

Statement for the Record

The Nonprofit Security Grant Program and Protecting Houses of Worship: A View from the American Jewish Community

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*Working to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure
Justice and fair treatment to all since 1913*

INTRODUCTION TO ADL

Since 1913, the mission of ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” For decades, one of the most important ways in which ADL has fought against bigotry and antisemitism has been by investigating extremist threats across the ideological spectrum, including white supremacists and other far-right violent extremists, producing research to inform the public of the scope of the threat, and working with law enforcement, educators, the tech industry and elected leaders to promote best practices that can effectively address and counter these threats.

Domestic violent extremism has been on the rise in recent years. The Jewish community continues to be a primary target of extremists, regardless of ideology. Our hearts are with the Colleyville, Texas community that was recently shaken by the trauma of being targeted by a terrorist who took hostages at a local synagogue, one that thankfully had security-related equipment and training – resources that many faith-based communities nationwide do not have access to.

Without a doubt, right-wing extremist violence is currently the greatest domestic terrorism threat to everyone in this country. From Charleston to Charlottesville to Pittsburgh, to Poway and El Paso, we have seen the deadly consequences of white supremacist extremism play out all over this country. Moreover, at ADL we are tracking the mainstreaming, normalizing, and *localizing* of the hate, disinformation and toxic conspiracy theories that animate this extremism. We cannot afford to minimize this threat. We need a bipartisan “whole of government approach” — indeed, a “whole of society” approach — to counter it, and the work must start today.

CURRENT TRENDS

Colleyville and Antisemitic Violence

Antisemitism is an ongoing threat to the American Jewish community. According to the FBI’s annual data on hate crimes, defined as criminal offenses which are motivated by bias, crimes targeting the Jewish community consistently constitute over half of all religion-based crimes. The number of hate crimes against Jews has ranged between 600 and 1,200 each year since the FBI began collecting data in the 1990s. There were 683 hate crimes against Jews in 2020, 963 in 2019 and 847 in 2018. The FBI’s data is based on voluntary reporting by local law enforcement and appropriate characterization of crimes as also being hate crimes. For a variety of reasons, dozens of large cities either underreport or do not report hate crime data at all. For that reason, experts, including at ADL, know that the real figure for crimes targeting Jews, as well as other minorities, is even higher than the FBI reporting indicates.

A violent attack against the Jewish community occurred just recently, on January 15th, when a gunman entered Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas, during services, taking three congregants and the rabbi as hostages. Though the standoff ended with all hostages freed and physically unharmed, the violent act reinforced the need to forcefully address the threat of antisemitic violence – experienced by the Colleyville community and far too many others. The fact that the Colleyville attacker travelled from the United Kingdom underscores that there can be foreign influences on domestic terrorism, either through incitement, coordination, or direct participation.

Rising Antisemitism

ADL has recorded a 60% increase of antisemitic incidents over the past five years. While antisemitism has commonalities with racism, anti-Muslim bias, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and other forms of hate and discrimination, it also has certain unique characteristics as a specific set of ideologies about Jews that has migrated across discourses – and across centuries. In almost every part of our society, this hatred has been conjured and adjusted to suit the values, beliefs and fears of specific demographics and contexts. The underlying conspiracy theories employing Jew-hatred morph to fit the anxieties and upheavals of the time – for example, that Jews were responsible for the Black Death in medieval times and for “inventing,” spreading or profiting from COVID in the 21st century. Or that Jews exercise extraordinary power over governments, media, and finance – from the charges of a conspiracy to achieve world domination set forth in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and used by the Nazis, to thinly veiled antisemitism blaming “globalism” and “cosmopolitan” elites for all the ills of the world and for planning a “new world order.”

We cannot fight antisemitism without understanding how it is both intertwined with other forms of prejudice and how it is unique.

Each year, ADL’s Center on Extremism tracks incidents of antisemitic harassment, vandalism, and assault in the United States. Since 1979, we have published this information in an annual [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents](#). In 2020, ADL tabulated 2,024 reported antisemitic incidents throughout the United States. This is a 4% decrease from the 2,107 incidents recorded in 2019 but is still the third-highest year on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979.

Known extremist groups or individuals inspired by extremist ideology were responsible for 331 incidents in 2020, up from 270 incidents in 2019. This represents 16% of the total number of incidents in 2020.

More recently, analysis from ADL’s Center on Extremism reveals that antisemitic incidents in the U.S. more than doubled during the May 2021 military conflict between Israel and Hamas and its immediate aftermath compared to the same time period in 2020. After peaking during that period, incident levels gradually returned to a baseline level.

Threats to HBCUs

Over the last several weeks, America's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were targeted by widespread and repeated bomb threats. While the cases are still under investigation, law enforcement authorities reportedly believe the threats were racially motivated. It is no coincidence that HBCUs, a longstanding symbol of Black resilience and excellence, were targeted at the start of Black History Month and during a time of widespread and “equal opportunity” hate, which has affected minority communities nationwide.

It is notable that threats targeting the Black community come at a time when antisemitic incidents are high, and the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community continues to experience alarming levels of hate crimes directed toward them. Hateful movements do not limit themselves to attacking only one group or demographic.

Murder and Extremism: By the Numbers

In 2021, based on ADL’s preliminary research, domestic extremists killed at least 29 people in the United States, in 19 separate incidents. This represents a modest increase from the 23 extremist-related murders documented in 2020 but is far lower than the number of murders committed in any of the five years prior (which ranged from 45 to 78). While this could be cause for optimism, more likely it is the result of COVID lockdowns reducing mass gatherings and the increased attention of law enforcement following the January 6th, 2021 insurrection.

Most of the murders (26 of 29) were committed by right-wing extremists, which for more than a decade in this country has been the case.

White Supremacist Propaganda

ADL’s [Center on Extremism \(COE\)](#) tracked a near-doubling of white supremacist propaganda efforts in 2020, which included the distribution of racist, antisemitic and anti-LGBTQ+ fliers, stickers, banners and posters. The 2020 data shows a huge increase of incidents from the previous year, with a total of 5,125 cases reported to ADL (averaging more than 14 incidents per day), compared to 2,724 in 2019. This is the highest number of white supremacist propaganda incidents ADL has ever recorded. The number of propaganda incidents on college campuses dropped by more than half, perhaps due to COVID restrictions.

Propaganda gives white supremacists the ability to maximize media and online attention, while limiting the risk of individual exposure, negative media coverage, arrests and public backlash that often accompanies more public events. The barrage of propaganda, which overwhelmingly features veiled white supremacist language with a “patriotic” slant, is an effort to normalize white supremacists’ message and bolster recruitment efforts while targeting marginalized communities including Jews, Black people, Muslims, non-white immigrants and LGBTQ+ people.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing Modern Terrorist Threats

We need a whole-of-government approach to address the extremist threat that the Jewish community, and many others, are facing and will continue to face in the years to come. The framework that ADL has created — the PROTECT plan — is a comprehensive, seven-part plan to mitigate the threat posed by domestic extremism and domestic terrorism while protecting civil rights and civil liberties. Together, focusing on these seven categories can have an immediate and deeply significant impact in preventing and countering domestic terrorism—more so than any one action, policy, or law— and can do so while protecting civil rights and liberties and ensuring that government overreach does not harm the same vulnerable people and communities that these extremists target.

- **Prioritize Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism:** We urge Congress to adopt a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to preventing and countering domestic terrorism.
- **Resource According to the Threat:** We must ensure that the authorities and resources the government uses to address violent threats are proportionate to the risk of the lethality

of those threats. In other words, allocation of resources must never be politicized but rather based on transparent and objective security concerns.

- **Oppose Extremists in Government Service:** It is essential that we recognize the potential for harm when extremists gain positions of power, including in government, law enforcement, and the military.
- **Take Domestic Terrorism Prevention Measures:** We must not wait until after someone has become an extremist or a terrorist attack has happened to act. Effective and promising prevention measures exist, which should be scaled.
- **End the Complicity of Social Media in Facilitating Extremism:** Congress must prioritize countering online extremism and ensuring that perpetrators who engage in unlawful activity online can be held accountable. Online platforms often lack adequate policies to mitigate extremism and hate equitably and at scale. Federal and state laws and policies require significant updating to hold online platforms and individual perpetrators accountable for enabling hate, racism, and extremist violence across the internet. In March 2021, ADL announced [the REPAIR Plan](#), which offers a comprehensive framework for platforms and policymakers to take meaningful action to decrease online hate and extremism.
- **Create an Independent Clearinghouse for Online Extremist Content:** Congress should work with the Biden-Harris Administration to create a publicly funded, independent nonprofit center to track online extremist threat information in real-time and make referrals to social media companies and law enforcement agencies when appropriate.
- **Target Foreign White Supremacist Terrorist Groups:** Congress must recognize that white supremacist extremism is a major global threat of our era and mobilize with that mindset.

Nonprofit Security Grant Program

The Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) is an essential tool in protecting nonprofits, including houses of worship and other faith-based organizations. The program can be used for training and equipment to secure facilities, such as synagogues like the one in Colleyville, Texas, whose leadership took advantage of the program. Far too many houses of worship do not. And those that do apply have a frustratingly low likelihood of receiving financial relief from the program for securing themselves. For houses of worship, community needs should be more front of mind than providing for their own security or raising funds for security precautions.

In the last grant cycle, 3,361 applicants requested \$399,763,916 in NSGP grants, according to FEMA. Congress had only funded the program at \$180 million, providing for a maximum of only 45 percent of security costs that nonprofits had assessed were necessary for their community's security. That funding gap represents almost \$220 million in unfunded liabilities for nonprofit organizations in an era of high and rising threats from domestic violent extremists. While the synagogue in Colleyville had fortunately been aware of this opportunity – and received some benefits from it – try to imagine all of the synagogues, churches, gurdwaras, and other community pillars lacking resources, and further, those that lack even the awareness of the program at all. While it might be fair to say that not all applications for funding are the highest caliber, it would also be fair to note that these are community institutions – not professional government contractors – navigating complex bureaucratic requirements when they should be focused on their

communities. In this era of extreme threats to houses of worship, our communities deserve more.

Recommendations for Reforming the Nonprofit Security Grant Program

NSGP poses a significant opportunity to help secure our communities. Even modest reforms can provide significant support. ADL recommends that Congress take on the following reforms:

- **Significantly increase the pool of available funding for NSGP:** Funding NSGP at \$360 million last year would have ensured that 90 percent of applicants received funding. For many grant programs, funding a small percentage of applications is a signal of the competitiveness of the program; however, NSGP does not fund nonprofits performing government services, it funds nonprofits who need government support – it should not be competitive, it should be helpful. We should expect even more applications in the future, as more organizations should be made aware of the program, and the threat trends show an increase in risk. As such, \$360 million is the minimum amount that community organizations need to secure themselves in this era of severe risk.
- **Scale outreach and engagement to increase the applicant pool:** Not enough states avail themselves of the program, and many community organizations are not aware of it. Following the Colleyville tragedy, ADL heard from many community partners that they were not aware of the funding available. While ADL can make partners aware of the opportunity – and urge state governments to increase their efforts within their states – DHS must step up. DHS should significantly increase engagement with communities and with state governments to broaden the number of applicants seeking support from the program.
- **Scale outreach and engagement to guide applicants:** Nonprofits like houses of worship are not government contractors; the burdensome bureaucratic requirements of federal funding applications may be familiar to organizations with direct experience applying for federal grants, but for most NSGP applicants, applying is a new and unusual process. As such, DHS should increase its guidance to potential applicants on how to be successful when applying for funds. Applying for NSGP grants should not be a competition, pitting congregation against congregation. It should be a way to support all communities under threat.
- **Broaden the spectrum of eligible grantee expenses:** NSGP funds can be used for security training and equipment to guard against threats that are “terroristic.” “Terroristic” is not a term many applicants may be familiar with. Moreover, it should be interpreted as broadly as possible, such as including threats from domestic extremist organizations based on the tactics those organizations use. As such, safeguarding against cybercrimes, such as hacking a website, and other targeted harassment that bears the hallmarks of the behavior of hate-based movements that sometimes use terrorism should be allowable expenses. The interpretation of guidance on expenses should track the guidance on threats provided by DHS and other law enforcement and intelligence entities, which note that domestic terrorism represents the top terrorist risks to Americans domestically. The full scope of domestic terrorist tactics should be considered when making programmatic decisions.
- **Provide full support to DHS to faithfully execute a scaled program:** Grant management

is a technical skill, and oversight is incredibly important for large funds. DHS should not be expected to adapt to the heightened threat environment without further resources to ensure funding is spent effectively and to provide necessary outreach. DHS should receive additional staff and other resources to administer the program, as well as new funding streams for additional outreach to potential applicants.

- **Ensure transparency and oversight in the administration of the program:** While DHS must be empowered to help community members secure themselves, it cannot be allowed to operate without careful oversight. We must acknowledge that some communities may feel less empowered, not more, when seeing DHS increase its resources. The program should be reviewed through a civil rights and civil liberties lens. Further, it is difficult for the public to determine how funding has been dispersed: DHS should release a public, annual report on the program, and Congress should ensure that the resources provided to DHS for this objective are being used proportionate to the evidence of terroristic threats.