

VIOLENCE AND PROTECTIVE INTELLIGENCE  
IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA:

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# PERSPECTIVES ON THE SHINZO ABE ASSASSINATION

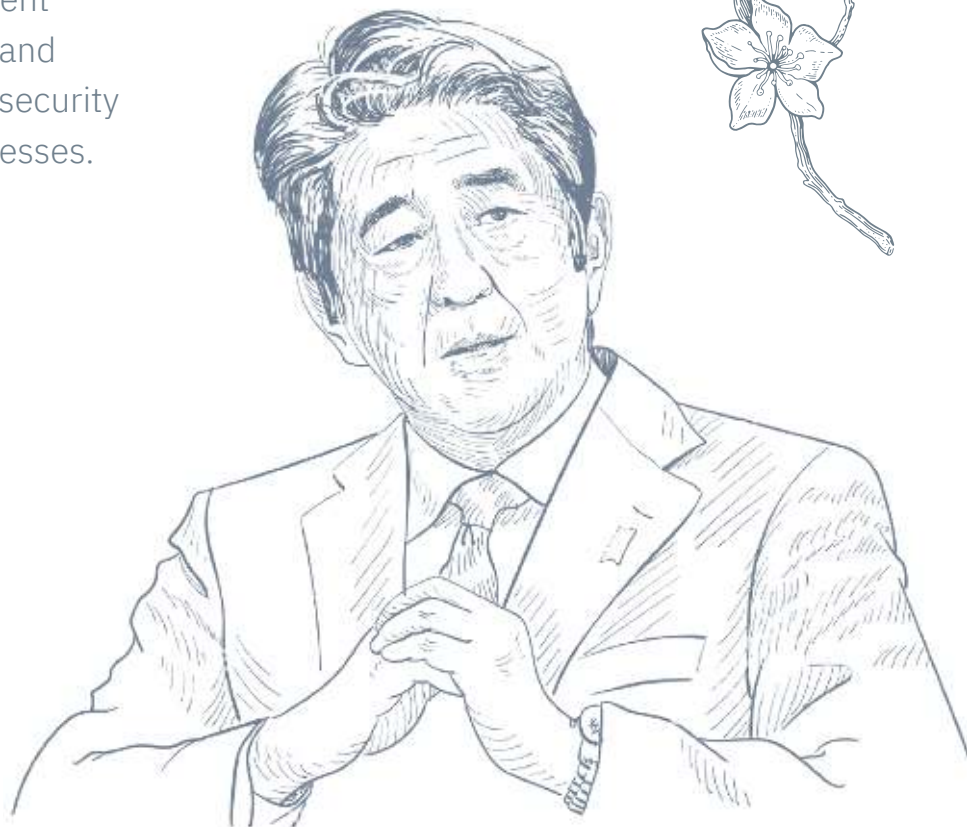


# FOREWORD

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The July 2022 assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe continues to reverberate through the security industry as government officials, executives and corporate security teams consider the implications of this incident for their security posture. The unusual tactical details and wider circumstances of this event have created a unique opportunity to examine the intersection of protective intelligence and wider geopolitical trends to better understand shifts in global crime, weapons and activities, broader societal problems and trends in the protection of high-profile individuals.

The piece you're about to read is a collaborative effort among several thought leaders and subject matter experts in the corporate security and risk management industry, analyzing the attack on Abe and addressing the broad range of global security implications for individuals and businesses.



SHINZO ABE 1954-2022

THE ONTIC CENTER FOR PROTECTIVE INTELLIGENCE, EMERGENT RISK INTERNATIONAL, TORCHSTONE GLOBAL AND AT-RISK INTERNATIONAL BELIEVE THAT COLLABORATIVE WORK AMONG PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR CLIENTS WILL ALWAYS YIELD THE BEST RESULTS. WORKING ACROSS THESE ORGANIZATIONS, WE HAVE CREATED THIS COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ASSASSINATION TO HELP YOUR ORGANIZATION UNDERSTAND:



### Geopolitical Events

Every event has a backstory that can help us better understand threats to personal safety and their impact on broader corporate, societal and political issues. Abe's assassination exemplifies how geopolitics and societal trends are interwoven with threats against high-profile individuals.



### Violent Crime Trends

Against the backdrop of the pandemic, there is evidence suggesting that violent crime has risen and that mental health is playing a role in this, leading to more deadly violent events, sometimes in unexpected places.



### Targeting Prominent Individuals

The rise in direct threats to politicians, public health officials and other public personas since 2016 has coincided with a global shift toward authoritarian politics and less respectful interactions between politicians and supporters. This trend worsened with the onset of the pandemic and will likely be with us for some time, underscoring the need for focused protective intelligence in public and private organizations.



### Illegal Weapons

The use of a homemade gun in the Abe assassination illustrated the sharp increase in home-manufactured firearms – often referred to as ghost guns – will make personnel and protectees less safe in the coming years. Understanding the trends behind the proliferation of these weapons and that they are not exclusive to any one country may help organizations become more vigilant for nontraditional weapons.



### How to Keep Protectees Safe

Abe's assassination underscores what we have long experienced in protection operations – complacency is our worst enemy. Prior to the attack, security personnel appeared to be inward-facing, rather than surveilling the crowd for risks. The 2.5-second gap between the first and second shots should have been enough time for close protection agents to cover Abe and begin to move him off the X, but complacency resulted in hesitation, which contributed to the deadly outcome. Counter-surveillance assets and a protective intelligence mindset could have reduced the threat and potentially neutralized the attack.

Each of the organizations involved brings a unique perspective and skill set to help your team analyze and understand the complexities of this situation. While many readers may not have operations in Japan or protect government officials, we believe the lessons learned in this attack and the implications for the security industry are important for all security professionals to understand and consider.

We hope that you find this contribution to the discussion useful.

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# EXECUTIVE PROTECTION

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

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On July 8, Tetsuya Yamagami shot and killed former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe with a homemade weapon at a campaign event in Nara, Japan. Abe was speaking on a traffic island in the middle of a road, and Yamagami moved within seven meters of Abe before firing two shots from behind. The first shot missed; however, Yamagami was able to then move to within five meters before firing again and wounding Abe, who died later in the hospital.

Video footage suggests Abe had four security personnel guarding him; however, after the first shot, two security personnel moved to intercept the attacker, rather than protecting Abe. On August 25, a National Police Agency investigation concluded<sup>1</sup> that Abe's security plan was overly focused on threats while transporting him between venues and had neglected threats from behind. The report also criticized police command and communications processes. The national police chief and the Nara prefectural police chief announced their resignation as a result.

**Below are some primary observations from our teams:**

### EVENT SECURITY PREPARATIONS

There did not appear to be a secure perimeter established during the scheduled outdoor campaign speech. There was also a visible lack of counter-surveillance police assets surveying the crowd. The overall protection detail size was small. Unconfirmed open-source reporting indicates only four protection officers were assigned to Abe. The detail was also inwardly focused, instead of concentrating on the crowd, where threats to high-profile individuals generally emerge. Moreover, this inward focus made it harder for the detail to see the attacker's out-of-place demeanor, if they had been looking for it.

### THE ATTACK

The assassin was able to fire two shots from a handmade shotgun-like device, and the security personnel were not able to intercept the shooter after the first shot was fired. The video shows white smoke in the air following the discharges.<sup>2</sup> The first shot missed Abe, but the second shot struck a fatal blow.

### SECURITY RESPONSE

The officers were slow to recognize the attack after the first shot. There was no apparent effort to provide body cover for the former PM, possibly because his close protection detail appeared to be too physically distant from him. A small ballistic shield was deployed by an officer after the first shot, but the effort was late and ineffective. This combination of distance and hesitation proved fatal. After the incident began and the attacker struck his blows, the police response in capturing the shooter was quick and effective.

### MEDICAL RESPONSE

Japan's low violence rates means there are not many doctors who are trained to address gunshot wounds. This should be considered when high-profile individuals travel to places like Japan, with details ensuring that they know – and can access – the nearest and most qualified facilities to treat major traumatic injuries.

### THE ATTACKER

There are no indications that the shooter was a prior intelligence concern. However, recent open-source reporting indicates the shooter had been planning the attack for nearly 20 years. We are not aware of a similar attack planned by any recent political assassin over this length of time.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/25/japan-police-chief-to-resign-over-shinzo-abe-assassination>

<sup>2</sup> For more on the device and rounds recovered from the autopsy - <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/07/10/national/crime-legal/diy-gun-abe-assassination/>

### MOTIVE

According to *The Japan Times*, the shooter's motive in targeting Abe was "a grudge against a certain religious group." The assassin apparently decided to target Abe over what he believed were the former PM's "close" ties to the group. Reportedly, his family's finances were ruined by his mother's donations to the Unification Church, causing the family to declare bankruptcy in 2002.<sup>3</sup> Media reports also indicate the shooter claimed his motive was not political, telling police he chose to target Abe after initially planning to target a Unification Church leader with a fire-bomb two to three years prior. Explosives were found in his home, along with other homemade weapons. The attacker's reported motive stresses the need to consider the broader ways in which threats to high-profile individuals may arise. Intelligence collection must consider not just direct threats to the individual but the current threats and recent history of the company or organization with which the individual is affiliated.

### ATTACK PREPARATIONS

Open-source media reports indicate that the shooter told the police he had initially planned on using explosives in the attack but chose to use a handmade gun to minimize casualties. He also practiced firing the homemade gun the day before, which made him vulnerable to detection during the weapons acquisition phase of his attack cycle.<sup>4</sup> Tactically, although crude in design, the weapon effectively discharged two shots.

### COMPLACENCY KILLS

Japan<sup>5</sup> is considered a "safe" country due to its low crime rates and low incidences of extremism. It is easy to become complacent in this type of environment and relax situational awareness. Complacency then leads to denial. "This can't be happening here; this can't be happening now; this can't be happening to me." In this case, lax situational awareness meant that the detail missed the attacker until he fired the shot. It is also evident that denial contributed to the hesitation witnessed in the reaction of the protective team. There was a 2.5-second gap between the first and second shots, which should have been enough time for the close protection agents to cover Abe and begin to move him off the X, but the hesitation resulting from denial prevented it. This complacency and denial also impacted Abe. He turned to look at the gunman after the first shot, rather than reacting and attempting to escape the threat. Threats can emerge in any environment and security team members and leaders must work to combat complacency and practice good situational awareness. Keeping executive protection teams focused and on point is a significant challenge in "safe" places.

### ACTION IS FASTER THAN REACTION

Protective teams must spot the threat actor before they are able to attack. Even in an environment considered to be "safe" teams must focus on preventing an attack rather than responding to one. Protective intelligence<sup>6</sup> is the set of tools that allow a protective detail to become proactive, identify threat actors and prevent attacks. Protective intelligence is not just used by huge protective details. In fact, small details need this even more than larger details. Any size protective detail can use the principles of protective intelligence to help them become proactive and stay left of the boom.

3 <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/07/15/national/crime-legal/yamagami-abe-shooting-motivation>

4 Sirhan Sirhan, who assassinated Robert F. Kennedy, also practiced firing his weapon before carrying out the attack.

5 <https://www.torchstoneglobal.com/enemies-of-situational-awareness/>

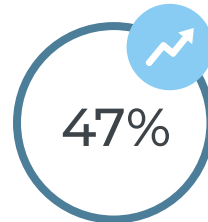
6 <https://www.torchstoneglobal.com/why-is-protective-intelligence-effective/>



# GLOBAL THREATS – LOCAL IMPLICATIONS: THE BIG PICTURE

## WHERE IT CAN BE MEASURED, VIOLENT BEHAVIOR APPEARS TO BE INCREASING – AND IS NOT EXCLUSIVE TO THE UNITED STATES.

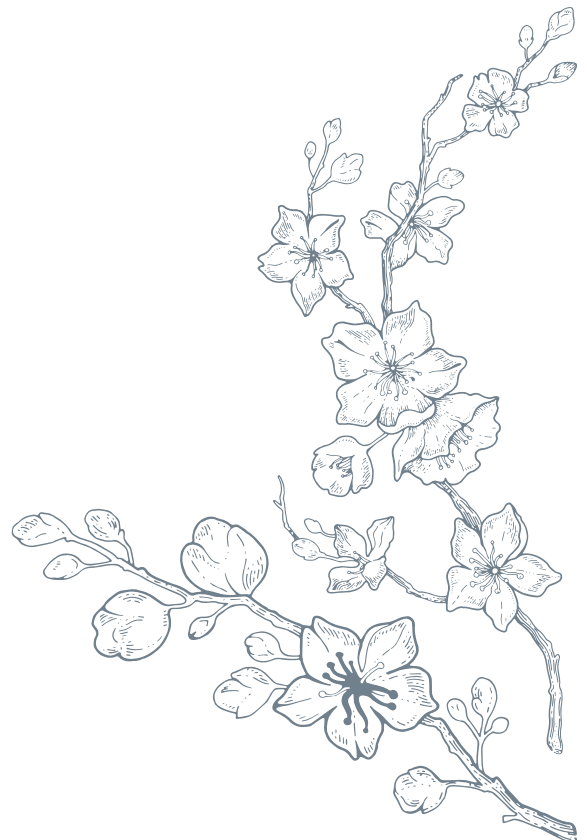
In a country like Japan, where violence is rare, Abe's assassination was shocking. However, violent behavior in general and threats to officials specifically appear to be rising in many countries. Reliable near-real-time quantitative data on violence trends is very difficult to identify. Yet what is available shows that while nonviolent property crime overall largely continued to decrease during the pandemic, violent crimes – particularly homicides and assaults – increased during the pandemic and are continuing to rise. In the US, gun homicides rose by 47% from 2019 to 2021<sup>7</sup> and remained elevated during the first half of 2022, according to the Gun Violence Archive. In England and Wales, which provide quarterly survey reporting on crime rates, homicides jumped 25% from March 2021 - March 2022, even as total crime remained in line with pre-pandemic levels and theft fell 20%.<sup>8</sup> Qualitatively, public-facing organizations are almost universally also seeing a worsening physical security environment. Ontic survey data shows nearly 90% of companies surveyed are experiencing a “dramatic” increase in threats this year, even over 2021's elevated levels.<sup>9</sup> Company security managers particularly cited extremism and political polarization, vaccine requirements and insider threats as the major threat drivers this year.



In the US, gun homicides rose by 47% from 2019 to 2021



In England and Wales, which provide quarterly survey reporting on crime rates, homicides jumped 25% from March 2021 - March 2022



<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/past-tolls>

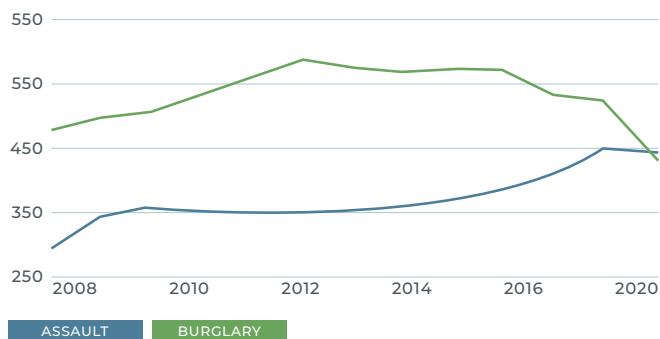
<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2022>

<sup>9</sup> <https://ontic.co/2022-state-of-protective-intelligence-report/>

## THREATS TOWARDS PUBLIC OFFICIALS HAVE RISEN SINCE 2016 AND WERE FREQUENT DURING THE PANDEMIC.<sup>10</sup>

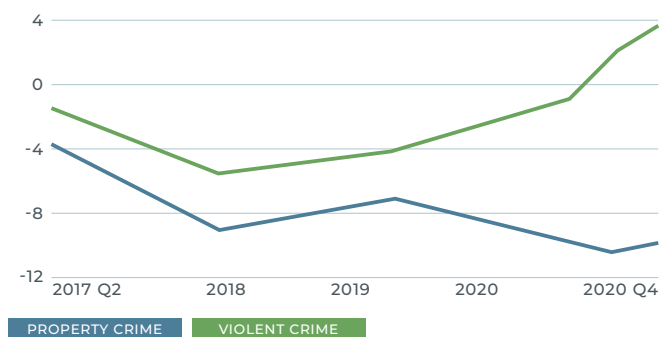
Abe's assassination highlighted a rise in threats towards officials of all stripes. After a period of few assassinations of high-profile figures in developed nations, physical threats, thwarted plots and actual assassinations appeared to rise around 2016 when UK parliamentarian Jo Cox was killed in West Yorkshire by a white extremist with pro-Nazi sympathies. In Germany, a pro-immigration Christian Democratic party governor, Walter Lübcke, was killed by a far-right wing sympathizer in January 2021. It was the country's first political assassination in decades.<sup>11</sup> In 2017, a left-wing extremist opened fire at a practice for a Congressional baseball game, seriously wounding US House Representative Steve Scalise. Since the pandemic began in 2020, in the US and Western Europe, public health officials, scientists and politicians became visible targets of threats in major urban areas and in smaller cities and towns as controversial pandemic safety measures increased. A Johns Hopkins University survey provided to 2,430 public health officials across the United States found 1,449 harassment or threatening behavior incidents targeting public health officials across 335 different health departments. Threats and harassment were the most frequently cited reason for resigning from a public health position. Similarly, protests targeting elected officials in their homes also rose, with protesters frequently targeting governors, representatives and other officials they deemed responsible for policies they disagreed with. In Germany, threats against politicians also rose, according to statistics from Germany's Interior Ministry. In 2020, the Ministry recorded 1,534 threats against politicians, a 9% increase year on year.<sup>12</sup>

FRANCE: ASSAULT VS BURGLARY



Source: Eurostat, Recorded offenses by offence category (source: police data)

US: VIOLENT CRIME AND PROPERTY CRIME (%)



Source: Violent and Property Crime in U.S.

Note: Violent crime rose sharply in the US during the pandemic, with similar but less dramatic trends also occurring in Europe and other parts of the world. Meanwhile, nonviolent property crime decreased, suggesting that the violent crime trend is being driven more by mental-health issues and social grievances than it is by financial gains.<sup>7,8</sup>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/03/harassment-public-health-officials-all-too-common-pandemic>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55824282>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-hate-speech-threats-against-politicians-rise/a-56512214>

**DEEP GAPS IN THE DATA ON A GLOBAL SCALE ARE LIKELY TO OBSCURE TRENDS OF INCREASING VIOLENCE AND ASSOCIATED PHYSICAL THREATS TO COMPANIES AND EXECUTIVES.**

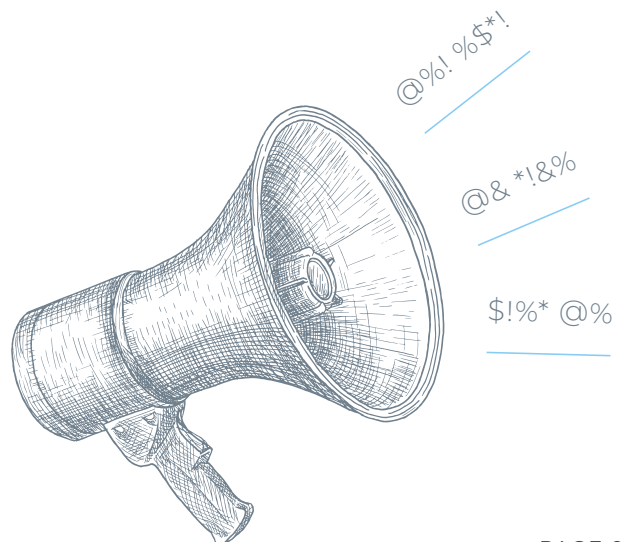
The political importance of gun violence in the US means that several nongovernmental organizations actively monitor, collate and publish gun violence data – in some cases daily. However, most nuanced and deeper government data on violence and violent crimes take months or years to be made public, even in Europe and other highly developed countries. UN and Eurostat crime data, for example, is currently only updated for 2020 – making those sources at least 18 months out of date and likely not identifying rising violence trends in 2021 and the first half of 2022. Moreover, in many lower- and middle-income countries, reliable and up-to-date data is even harder – or nearly impossible – to acquire, increasing the risk that violent trends or increasing risk factors for violence will be unreported or ignored as anecdotal or isolated.

## UNDERLYING TRENDS

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**SHAREHOLDERS, THE MEDIA, CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE PUBLIC INCREASINGLY PRESS COMPANIES AND EXECUTIVES TO SPEAK OUT ON A RANGE OF SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES AND THESE COMMENTS SOMETIMES TRIGGER VIOLENT RESPONSES.**

The increasing expectation for companies to speak out on controversial and emotive issues increases the risk of threats of violence, particularly if there is any perception that companies have a strong alignment with one side. This trend was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic; social justice-related civil unrest in the US; and the US presidential election. Several companies received threats after introducing COVID-19 vaccine mandates for employees. When Twitter and other social media platforms banned former President Donald Trump and others from their platforms, groups and individuals that supported Trump's allegations of election fraud responded with threats. Some lawmakers called for regulation of the tech sector to eliminate bias, while militia groups called for outright attacks on businesses.





**ALTHOUGH THE IMMEDIATE MENTAL-HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF THE PANDEMIC HAVE BEEN DOCUMENTED, THE LONGER-TERM MENTAL-HEALTH EFFECTS ARE LESS CLEAR BUT PROBABLY CONTRIBUTE TO RISING RATES OF COMMUNITY VIOLENCE.**

Since the early months of the pandemic, research has documented the immediate mental-health impacts of isolation and stress. However, new research is starting to emerge pointing to widespread longer-term mental-health impacts of the pandemic – sometimes referred to as “Post-Pandemic Stress Disorder” (PPSD) – although this is not yet an accepted clinical diagnosis. Research so far suggests PPSD disproportionately affects younger people and women and has different triggers to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can be caused by a single traumatic event. PPSD, meanwhile, appears to be caused by prolonged exposure to stresses of the pandemic. Nonetheless, the symptoms of PPSD so far appear similar to PTSD<sup>13</sup> including:

- Fear and anxiety
- Negative emotions
- Social withdrawal
- Feelings of powerlessness
- Dissociative disorders

Clinical research has indicated that PTSD is correlated with higher levels of violent behavior, and although further research is needed to determine whether the same holds true for PPSD, it indicates a potential long-term international risk factor for increased levels of community violence.

Cultural factors will also play a part, with mental-health trauma being expressed differently in different cultures. In Japan, with its low levels of gun ownership, mental-health-related violence is often redirected internally, leading to higher rates of suicide than in most Western countries but lower levels of externally targeted violence. Japan’s suicide rates rose sharply during the pandemic but only in some groups – women and younger men – potentially consistent with early research on PPSD. Moreover, mental-health research following Japan’s traumatic 2011 tsunami found that suicide rates in Fukushima prefecture and other affected areas rose and remained elevated three years *after* the tsunami,<sup>14</sup> suggesting that the world may have several more years of elevated mental-illness rates ahead.

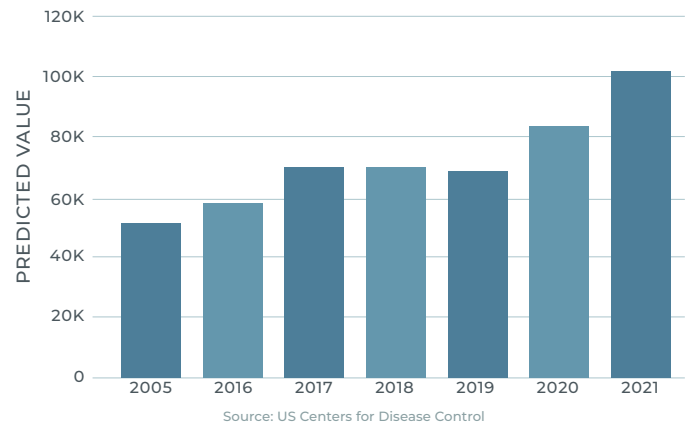


13 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9222801/>

14 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)60890-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)60890-X/fulltext)

Both developed and developing Western and non-Western economies will continue to struggle with prioritizing mental health challenges, which likely have driven increased rates of legal and illegal drug abuse and higher suicide rates, as well as higher rates of violent crime. Since the onset of the pandemic, more societies that have previously shied away from public discussions of mental health are discussing the issue but will take decades to truly have the social and professional resources to address these problems, portending probable increases in violent crime and drug use in these countries as well. In Shanghai, for instance, after an almost two-month lockdown in the spring of 2022, the local government reported a 100% increase in the number of people seeking care at local mental-health facilities.<sup>15</sup>

**US DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS  
PRELIMINARY DATA FOR 2021**



Note: Preliminary data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (for the 12 months encompassing June 2021 – June 2022) suggests that overdose deaths in the US are at an all-time high, driven by pandemic-related stressors and fentanyl-laced products.

### UNDERSTAFFED POLICE AND PROTECTIVE FORCES ARE AFFECTING THE ABILITY TO RESPOND TO VIOLENT CRIME AND COULD ALSO AFFECT POLICE PRESENCE AT MAJOR EVENTS.

The lack of full protection for Japan's former Prime Minister has been highlighted as a potential contributing factor in his assassination. This may have been due to a lower threat perception, rather than a lack of capacity. At the same time, Japan has long suffered labor shortages and may have seen Abe's campaign events as a lower priority, possibly contributing to the ability of his attacker to get so close to him. In other parts of the world, particularly the US, Western Europe and Latin America, understaffed police forces are likely a contributing factor in rising violence.

In the US, racial-justice protests and associated violence was a factor in a significant number of resignations and early retirements from the police force. Pandemic-related deaths, the great resignation and cuts in funding for some police departments has also contributed to chronic understaffing across US police forces.<sup>16</sup> In France, police forces have been under stress since the "Yellow Vest" protests began in 2017 and continued through anti-police brutality protests. According to the Police Executive Research Forum, on average, US police departments are only filling 93% of open positions, while departments have seen record increases in resignations (up 18% in 2020) and retirements (up 45% in 2020).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2022-07-12/in-depth-lockdowns-expose-covids-cost-on-mental-health-in-china-101912085.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/02/us/police-departments-struggle-recruit-retain-officers/index.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.policeforum.org/workforcesurveyjune2021>

### **THE ASSASSINATION OF ABE DEMONSTRATED THAT IN THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT, EVEN LOW-TECH, HOMEMADE, IMPROVISED WEAPONS CAN BE SUFFICIENT TO KILL OR SERIOUSLY INJURE.**

Abe's assassination illustrates that even in jurisdictions with low levels of gun ownership or highly restrictive firearm laws, the spread of information online sustains the risk of targeted violence against high-profile individuals, such as political leaders and government officials. Countries such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand have low levels of private gun ownership, which in recent years has driven an uptick in attacks using knives or other bladed weapons. However, online communities of "accelerationists" will likely seize upon the Abe assassination as inspiration, driving greater discussion and awareness of the design, construction and use of homemade weapons in countries with a lower conventional firearms threat.

### **HOMEMADE OR IMPROVISED WEAPONS ARE NOT NECESSARILY LOW-TECH, AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES WILL CONSTANTLY BE CHALLENGED TO KEEP PACE WITH THE WEAPONIZATION OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES.**

Homemade weapons such as the one used to kill Abe are comparatively rare in the US, where legal and illegal gun ownership rates are much higher than in Japan. However, the number of 3D-printed weapons, or weapons modifications, has exploded in the US in the past few years. Given that these "ghost guns" are not registered and are, therefore, invisible to official databases, the clearest data about them comes from the number seized by law enforcement. In the US, the Biden Administration reported that law enforcement agencies had seized 20,000 ghost guns in 2021, up tenfold from 2016.<sup>18</sup> Police in several major cities reported seizing twice as many 3D-printed weapons in 2021 as in 2020, with ghost guns now comprising up to 20% of all weapons seized.<sup>19</sup> Hostile actors will always seek to modify or adapt new technologies to penetrate security and threaten organizations and individuals, underlining the importance of intelligence resources that identify these trends to stay ahead of potential attackers. Even in a lower-threat country like Japan, tech-enabled threats are not new. For instance, in 2015, a Japanese anti-nuclear protester used a modified drone to land a payload of radioactive sand on the roof of Abe's residence.<sup>20</sup>

18 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/11/fact-sheet-the-biden-administration-cracks-down-on-ghost-guns-ensures-that-atf-has-the-leadership-it-needs-to-enforce-our-gun-laws/>

19 <https://everytownresearch.org/report/ghost-guns-recoveries-and-shootings/>

20 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-32465624>



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Ontic is a protective intelligence software innovator transforming, expanding and changing how Fortune 500 and emerging enterprises protect employees, customers and assets from physical security threats. Ontic's SaaS platform helps preserve business continuity and build long-term organizational resilience by collecting and connecting data to create a comprehensive view of potential threats and take necessary actions to mitigate risks. Ontic also provides threat assessment, threat management and strategic intelligence services that include expert training, guidance and program development using best practices and proven protocols. Ontic was named 2022 Global Entrepreneurial Company of the Year by Frost & Sullivan and the top industry innovator among a dozen other vendors in the Frost Radar™: Digital Intelligence Solutions, 2021.

The Ontic Center for Protective Intelligence is a trusted resource for those in the security, safety and protection communities that shares strategies and best practices, insights on current and historical trends and lessons learned through dialogue, discourse and alternative analysis from some of the industry's top practitioners.

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