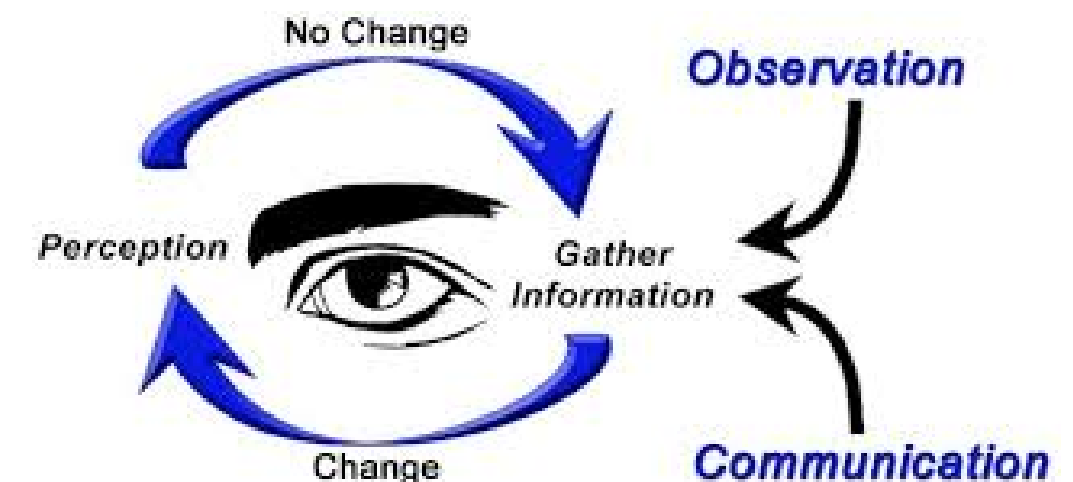
- Early identification of concerning individuals or behaviors.
- Monitoring of escalating rhetoric or repeated unwanted contact.
- Coordination with police intelligence units.

C. Event Security Planning

- Physical barriers.
- Controlled access points.
- Trained personnel in monitoring crowds.
- Clear emergency exit and evacuation protocols.

D. Personal Conduct Measures

- Maintain distance during public interactions when possible.
- Avoid engaging with visibly agitated individuals.
- Use of trained staff to screen or buffer crowds.



Importance of Securing Your Domicile

Your Home Is Your Most Vulnerable Location Because

- Routines are easiest to observe.
- You are time and place-predictable.
- Protective staff are often absent; portal to portal.
- Family members may also be exposed.



Essential Residential Security Measures

- Reinforced doors, quality locks, and intrusion-resistant windows.
- Modern alarm system with police integration.
- Perimeter lighting, motion sensors, and camera coverage.
- Mail/package screening.
- Secured Wi-Fi and privacy-protected digital footprint.
- Avoid posting photos/videos that reveal layout or entry points.
- A well-secured home dramatically decreases the risk of targeted attacks, stalking, or opportunistic violence.



Importance of Securing Your Domicile

Your Home Is Your Most Vulnerable Location Because

- Routines are easiest to observe.
- You are time and place-predictable.
- Protective staff are often absent; portal to portal.
- Family members may also be exposed.



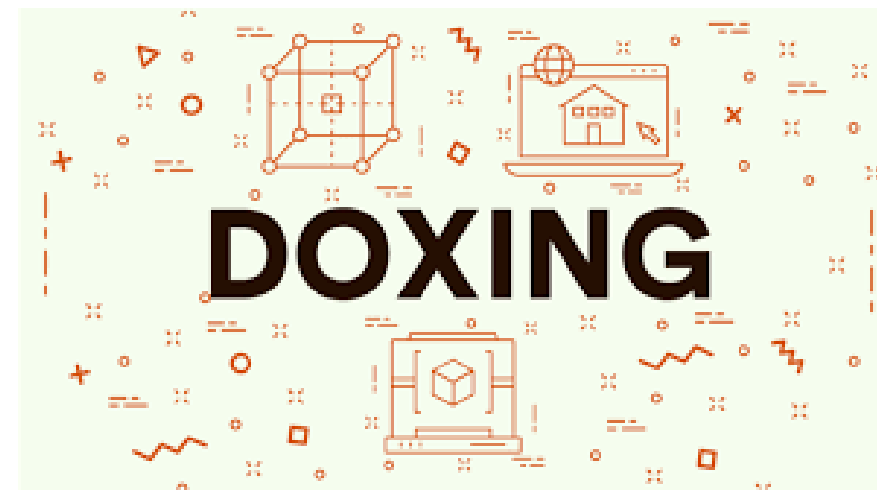
Essential Residential Security Measures

- Reinforced doors, quality locks, and intrusion-resistant windows.
- Modern alarm system with police integration.
- Perimeter lighting, motion sensors, and camera coverage.
- Mail/package screening.
- Secured Wi-Fi and privacy-protected digital footprint.
- Avoid posting photos/videos that reveal layout or entry points.
- A well-secured home dramatically decreases the risk of targeted attacks, stalking, or opportunistic violence.



What is Doxing and Swatting?

- **Doxing** is revealing someone's private, identifying information (like address, phone number, SSN) online without consent for harassment or intimidation.
- **Swatting** is a dangerous form of doxxing where perpetrators use that information to make a false emergency report to dispatch armed police (SWAT teams) to the victim's home, creating a life-threatening situation.
- Doxing provides the data, and swatting uses it for a malicious physical-world attack.



Benefits of a Protection Team

A. Threat Detection and Deterrence

- Potential attackers are less likely to act when skilled personnel are present.
- Protection officers can identify pre-attack indicators early.

B. Advanced Planning

- Route assessments, site surveys, and contingency plans.
- Coordination with local law enforcement.
- Pre-event intelligence on attendees and risks.

C. Immediate Response Capability

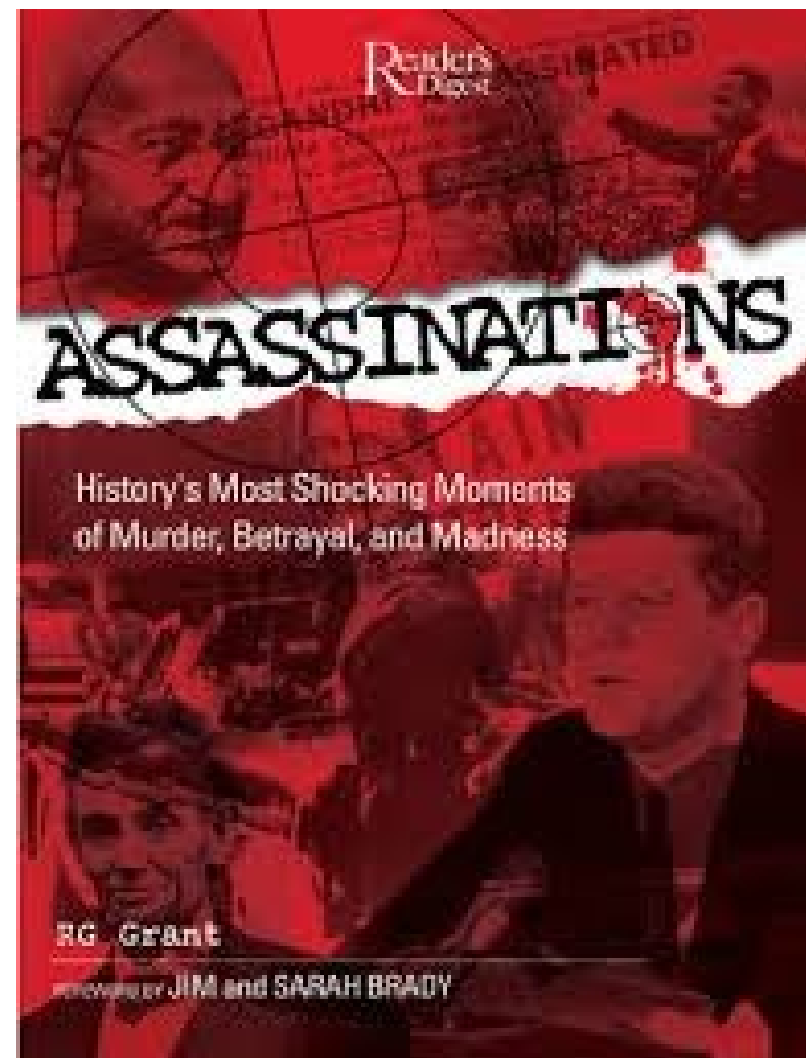
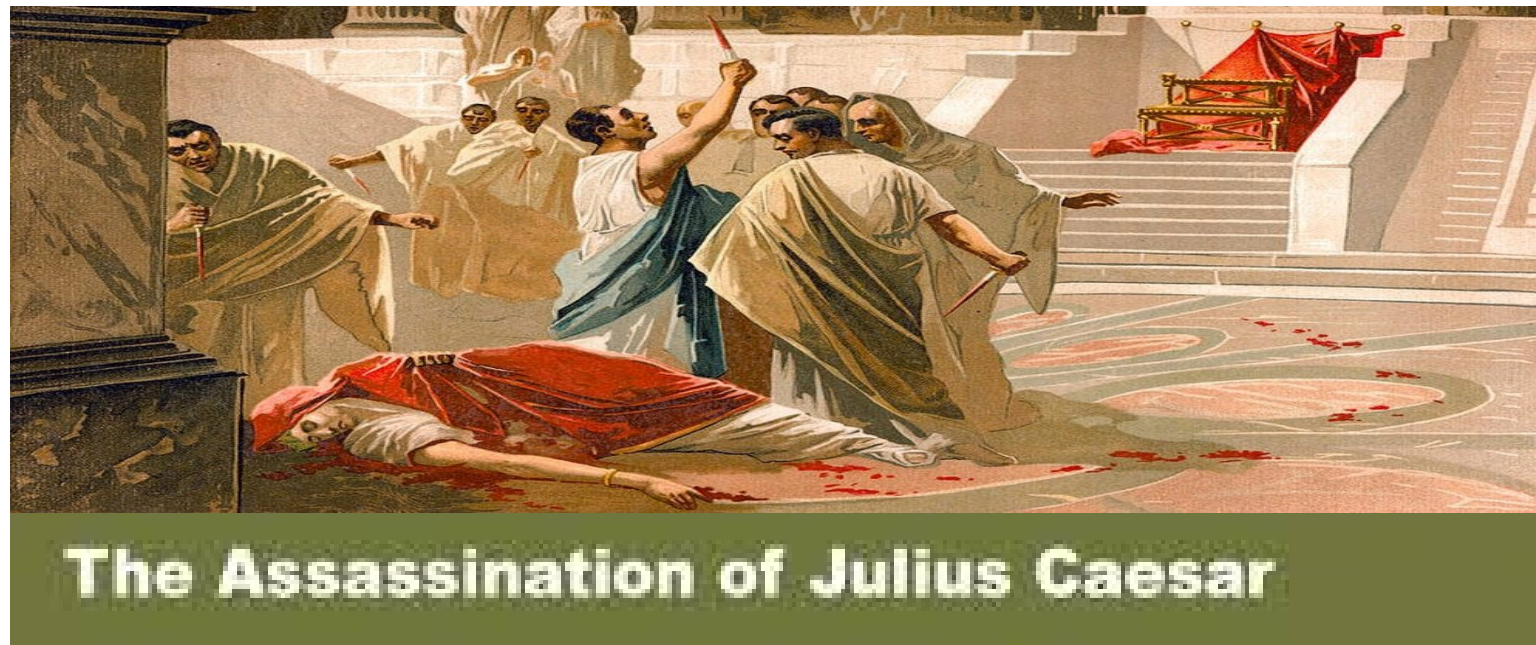
- Rapid evacuation strategies.
- Medical aid.
- Crowd and conflict management.
- Even a small team can dramatically reduce the likelihood and impact of an attack.

D. Protection for Family Members

- Threats often extend to the spouse and children.
- A professional team ensures safety continuity beyond the workplace.



Since 44 BC, Attacks and Assassinations on Public Officials Have Occurred



State representative [Melissa Hortman](#) (left) and her husband were killed, while state senator [John Hoffman](#) (right) and his wife were injured.



June14, 2025



July 13, 2024

Butler, Pennsylvania

Motive - The investigation into Thomas Crooks' involvement is TBD

Means - Crooks climbed up the side of a building with an AR-15 rifle (.223 rounds), 130 yards away from the stage. He kneeled and took seven shots at former President Trump while giving his speech.

Opportunity - Former President Trump was at a public rally with the USSS, PA State Police, and local police. Proximity to the protectee was a major factor in this security failure; they didn't control the line of sight.



www.vsp.virginia.gov

VALOR • SERVICE • PRIDE



September 15, 2024

Palm Beach, Florida

Motive - The investigation into Ryan Routh's involvement is TBD.

Means - Routh concealed himself in the Trump International Golf Course shrubbery near the roadway while aiming a .223 rifle 150 yards from former President Trump while approaching the fifth hole in the course.

Opportunity - Former President Trump was at his closed golf course with the USSS. The USSS advance agent was approaching the Sixth hole when he noticed a rifle pointing at President Trump out of the shrubbery. The agent shot at Routh; he fled the scene and was later arrested by local police due to a citizen giving them the license plate number. The area where this occurred was known to be frequented by paparazzi.



Assassination of United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson by Luigi Mangione 12/'24



www.vsp.virginia.gov

VALOR • SERVICE • PRIDE



Charlie Kirk, Political Activist and Founder of Turning Point USA

September 11, 2025

Utah Valley University

Motive - Shot by a 22-year-old, Tyler Robinson.

Means - Climbed up the side of a building with a bolt-action .30-06 Mauser M98 bolt-action rifle. ~200 yards away from the stage. He took one shot, hitting Charlie Kirk in the left side of his neck while he was answering a student during his “Prove Me Wrong” engagement.

Opportunity - Charlie Kirk was at an outdoor public rally with approximately 3,000 students. Security at the event consisted of Charlie Kirk’s personal security detail, six officers from Utah Valley University, and one Utah State University Police Officer.



Threat of a Lone Wolf



- A **"lone wolf"** is someone who prefers to live, work, or act independently, avoiding groups and preferring solitude. Still, the term also refers to a criminal who plans and executes violent acts alone without a group, often inspired by an ideology but acting without direct orders.
- **Characteristics:** May be deep thinkers, good listeners, or draw energy from solitude; they aren't necessarily shy but engage with the world differently.

Motivation: May be inspired by extremist ideologies but acts independently, without direct command. For public officials, lone actors are especially dangerous because they:

- **Blend into normal society.**
- **Lack of communications that intelligence systems can easily intercept.**
- **Often escalate rapidly from grievance to action.**

Common Motivations

- Most lone-wolf threats emerge from a **convergence of factors**, not a single cause:

Personal grievance

- Termination, arrest, disciplinary action, civil disputes.

Ideological fixation

- Anti-government, sovereign citizen beliefs, extremism.

Perceived humiliation or loss of status

- "They ruined my life."

Identity crisis

- Seeking meaning, recognition, or notoriety.

Mental health stressors

- Not causative alone, but often present during escalation.



Conclusion



- Maintain good situational awareness.
- Most people who contact you – even angrily – are not dangerous.
- But the small number who usually stand out over time.
- Our job together is to notice, share, and manage concerns before they become a crisis.
- Be proactive vs. reactive during official functions and in life.



VALOR • SERVICE • PRIDE



Questions:

Captain Thomas A. Bradshaw, DSL, MPA

tom.bradshaw@vsp.virginia.gov

Office (804) 674-2044

