

A Domestic Mimetic Chain: Nihilistic Violent Extremism, Youth Radicalization, and School Violence in Italy

By Francesco Marone

In the spring of 2026, Italy experienced an unusual sequence of school attacks and investigations into alleged plots targeting schools, all involving minors aged 12 to 17. Drawing on official statements, specialist literature, and open-source reporting, this article examines four cases across different regions of the country between March and May 2026, alongside an important precursor case from February 2025. All these different episodes can be situated within the broader landscape of nihilistic violent extremism (NVE), the True Crime Community (TCC), and related subcultures of performative violence. The article argues that these cases should be understood neither simply as conventional ideological terrorism nor as ordinary adolescent deviance. Rather, they constitute Italy's first publicly visible sequence of NVE-linked incidents, with three of the four 2026 episodes suggesting a domestic mimetic chain unfolding over a matter of weeks. The Italian experience also underscores the challenges these phenomena pose for counterterrorism and the need for a comprehensive prevention framework.

In the spring of 2026, within the space of 65 days, two violent incidents inside Italian schools forced the country to confront a type of threat that it had not yet learned to fully recognize, nihilistic violent extremism (NVE)^a and adjacent online subcultures of performative violence.

On March 25, 2026, a 13-year-old student in Trescore Balneario (northern Italy) stabbed his French language teacher in a school corridor, livestreaming the attack on Telegram, after publishing a pre-attack text titled “The Final Solution” containing NVE-adjacent references.¹ Then, on May 29, a 12-year-old student in San Vito Lo Capo (southern Italy) attempted to stab his technology teacher in the classroom, wearing a bicycle helmet covered in handwritten references to the True Crime Community (TCC)² and recording the act with the intention of livestreaming it.³

a The term ‘nihilistic violent extremism’ has gained traction in recent years among both practitioners and experts but, to date, its exact definition remains contested. A useful contribution was recently made by a *CTC Sentinel* article by Argentino and Lindsay; the two authors identify “six key elements” of this form of violent extremism: active participation in a specific online ecosystem (the “edgesphere”); status and belonging earned through the production and circulation of harm (“clout chasing”); behavioral drivers of anomie, nihilism, and misanthropy; the hybridization of harms, including sadistic online exploitation; a limited or secondary role for ideology; and the absence of a coherent strategic end state. Marc-André Argentino and Angus Lindsay, “Remotely Coerced Violence: 764, The Com Network, and the Hybridization of Threats,” *CTC Sentinel* 19:6 (2026).

Furthermore, in the short period between these two incidents at school, Italian authorities conducted two separate police operations concerning minors holding extremist views who were allegedly interested in planning acts of violence at school. On March 30, the Carabinieri (Italy's national gendarmerie) arrested a 17-year-old student in the province of Perugia (central Italy), reportedly fascinated by incel subculture, neo-Nazism, and school-shooting fantasies, who was accused of planning a Columbine^b-style massacre at his high school and had acquired weapons-manufacturing instructions.⁴ On April 4, the Italian State Police (Polizia di Stato) searched a 15-year-old student with white supremacist sympathies in the province of Arezzo (central Italy) who had allegedly expressed admiration online for the perpetrator of the Trescore Balneario school attack and, according to investigators, had shown interest in carrying out a similar act within days.⁵

Each case is alarming in its own right. Taken together, these episodes, all involving minors, also mark the first sustained public recognition in Italy of NVE and NVE-adjacent manifestations that researchers, experts, and security practitioners have been tracking for several years. In turn, on closer inspection, these cases in the spring of 2026 had significant domestic precedents in the years immediately prior, as with the February 2025 arrest of a 15-year-old boy allegedly linked to the 764 network, near Bolzano (northeastern Italy).⁶

This article aims to reconstruct and analyze these 2026 cases and their immediate precedents in Italy, situating them within the broader transnational evolution of nihilistic violent extremism. To do so, it combines various open sources (including official statements and documents, specialist literature, and media reporting in Italian and other languages). Because most of the cases concern ongoing investigations and involve minors, the article distinguishes, where

b The Columbine High School massacre occurred in Columbine, Colorado, on April 20, 1999. Students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed 12 students and one teacher, wounded more than 20 others, and then died by suicide. See, in particular, “Columbine High School,” Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), n.d. Columbine is widely regarded as one of the most infamous school massacres in the United States and has inspired several copycat attacks in the country and abroad.

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possible, between confirmed official information, well-sourced reporting, and still-unverified claims.

The Bolzano Precedent: Italy's First Case of a 764-Linked Arrest

As noted above, Italy's encounter with the nihilistic violent extremism ecosystem did not begin in the spring of 2026. It can be traced back by at least one year. On February 12, 2025, officers of the DIGOS (the special operations division of the Italian State Police) arrested a 15-year-old boy of Pakistani origin⁷ (who cannot be named under Italian law governing minors) near Bolzano, in the predominantly German-speaking region of Alto Adige/South Tyrol, on an array of charges: participation in an association with terrorist aims, the manufacture and use of explosive devices, the unlawful carrying of weapons, aggravated criminal damage, and the possession and dissemination of child sexual abuse material.⁸

At the time, the case drew brief national coverage and then largely faded from public view; in retrospect, it stands as an early warning that the transnational threat later visible at Trescore Balneario, Arezzo, Perugia, and San Vito Lo Capo was already present in Italy.

The 15-year-old boy was allegedly linked to 764.⁹ Founded online in 2020 by then-15-year-old Bradley Cadenhead of Texas, this network operates at the intersection of child sexual exploitation and violent extremism and has various offshoots.¹⁰ In December 2025, Canada became the first country to designate 764 as a terrorist entity,¹¹ together with the adjacent Maniac Murder Cult (Manyaki: kult ubiystva, M.K.Y.).¹²

Italian investigators reportedly traced the activity of the Bolzano boy to a 764 offshoot they identified as "Rage Section 764."¹³ Communicating through encrypted platforms, the Italian 15-year-old had allegedly attempted to demonstrate his loyalty in a manner consistent with 764-style initiation practices: He first reproduced the network's insignia on walls and vehicles near a sports facility in the province of Bolzano, the same site he had selected for an intended killing.¹⁴

According to Italian investigators, the murder plan was tied to a coordinated "Terror Week": 764 adherents were allegedly instructed to select a vulnerable victim (in particular, a homeless or disabled person), murder that victim, record the act, and publish the video on a Russian dark-web site.¹⁵ The killing was therefore meant to function simultaneously as a rite of initiation, proof of commitment, and a bid for status within the online community.¹⁶ The Italian police officially stated that the 15-year-old was "at a very advanced stage of the plan;"¹⁷ he had also already selected a victim (reportedly, a homeless person) and, as mentioned above, chosen the location.

The boy had also assembled and detonated a rudimentary explosive device, filming himself as he tested it; unconfirmed media reports suggested that he had considered detonating an explosive device at his school.¹⁸ Moreover, he had queried AI-powered search tools¹⁹ about the emotional states of terrorists during their attacks and the pain perception of suicide bombers during "martyrdom."²⁰ Notably, the boy, born into a Muslim family (that appears to have been entirely unconnected to the alleged offenses), despite being active in a neo-Nazi-inspired network, had reportedly developed a growing sympathy for militant Islamism and jihadism and, according to media reports, had searched online for information on how to travel to Palestine.²¹

During the search of his home conducted at the time of his arrest, police seized an axe and improvised explosive devices, along with two computers and a phone containing large quantities of videos of school shootings and killings, child sexual abuse material, neo-Nazi imagery, and Islamic State propaganda.²² In addition, unconfirmed media reports²³ also mentioned a handwritten "oath of allegiance" to the Order of Nine Angles (ONA or O9A), the transnational occultist and militant accelerationist network that has influenced the 764 milieu.²⁴ The arrest itself captured the performative character of the case and its connection with a transnational online audience: As DIGOS officers reached his door, the boy reportedly sent a final message to a 764-linked chat: "I have the fed on the door" (in English).²⁵

According to available information, the boy had already been subjected to police searches.²⁶ Following a search in March 2024, Italian authorities established that he was in close contact with a 764 participant based in England, who was arrested by British police a few days later on March 26, 2024, when he was 18 years old.²⁷ Although the name of that young man is not specified in the official statements of the Italian authorities, it appears clear that, as some Italian media explicitly reported,²⁸ that person was Cameron "ACID" Finnigan, a prominent 764 propagandist.²⁹ On January 16, 2025, Finnigan received an extended sentence of nine years (six years in custody followed by a three-year extended license period) for encouraging suicide and possessing both a terrorist manual and indecent images of a child.³⁰ Finnigan himself had promoted a "Terror Week" and incited others to attack "homeless people."³¹ Furthermore, British officers reportedly found online chats in which he encouraged a young woman, believed to be in Italy itself, to livestream her own suicide; they were unable to identify this woman or determine what happened to her.³²

Clearly, the Bolzano boy was a node in a broader transnational network. This Italian case also appears to exemplify what a recent *CTC Sentinel* article³³ termed "remotely coerced violence," a dynamic in which vulnerable minors are pushed toward self-harm, abuse, or offline violence for circulation within, and status-seeking among, an online network. Viewed through the role typology proposed by Argentino and Lindsay,³⁴ the Bolzano boy resembles the "directed follower," while Finnigan approximates the roles of "influencer and propagandist," and self-described "high-level extorter." The entirely online and cross-border nature of this alleged relationship makes it especially difficult to address through national instruments alone.

According to later media reporting, by February 2026, the Bolzano boy had been moved to a juvenile facility in southern Italy and was placed in a judicial-probation program (*messa alla prova*); the measure suspended the criminal proceedings^c while the teenager began an 18-month, court-approved rehabilitative program. The boy enrolled in an agricultural school and reportedly demonstrated commitment to his studies and good conduct. He

c Specifically, under this provision of the Italian juvenile justice system, criminal proceedings are suspended for a period not exceeding three years while the minor (aged 14 or older) follows an educational, rehabilitative, and reparative program under the supervision of juvenile justice services. Successful completion extinguishes the offense; otherwise, proceedings resume. In the event of a trial and conviction, according to Italian media, the Bolzano boy could "face up to 10 years in prison." Chiara Currò Dossi, "Terrorista neonazista a 15 anni, progettava di uccidere un senzatetto: 'Ho sbagliato, grazie per avermi fermato,'" *Corriere della Sera*, December 10, 2025.

also told the court that he was grateful to the magistrates and police who had “stopped him in time.”³⁵

The Trescore Balneario Case: An NVE-Adjacent Attack at School

The attack in Trescore Balneario, a small town near Bergamo, operationally inaugurated the sequence of episodes that shocked Italy in the spring of 2026. The March 25 stabbing at a middle school was not spontaneous. The 13-year-old student had spent the prior evening on Telegram, where he posted photographs of weapons and a text he titled “The Final Solution” (written in English, not Italian).³⁶ The title itself, apparently an unmistakable reference to the Nazi extermination program, is telling: The boy disclaimed any ideological affiliation, and nothing in the text develops an antisemitic argument, but the choice of the most transgressive label available is consistent with the NVE practice of deploying extremist symbols for mere shock value and transgressive effect.

This short manifesto describes intense personal grievances. It begins with a brief, elusive reference to hostility toward the boy’s father (who had reportedly separated from his mother about one year earlier): “I didn’t find the courage to kill my father.” The text then focuses on perceived injustices by his French language teacher; among other alleged wrongs, in his view, this woman did not properly take into account his recently diagnosed attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In the words of this text: “I have come to the conclusion that I can’t live a life like this anymore. A life filled with unfairness, disrespect, and mundanes. I’m tired of this so I decided the perfect solution to this is taking the matter into my own hands. I’ll kill my French teacher” [*sic*]. At the same time, the text frames these personal grievances within a language of nihilistic transgression; for example, the 13-year-old wrote that “it’s not only an act of revenge, it’s something to break a boring routine in the most extreme way possible. I’m tired of being a mundane myself, having to do the same things over and over again. Rules aren’t something I should follow, they’re something I should break, and there’s nothing better to do than vengeance.”³⁷

On March 25, shortly before the start of classes, he stabbed his 57-year-old French teacher with a knife at least twice, in the corridor outside her classroom, inflicting serious wounds to her neck and torso. A helicopter evacuation and emergency surgery saved her life. Another 13-year-old student intervened after the first blow, kicking the attacker and forcing him to flee; the attacker was then stopped by another teacher and two school staff members before the Carabinieri arrived.³⁸

The boy had a smartphone hanging from his neck, secured with an improvised harness that turned the device into a body-worn camera, to livestream the attack on the Telegram channel he had created the previous day, named “Vendetta” (now closed). Moreover, he wore a white T-shirt bearing the same word. The student also wore military-pattern trousers, and his knife was inscribed with the word “SOLDIER” (in English). In his short manifesto, echoing other school shooters, the boy wrote that “the military uniform isn’t a random choice. I chose it because I see myself as a soldier fighting for my rights that got neglected.” He immediately associated the uniform with a sense of superiority: “I also feel superior to all my peers. Yes, sometimes they’re funny, but I feel like I’m way smarter than them, and wearing a uniform shows how I’m superior to all these mundanes. I’m no longer one of them, I’m someone better, someone who had the strength to do what many don’t, someone

who has the intelligence to realise that no one really advocates for us and our needs” [*sic*].

According to available information,³⁹ the Trescore Balneario boy had previously showcased alternative “outfit” options to the other users of his Telegram channel before settling on his final choice. These included the skull mask he ultimately wore during the attack, while insisting it was selected purely for its aesthetic appeal rather than its far-right symbolic valence:⁴⁰ “the skull face masks isn’t to express a specific ideology, it’s just visually pleasant and I like the aesthetic.”

This attention to costume and staging apparently corresponds to the belief, documented in recent NVE research, that an individual’s aesthetics and physical appearance can help convert violent fantasy into action.^{41,42} The Trescore Balneario attacker’s insistence that the skull mask was about appearance rather than its far-right meaning follows the same logic: from this perspective, costume is not merely symbolic decoration, but part of the performance through which violence becomes imaginable and communicable to an online audience.

At the same time, the 13-year-old emphasized that his action was unique. His short manifesto states: “I’m unique and I’m not a copycat of any previous school attack.” In the text, he also preemptively dismissed the “natural selection” motif, an unmistakable reference to the slogan worn by one of the April 1999 Columbine perpetrators.^e Moreover, in the same text, he rejected any clear ideological affiliation: “as for my political ideology I don’t fit neatly into any clear ideology because the only thing that matters is me, no one else matters, no life matters beyond mine.” This phrase appears to be an almost exact echo of the name and the central counter-slogan of the No Lives Matter (NLM) network, although in this case it was apparently associated mainly with an intensely personal assertion of singularity and self-importance.

According to available information, after the attack, investigators also found material at his home compatible with explosive precursors, pending technical examinations.⁴² His Telegram channel was closed after the attack for violating the platform’s terms of service, and his account was deleted.

After the arrest, his family’s lawyer stated that the Italian boy appeared “detached from reality” during protected questioning and expressed the view that it would have been “very difficult” for him to have acted without external instigation through social networks.⁴³ To date, however, this remains an allegation rather than an established fact. Because the boy was under age 14, he could not

d For example, as Hart noted, Solomon Henderson, the January 2025 Antioch (Nashville) school shooter, devoted pages of his diary to emulating the look of June 2015 Charleston church shooter Dylann Roof; not because Henderson, who was Black, shared Roof’s white supremacism, but because Roof’s aesthetic was understood as violence-enabling. Mackenzie B. Hart, “‘Less than a speck of dirt’: exploring the manifestos of nihilistic violent extremists,” *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* (2026).

e During the Columbine High School massacre, Eric Harris wore a white T-shirt with the words “Natural Selection” printed in black. In his personal journals, he had also framed his impending violence as a way to “kick natural selection up a few notches” by eliminating those he deemed inferior. In this context, the phrase was understood in the light of pseudo-scientific social Darwinism and was also influenced in part by Nazi ideas. With this connotation, the expression became a recognizable reference that other school attackers adopted. See, for example, Ralph W. Larkin, “The Columbine legacy: Rampage shootings as political acts,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 52:9 (2009): pp. 1,309-1,326.

be prosecuted or punished under Italian criminal law; a juvenile judge instead ordered his placement in a protected community under a provisional security measure.⁴⁴

After the attack, it also emerged that the 13-year-old student had met online a girl of the same age living in Poland who struggled with self-harm and other vulnerabilities. After exchanging several messages, the boy reportedly asked her whether she had a razor, told her to cut herself, and threatened to reveal her secrets to her mother if she refused; the girl then spoke to her mother and left the Telegram group.⁴⁵ The Italian boy's reported behavior closely resembles the "remotely coerced violence"⁴⁶ pattern typical of NVE.

Thus, different factors made the Trescore Balneario case quickly recognizable to experts and careful observers as NVE-linked or at least NVE-adjacent. The initial "confusion"⁴⁷ in much of the Italian media, which struggled to adequately categorize and interpret this shocking event,⁴ revealed the country's limited awareness of a phenomenon that had already existed for years.

Finally, it is worth noting that, before the stabbing, the 13-year-old allegedly encouraged members of his Telegram channel to celebrate his act with images and memes, even providing photographs of himself in uniform for "edits."⁴⁸ This expectation of post-attack memorialization shows that the intended audience was not only the immediate victim or the school, but also a dispersed online milieu capable of transforming the act into shareable subcultural material. Indeed, the boy was subsequently praised and acclaimed by NVE-inspired "fans" online. Some of them portrayed the Italian boy as a "saint," in line with the broader Saints culture.⁸

The Arezzo and Perugia Cases: Other School-Attack Plans

In the days immediately following the attack in Trescore Balneario, Italian authorities conducted a series of police operations targeting minors that highlighted links among the threat of school violence, violent right-wing extremism, misogynistic grievance, and NVE-adjacent references.

On April 4, 2026, in the province of Arezzo, not far from Florence, the State Police searched a 15-year-old with white supremacist sympathies, under investigation for hate propaganda and incitement to commit a crime.⁴⁹ The youth, who posted violent content online and expressed deep contempt for women, had also voiced admiration online for the Trescore Balneario attacker. Furthermore, according to investigators, he had expressed an intention to carry out a similar act "after Easter" (Easter Sunday fell on April 5).⁵⁰ Police also found a video on the teenager's smartphone showing him wielding a large kitchen knife and simulating stabbing motions against a pillow on a sofa in his home.⁵¹ Officers seized his smartphone, a video game console, and paper notes containing

references to perpetrators of murders and terrorist attacks.⁵²

A few days earlier, on March 30, the ROS (the Carabinieri elite special operations unit) arrested a 17-year-old originally from Pescara who was living in the province of Perugia.⁵³ He was suspected of hate propaganda and incitement to commit crimes and of possessing material for terrorist purposes. Investigators also documented contacts between this 17-year-old and the leadership of the Telegram group "Werwolf Division"^h (later renamed "New Dawn Division"),⁵⁴ originally created by an Italy-based neo-Nazi group of the same name, that had already been targeted by national counterterrorism authorities in December 2024.⁵⁵ The participants in this digital space glorified far-right attackers such as Anders Behring Breivik (Oslo and Utøya, in 2011) and Brenton Tarrant (Christchurch, in 2019) who were elevated as "saints" to encourage emulation.⁵⁶

Investigators alleged that the 17-year-old student had assembled operational instructions for the synthesis of acetone peroxide (TATP, a powerful and notoriously unstable explosive) and the manufacture of firearms, including 3D-printed ones, and had gathered information regarding hazardous chemical and biological substances.⁵⁷

Reportedly, in a 2024 WhatsApp chat, the boy had written: "When I'm in my final year, I'll replicate Columbine." Other messages had expressed similar aspirations: "maybe one day I'll do a shooting and then kill myself;" and "I still have to decide where to do the shooting before checking out."⁵⁸ Another message referred to buying a "Natural Selection" T-shirt.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the teenager reportedly described himself as an "incel," and gathered information online about notorious Italian perpetrators of violence against women.⁶⁰ Child sexual abuse material was also reportedly found on his smartphone.⁶¹

As part of the same police operation, the Carabinieri's ROS searched seven other minors, aged 13 to 17, across several Italian provinces. All were allegedly found to be embedded in what investigators described as a transnational virtual ecosystem of neo-Nazi, accelerationist, and white supremacist groups and channels.⁶² The investigation, opened in October 2025, grew out of an earlier counterterrorism inquiry concluded in July 2025 by the Carabinieri.⁶³ That same month, the State Police conducted a separate wave of 22 searches involving youths aged 13 to 17 associated with different forms of violent extremism.⁶⁴

The Perugia case illustrates a familiar dynamic: the "aesthetic adoption" of symbols and figures across ideological categories,⁶⁵ including an overlap among neo-Nazi symbols, incel grievance, school-shooting references, and NVE-linked aesthetics. From this perspective, far-right attackers such as Breivik and Tarrant and school shooters such as the Columbine perpetrators may function together as figures of rupture in a shared mythology of violence. NVE-inspired actors venerate attackers from across the ideological spectrum "for their action, not their ideological convictions;"⁶⁶ the in-group is defined primarily by violence circulated, glorified, and at times performed, rather than by beliefs held.

It is worth adding that the Arezzo and Perugia cases have at least one important Italian precedent. In January 2021, the DIGOS arrested a 22-year-old from Savona (northwestern Italy)

f It is also worth highlighting that premeditated school attacks have historically been extremely rare in Italy. Cf. Nils Böckler, Thorsten Seeger, Peter Sitzer, and Wilhelm Heitmeyer eds., *School Shootings: International Research, Case Studies, and Concepts for Prevention* (New York: Springer, 2013).

g Adherents to militant accelerationism and adjacent extremist milieus often glorify perpetrators of terrorist attacks and massacres as exemplary figures to be emulated, and venerate them as "saints," mimicking Christian iconography. This practice has also extended to the incel subculture and NVE itself. Among others, see Jonathan Lewis, Joshua Molloy, and Graham Macklin, "The Lineage of Violence: Saints Culture and Militant Accelerationist Terrorism," GNET Research, April 27, 2023; Graham Macklin, "Evaluating 'Transnationalism' as an Analytical Lens for Understanding REMVE Terrorism," *CTC Sentinel* 17:11 (2024).

h The German name "Werwolf" (werewolf) apparently evokes the 1944 Nazi plan to create a resistance force that could operate behind enemy lines.

for terrorist association, hate propaganda, and racially motivated incitement aggravated by Holocaust denial.⁶⁷ This neo-Nazi sympathizer, radicalized largely online, had founded an online group, Nuovo Ordine Sociale (New Social Order), explicitly modeled on Atomwaffen Division, ran a neo-Nazi Telegram channel (Sole Nero, “Black Sun”), and venerated far-right attackers from Breivik to Tarrant.

What makes it an interesting forerunner of the Perugia case is its early fusion of different strands: neo-Nazism and militant accelerationism, a fascination with school shootings (in the reported words of the then 22-year-old from Savona, “better to die with honor in a school shooting than to live a life of filth alone”), and, additionally, explicit incel self-identification (“we will be the first Italian incels to take action”).⁶⁸ Originating from the case of a radicalized 17-year-old in Turin and later widened to additional suspects, that investigation reportedly ended in 2022 with a reduced sentence against the Savona man on grounds of partial mental infirmity.⁶⁹

The San Vito Lo Capo Case: A TCC-Inspired Attack at School

On the morning of May 29, 2026, at a middle school in the small town of San Vito Lo Capo, Sicily, a 12-year-oldⁱ attempted to stab his technology teacher in class with two small knives. The boy wore a helmet and a face mask and had fixed a smartphone to the helmet to record the action and transmit it to a Telegram audience. Reportedly, the attack may have been recorded but not successfully transmitted live.⁷⁰ The student was disarmed by the teacher, who sustained only minor abrasions.

According to currently available information, the teacher had given the student poor grades in the past, but the 12-year-old had since improved his performance and did not appear to harbor clear hostility toward that teacher or other colleagues.⁷¹

What distinguishes this case is the density and specificity of the TCC and NVE-adjacent symbolism on display. Before the attempted attack, the boy had reportedly posted on TikTok a photograph of the helmet he intended to wear, using the hashtags “#truecrimetok” and “#stream” before the attack.⁷² The first hashtag was a legible signal within the TCC fandom ecosystem, while the second clearly pointed to the intended communicative dimension of the attempted attack.

As documented in a February 2026 *CTC Sentinel* article, the TCC functions as a layered fandom ecosystem organized around mass-casualty perpetrators, including school shooters, whom adherents research, aestheticize, incorporate into a shared mythology, and sometimes even attempt to emulate.⁷³ Central to TCC dynamics, too, is the tendency to replace ideology with aesthetics: TCC adherents often disregard the motivations of the criminals they revere, focusing instead on deeply researching and replicating their attire, mannerisms, weapons, and other reproducible markers.⁷⁴ In other words, the signs matter first of all because they are legible to insiders; they are not just public spectacle, but also a request for recognition by the fandom itself.

The helmet bore the word “INCEL” prominently on the front and “MIZANTHROPY” [*sic*] on the back, along with several references to school shootings, mass-casualty attacks, and their perpetrators.

In chronological order, these included: “TEXAS SNIPER -18” (possibly referring to Charles Whitman’s 1966 University of Texas tower shooting, linked to a total of 18 deaths); “COLUMBINE” (the 1999 school massacre); “ATTIAS” (likely David Attias, the perpetrator of the 2001 attacks in Isla Vista, California, near a university attack); “VIRGINIA TECH -32” (the 2007 campus shooting in Virginia, in which 32 victims were killed); “2012 SANDY HOOK” and “LANZA” (the 2012 school shooting in Connecticut and its perpetrator, Adam Lanza); “ELLIOT” (likely Elliot Rodger, the perpetrator of the 2014 misogynistic attacks in Isla Vista); “ISLA VISTA -6 -5” (apparently pairing Rodger’s 2014 attack, in which six people were killed, with Attias’ 2001 attack, that resulted in the deaths of five people in total); “CRUZ -17” (likely Nikolas Cruz, the perpetrator of the 2018 Parkland high school shooting in Florida, who killed 17 people); “KERCH -20” (the 2018 Kerch Polytechnic College massacre in Crimea, with 20 deaths) “PERM -6” (likely the 2021 Perm State University shooting, in Russia, in which six people were killed); “AUDREY HALE” (the perpetrator of the 2023 Covenant School shooting in Nashville, Tennessee); “TIMOFEY” (likely Timofey Kulyamov, the suspected perpetrator of the 2025 Odintsovo school attack in Russia); and “SAN DIEGO -3” (possibly the May 2026 San Diego shooting, in California, a suspected anti-Islamic attack in which three people were killed).⁷⁵ Some of these references, including Columbine and Elliot Rodger, have also firmly established themselves in the TCC pantheon.⁷⁶ Importantly, the surname of the Trescore Balneario attacker was also on the helmet. The full name of an Italian man who had murdered members of his family and a neighbor before taking his own life in Sardinia in 2024 was also written on it. Moreover, the helmet bore an acronym that plausibly refers to a gore-related website.⁷⁷

The 12-year-old student also repeatedly used the scorekeeping idiom familiar from NVE/TCC circles and other spaces of atrocity glorification, in which attacks and body counts are tallied as victories. Before the attack, the Italian boy wrote in English on TikTok: “my biggest fear is not even getting -1” (meaning, not killing even one person). As noted above, similar numerical notations also appeared on the helmet and reportedly on the knives (specifically, one knife bore “-51” and “-10,” possibly referring to the far-right attacks in Christchurch in 2019 and in Buffalo in 2022, respectively).⁷⁸ These notations can be interpreted as a sign of “gamification” of violence operating in real time;⁷⁹ NVE/TCC texts and posts frequently assign point values to the tactics, weapons, and targets of earlier attacks, converting violence into a “game” in which users are encouraged to commit and to document their own attacks in pursuit of new “high scores.”⁸⁰

On the other hand, that morning, the student wore a black T-shirt bearing the Italian phrase “*Me ne frego*” (“I don’t give a damn”), one of the most recognizable rallying cries of Italian fascism. The slogan may have appealed to him as a marker of nihilistic indifference to consequence, but its political resonance should not be dismissed: Before the attack, the boy had reportedly told an online interlocutor that he was taking action “for political reasons” and had previously expressed sympathy for symbols and figures associated with Italian fascism and with contemporary violent right-wing extremism.⁸¹

The 12-year-old had also published an announcement in English on TikTok the night before the attack: “Don’t blame me for what I will do in 4 hrs.”⁸² Once again, the choice of the English language is consistent with a community whose *lingua franca* is not Italian. Under that TikTok post, dozens of users wrote comments

i Early press reports stated that the student was as old as 11; the age was later corrected.

“Italy’s recent NVE-linked and NVE-adjacent cases are not anomalous or accidental. They represent the national expression of a transnational phenomenon that has been developing for years.”

suggesting at least partial awareness of what was coming: Some asked for a streaming link, others referred to a possible “manifesto,” and others used the notation “+1” and “-1.”⁸³

Following the attempted attack, it emerged that the 12-year-old had reportedly expressed a desire online to target specific schoolmates, all of foreign origin. In his reported words: “my main targets are three clueless Muslim classmates of mine, another Muslim immigrant in a different class, and a Black girl, though I don’t know which class she’s in.” As investigators highlighted, this information raises the possibility that he had at least discussed with other users or fantasized about carrying out a racially motivated massacre.⁸⁴

According to available information, the 12-year-old showed no clear signs of remorse during protected questioning. Because the boy was under 14, he could not be held criminally responsible. The Palermo juvenile prosecutor’s office opened an investigation into possible encouragement or instigation by unidentified third parties.⁸⁵ The school imposed a 16-day disciplinary removal from the school community and, at the end of the school year in June 2026, did not admit him to the next grade.⁸⁶

The Connections Between the Trescore Balneario and San Vito Lo Capo Cases

Italian investigators are actively examining whether the two students in Trescore Balneario and San Vito Lo Capo were connected, beyond their partially shared online subculture. Investigators are also examining whether an online intermediary linked the two cases. According to current reporting, a user presenting as a foreign-national girl was in contact with both minors.⁸⁷ The Trescore Balneario attacker referred to her at the end of his short pre-attack text, saying he was “in love with her.” In the San Vito Lo Capo case, this supposed girl allegedly appeared in the boy’s Telegram environment, was tagged in TikTok posts showing preparatory material, and claimed to possess the video of the attempted attack;⁸⁸ furthermore, according to media reports, when other users asked the Sicilian boy how they could watch the stream of the imminent attack, he told them to ask “her.”⁸⁹ However, direct contact between the two Italian minors has not been confirmed as of this writing.

What is confirmed is that the Sicilian boy reshared content celebrating the Trescore Balneario attack and, as noted above, wrote the boy’s surname on his helmet. In brief, within weeks, the Trescore Balneario attacker had entered his pantheon.⁹⁰ In the community’s own logic, the Sicilian boy was apparently attempting to “add to the lineage.”

This “lineage” dynamic has been documented by several scholars and experts: An NVE-linked attack can trigger fan content, which

enters the community’s “mythology” and provides a model for the next participant to act, creating a self-reinforcing logic of attention, imitation, and competitive outbidding.⁹¹ The dynamic is not entirely new; an analogous “cumulative momentum” has been documented in far-right terrorism,⁹² with each attacker positioning himself within a chain of predecessors. What is distinctive in the NVE/TCC context is the organization of this process around aesthetics, fandom, and competitive imitation, rather than around a relatively coherent political project.⁹³

In this context, Italy now appears to have the first publicly visible links of a domestic mimetic chain, unfolding over a matter of weeks, while available evidence does not prove coordination.

The Challenges Posed by NVE

NVE poses several complex challenges. First, the phenomenon itself still requires clear and precise focus. The initial confusion of a large part of the Italian media about the nature of these acts or alleged plans and their real motivations reflects a broader conceptual gap, which has practical consequences. Indeed, the terminological instability around NVE is not merely an academic concern; it can complicate legal responses and interagency coordination.

Moreover, it is clear that this type of threat reflects transnational dynamics. The pattern of behavior observed in the 2026 cases is consistent with international NVE documentation, including celebratory references to earlier perpetrators, pre-attack staging, English-language posts, texts or manifestos aimed at a transnational audience, the channeling of proximate personal grievances into a nihilistic performance, the livestream as constitutive element of the act, and/or a limited or unstable role for coherent ideology. The online platforms involved, including Telegram and TikTok, also operate on a global scale.

These Italian cases also involved warning signs (texts, posts, photographs, hashtags, etc.) visible before the violence or alleged planned violence. This is consistent with the research on “leakage:” Lone actors are significantly more likely than group-based violent extremists to communicate their intent before acting.⁹⁴ The policy challenge is to connect platform moderation, law enforcement, school-based threat assessment, families, and mental-health services quickly enough to matter, without treating every potential adolescent provocation as a terrorist signal.

One notable institutional response was the application of the Christchurch Call Protocol (originally developed in response to the 2019 mosque shootings in New Zealand) to the Trescore Balneario livestream, which was removed from Telegram and flagged through the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) content hash-sharing system.⁹⁵ This is significant because it represents the first confirmed Italian application of that mechanism to an NVE-linked violent incident, and reflects an understanding that what happened in Trescore Balneario, however different from jihadi or far-right livestreamed violence in ideology and scale, shares key aspects of its communicative logic: The act’s damage is not only physical but also informational and has a potential mimetic character.

Another source of serious concern is that numerous NVE manifestations are structurally based on processes of imitation and of competitive outbidding. These dynamics demand a rapid response. The 65 days between Trescore Balneario and San Vito Lo Capo are consistent with a pattern in which the cycle from act to attempted replication can unfold in weeks. Mobilization “in service

of solely an aesthetic” may proceed on shorter timelines compared with mobilization within violent extremist groups requiring deeper ideological indoctrination.⁹⁶

Additionally, it is well documented that individuals in NVE milieus are often very young. Italy’s recent cases push the age frontier in ways that concern investigators, in addition to families and schools. In particular, the San Vito Lo Capo student, at 12 years old, appears to be among the youngest TCC-linked actors publicly documented. The Italian boy was born the same year as the 2014 Isla Vista attacks and a full 15 years after the Columbine massacre; he arguably absorbed their mythology mostly, if not entirely, through the online TCC ecosystem.

Such a young age poses serious practical challenges. From a criminal standpoint, in Italy the threshold for criminal liability is 14 years of age.⁹⁷ This means that both the Trescore Balneario and San Vito Lo Capo attackers cannot face criminal proceedings, although juvenile courts can impose protective or security measures where the legal requirements are met. As in other national jurisdictions,⁹⁸ this condition tends to create an asymmetry between the seriousness of the acts and the legal instruments available in response.

Some minors may even understand and exploit this legal vulnerability. In his short manifesto, the Trescore Balneario attacker explicitly wrote: “since apparently ‘kids’ can’t understand what’s good and what’s not, I’ll use this in my favor, I can’t be imprisoned, since in Italy the minimum age for criminal liability is 14, I can’t be trialed at all, so I’ll do what I always wanted to do, kill her [the French language teacher] and everyone that tries to stop me from doing that.” The San Vito Lo Capo student reportedly showed a similar awareness online.⁹⁹

This is not an Italian idiosyncrasy but a pattern documented across different NVE milieus: For example, in the Swedish “Slain764” case, the senior figure who coerced and blackmailed a 14-year-old into carrying out a stabbing near Stockholm in September 2024 explicitly reassured him that, as a minor below the age of criminal responsibility, he had effectively no serious consequences to fear and should simply go ahead.¹⁰⁰

NVE cannot, however, be understood solely as a law-enforcement problem, particularly when very young people are involved. A 12-year-old who has apparently internalized elements of the NVE/TCC repertoire of meanings, symbols, and incentives is also a child in acute crisis, one who has found in those online ecosystems a structure of meaning, identity, and belonging that that he did not find and recognize in his immediate social environment.¹⁰¹

This aspect highlights a significant vulnerability unique to Italy. Unlike most Western countries, Italy still lacks a comprehensive national strategy for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). It could be argued that in this field, Italy has to a certain extent been a victim of its own success: The limited number of

extremist attacks, with very few casualties—due in part to an expert, well-coordinated, and proactive counterterrorism apparatus¹⁰²—has meant that such a comprehensive prevention framework has appeared less urgent in the country. However, recent cases such as those discussed in this article highlight the need to develop a P/CVE national strategy promptly, drawing on international best practices and lessons learned. This effort should also include referral mechanisms and programs tailored to schools.

Encouragingly, the Bolzano case suggests that timely intervention may work: As noted above, according to available information, the same boy who was “at a very advanced stage” of a murder plan in February 2025 was, a year later, a dedicated student expressing gratitude to those who had stopped him.

Conclusions

Italy’s recent NVE-linked and NVE-adjacent cases are not anomalous or accidental. They represent the national expression of a transnational phenomenon that has been developing for years. In NVE milieus, ideological orientations may be absent or, at the very least, may function mainly as aesthetic, status, and identity markers. This does not make NVE less dangerous or less consequential; it makes it harder to classify and interpret. The phenomenon typically sits at the intersection of terrorism, targeted violence, child exploitation, self-harm, and youth mental-health crises. Overexpanding the “terrorism” label risks obscuring peculiar dynamics (such as aesthetic fascination, status-seeking, coercion, and juvenile vulnerability) and may produce blunt responses; however, treating these cases as ordinary “adolescent deviance” risks understating their seriousness and ignores their networked structure, imitative dynamic, and performative logic.

The Italian sequence makes these patterns visible in different forms. In particular, the Bolzano case points to the transnational 764/Com ecosystem and to “remotely coerced violence;” Trescore Balneario shows how personal resentment can be recast as livestreamed, NVE-adjacent performance at school; Arezzo and Perugia illustrate the fusion of far-right references with school-attack fantasies and misogynistic grievances; and San Vito Lo Capo offers the clearest Italian example to date of a TCC-coded attack attempt, only weeks after the earlier school attack in the country.

This examination also makes manifest that a 12- or 13-year-old can be at the same time a vulnerable child and a potential source of serious public violence. Ultimately, while effective counterterrorism is essential, an even deeper challenge concerns prevention. For Italy, as for other countries facing this threat, the task is to develop and enhance a comprehensive system capable of identifying and ‘stopping’ such individuals, including children, in time, and offering them something to return to afterward. **CTC**

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