

# SIUE Professors Will Share Ways to Prevent Domestic Terrorism in Southern Illinois

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
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EDWARDSVILLE - SIUE professors will host a “Building Community Resilience to Radicalization to Violence” community briefing to share information about the current threat of domestic terrorism in southern Illinois and prevention tips that communities can employ.

Dr. Suranjan Weeraratne and Dr. Laurie Rice, political science professors at SIUE, will host the briefing from 6–7:30 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 22, 2024, at the Edwardsville Public Library. Weeraratne and Rice will present survey findings that indicate the threat level of violence in our region, followed by strategies to prevent domestic terrorism in southern Illinois.

“I think and other federal agencies, they have been clear for a long time that the best way to prevent targeted violence and domestic terrorism in the United States, you support the communities and put local communities front and center. They are the first line of defense,” Weeraratne said. “So they’re really important and there’s a lot of emphasis and focus on strengthening local prevention capacities.”

Weeraratne and Rice became interested in this topic after noticing an increase in “ideologically-motivated violence” in the U.S., Rice said. They received a grant from the Department of Homeland Security’s Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, which allowed them to conduct surveys throughout southern Illinois about radicalization.

During the briefing, the professors will present their findings and identify risk factors. They will also share information about what people can do as individuals and on a community-wide level to prevent radicalization and resulting violence.

“I think one thing to think about is that we really do face a risk of political violence and domestic terrorism in the United States currently. It’s something that can happen anywhere, and we don’t want it to happen here,” Rice said. “And there’s something that we can do...Our hope is that this begins conversations and helps connect different concerned community members to begin to imagine what we might do to make our communities safer and more resilient.”

After years of studying violence in Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia, Weeraratne added that it’s “kind of frightening” to notice similar polarization and rhetoric emerging in the U.S. Rice and Weeraratne hope the community briefing can begin conversations about domestic terrorism and help make communities more resilient against violence.

“Sometimes you get the feeling that people are complacent and they think, ‘Oh, it’s not going to happen here. It cannot happen in my community.’ But if you look at the data, on a map of the United States where mass violence or targeted violence has happened, it’s all over the country,” Weeraratne said. “That’s why we need to make people more aware, more cognizant of the dangers of radicalization and whatever possible mitigating steps that we can take so that we’re better prepared.”

The “Building Community Resilience to Radicalization to Violence” community briefing runs from 6–7:30 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 22, 2024, at the Edwardsville Public Library. All are welcome.