

Congressional Testimony

The Dynamic Terrorism Landscape and What it Means for America

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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.

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.

Modern White Supremacy

Extremist white supremacist ideology is more than a collection of prejudices: it is a complete ideology or worldview that can be as deeply seated as strongly held religious beliefs.

Different variations and versions of extremist white supremacist ideology have evolved and expanded over time to include an emphasis on antisemitism and nativism. These extremists themselves typically no longer use the term “white supremacist”, as they once proudly did, but tend instead to prefer various euphemisms, ranging from “white nationalist” to “white separatist” to “race realist” or “identitarian.” Even in the face of these complexities, it is still possible to arrive at a useful working definition of the concept of extremist white supremacy.

Through the Civil Rights era, white supremacist ideology focused on the perceived need to maintain the dominance of the white race in the United States. After the Civil Rights era, extremist white supremacists realized that their views had become increasingly unpopular in American society and their ideology adapted to this new reality.

Today, white supremacist ideology, no matter what version or variation, tends to focus on the notion that the white race itself is now threatened with imminent extinction, doomed — unless white people take action — due to a rising tide of people of color who are being controlled and manipulated by Jews. Extremist white supremacists promote the concept of ongoing or future “white genocide” in their efforts to wake white people up to their supposedly dire racial future. The popular white supremacist slogan known as the “Fourteen Words” reflects these beliefs and holds center stage: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.” Secure a future, as white supremacists see it, in the face of their enemies’ efforts to destroy it.

This twisted and conspiratorial ideology was on display in 2017 in Charlottesville as white supremacists marched with tiki torches chanting “Jews will not replace us,” a rally that ended in the death of counter-protester Heather Heyer. It was on display in 2019 during the horrific mass shooting in El Paso. When [a white supremacist opened fire in a shopping center](#), killing 23 people, he was motivated by what he called “the Hispanic invasion of Texas.” And when the mass shooter at the Pittsburgh Tree of Life synagogue massacred 11 Jews on the Jewish Sabbath, he shouted not only “All Jews Must Die!” but claimed to be murdering Jews because they were helping to transport members of the large groups of undocumented immigrants making their way

north towards the U.S. from Latin America.

Anti-Government Militias

The militia movement is a right-wing anti-government extremist movement that formed in 1993-94, primarily in reaction to federal gun control measures and to deadly standoffs between civilians and federal agents. Much of the movement focuses on paramilitary activities. Militia movement adherents have traditionally believed that the federal government is collaborating with a shadowy conspiracy (the “New World Order”) to strip Americans of their rights, starting with their right to keep and bear arms. Once rendered defenseless, Americans would be absorbed into the tyrannical New World Order’s one-world government. The movement grew rapidly in the 1990s but suffered a serious decline in the early 2000s. Beginning in 2008, however, the militia movement enjoyed a major resurgence that attracted thousands of new, often young, recruits. It has been quite active in the years since.

The 2016 election of Donald Trump changed the emphasis of the militia movement, which strongly supported Trump’s candidacy. After Trump’s election, the movement was less interested in opposing the federal government and spent much of its energy looking for other perceived enemies, such as antifa and racial justice protesters associated with the Black Lives Matter movement—particularly in the wake of the May 2020 murder of George Floyd. In 2020, the militia movement focused on opposition to state-level gun control measures, state-level pandemic-related restrictions and Black Lives Matter protests.

The militia movement has a long history of serious criminal activity, including murders, armed standoffs, terroristic threats against public officials, illegal weapons or explosives, and terrorist plots or acts. More information about various active militia groups—and their participation in the January 6, 2021, insurrection—is available below.

Online Hate

In recent years, extremists’ online presence has reverberated across a range of social media platforms. This extremist content is intertwined with hate, racism, antisemitism, and misogyny—all also through lines of white supremacist ideology. Such content is enmeshed in conspiracy theories and explodes on platforms that are themselves tuned to spread disinformation. We can look no further than the deadly insurrection at our Capitol, which ADL has repeatedly called the most predictable terror attack in American history, because it was planned and promoted out in the open on mainstream platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, as well as fringe platforms such as Parler, Gab, 4Chan and Telegram. There is little doubt that fringe platforms have helped radicalize users and normalize both online and offline extremist actions.

Fringe Social Media Platforms

Parler

In the weeks following the 2020 presidential election, the social media site Parler drew [millions of new users—both ordinary users and extremists, allowing for worrisome commingling](#). These newcomers were frustrated with what they perceived to be “anti-conservative” bias exhibited by mainstream social media platforms. For example, these users thought that Twitter and Facebook

were being “anti-conservative” when they limited posts by President Trump and other conservative influencers who violated terms of service prohibiting the spread of misinformation.

Shortly after the Capitol insurrection, [Amazon Web Services \(AWS\)](#) announced that Parler had violated AWS’s terms of service and removed the platform from its hosting service, taking it offline. [Apple and Google similarly](#) suspended Parler’s app from their app stores. [Parler returned online](#) in February 2021, after securing an alternative hosting service. [Proud Boys, QAnon](#) adherents, anti-government extremists ([Oath Keepers](#), [Three Percenters](#) and [militia](#)) and white supremacists (from members of the [alt right](#) to [accelerationists](#)) continue to openly promote their ideologies on Parler. Additionally, [Holocaust denial](#), antisemitism, racism and other forms of bigotry are easy to find. Today, Parler claims to have around sixteen million active users.

Gab

Gab serves as a forum where white supremacists and extremists publish manifestos or gather to plan and organize hateful acts. In October 2018, white supremacist [Robert Bowers killed 11 people](#) at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh after posting antisemitic, anti-immigrant rants on Gab. Two years later, the social media site gained traction among right-wing extremists, including white supremacists. In fact, sixty percent of the 47 right-wing extremist groups [ADL has identified](#) on Gab were created in 2020.

In the wake of the Capitol insurrection, ADL called on the U.S. Department of Justice and the FBI to launch a criminal investigation into Gab and its CEO to determine whether the social media platform intentionally aided or abetted individuals who carried out the January 6 attack on the nation’s Capitol.

4Chan, 8Chan and 8Kun

4chan, one of the oldest and most popular imageboards, was launched in 2003 and introduced viral memes (many of which still circulate today). However, parts of 4chan—especially its Politically Incorrect board, known as pol or /pol/—developed a reputation for offensive and hateful posts and memes.

In March 2019, Brenton Tarrant, an Australian white supremacist, allegedly [posted a manifesto to 8chan](#) before [murdering 51 people](#) at two mosques in New Zealand. In April 2019, white supremacist John Earnest [opened fire inside a Chabad synagogue](#) in Poway, California, killing one person and wounding three more before he surrendered. He posted a manifesto to 8chan before his attack, which referred admiringly to Tarrant, and to Robert Bowers, the [mass shooter who murdered 11 people at a Pittsburgh synagogue](#) in October 2018 (referenced above).

8chan began as an offshoot of the imageboard 4chan. “Imageboards” are types of online discussion forums centered around posting images. After 8chan shut down in August 2019—as a result of being [deplatformed by the web infrastructure and security company Cloudflare](#) following the extremist mass murder in El Paso, Texas—many users migrated over to 8kun.

These users are typically anonymous, with no screen names. That anonymity allows people to post outrageous, disgusting, or hateful photos and messages, ranging from hate speech to posts about pedophilia.

Telegram

Telegram, an online social networking app with well over 200 million users, may not be a

household name just yet, but it has a significant audience. [And it is gaining popularity](#). Telegram has become a favored online gathering place for the international overtly white supremacist community and other extremist groups who have been [displaced or banned](#) from more popular platforms. The platform, which is a cloud-based chat and group messaging app, was created in 2013 by the same two Russian brothers who founded the Russian-based social networking site [VKontakte](#), or VK. VK is also known for its lack of moderation of white supremacist content. At present, the various platforms' leadership teams appear to be uninterested in addressing this issue.

Mainstream Social Media Platforms

Fringe platforms, despite having relatively small user bases, leverage Big Tech platforms like Twitter and Facebook to increase their reach and influence. But Big Tech platforms are no longer unwitting accomplices. In the case of Big Tech, white supremacist propaganda has found its viral channel. It's a perfect storm. First, there is the well-researched human propensity to engage with the most incendiary, inciting, and hateful content. This in turn meets the business model of Big Tech, which depends on increasing engagement of users to surveil them and collect copious amounts of data about them—and their associates and activities—all to sell as many hyper-targeted advertisements as possible. The profit incentive demands engagement, hate and extremism delivers it, and then algorithms amplify that hateful content to generate even more engagement. Toxic speech is thus given reach and impact unparalleled in human history. For example, in 2020, a single “Stop the Steal” Facebook group gained more than 300,000 members within 24 hours. Thousands of newcomers a minute joined this group and some of them openly advocated civil war.

Facebook

Facebook claims that it is addressing hate on its platforms. ADL and others, however, continue to expose egregious examples of online hate, misinformation, and extremism across the company's products. In June 2020, Facebook [announced](#) that it took down hundreds of groups and pages on its platform associated with the violent anti-government [boogaloo movement](#). Despite efforts by the boogaloo movement to [camouflage](#) itself to retain a Facebook foothold, the social media company's efforts were largely effective, and after the de-platforming, it became difficult to find large and active boogaloo spaces on Facebook.

Concerningly, however, additional boogaloo pages have since emerged on Facebook, hiding among libertarian groups and pages that also share memes advocating for violence. Perhaps most worrying, Facebook algorithms appear to be recommending these boogaloo pages to like-minded users, despite the company's June 2020 [assertion](#) that it would no longer do so, followed by [broader](#) statements around not recommending groups tied to violence in September 2020 and an [even broader statement](#) in March 2021 stating that Facebook would be ending all recommendations for “civic and political groups, as well as newly created groups.”

TikTok

In less than six years, TikTok—the social media app that allows users to create and share short videos—has amassed hundreds of millions of users. It is particularly popular among young people. As ADL [documented in August 2020](#) and [May 2021](#), while much of the content on TikTok is lighthearted and fun, extremists have exploited the TikTok to share hateful messages and recruit new adherents. Antisemitism continues to percolate across the app, with posts

perpetuating age-old anti-Jewish tropes and conspiracy theories. Recordings of [Louis Farrakhan](#), Rick Wiles (of TruNews), and [Stephen Anderson](#)—all antisemitic individuals whose bigotry has been thoroughly documented by ADL—were readily available on TikTok in 2021. One such post, shared on May 23, 2021, showed a clip of a TruNews segment in which Rick Wiles states: “And our leaders are lowlife scum that screw little girls so the Jews can screw America...we’ve allowed Kabbalah practicing Jews to defile the nation.” [TruNews](#), a fundamentalist Christian streaming news and opinion platform that produces antisemitic, anti-Zionist, anti-LGBTQ+ and Islamophobic content, has been banned from YouTube and Facebook for violating the platforms’ content rules.

Twitter

Twitter has taken significant steps to decrease extremist conspiracy theory content on its platform; however, policy enactment and enforcement remain inconsistent. In July 2020, for example, Twitter [announced](#) it would take further action on “QAnon” activity and permanently suspend QAnon-affiliated accounts. The company subsequently claimed that QAnon-related content dropped by more than 50% as a result. The platform also announced additions to its [coordinated harmful activity policy](#). Unfortunately, there were many prominent Twitter accounts, with significant reach, espousing QAnon content but left untouched. It is evident that Twitter did not regularly enforce its QAnon policy after the July 2020 announcement. [Data collected before and after the attack](#) on the Capitol shows that leading up to January 2021, Twitter’s actions fell far short. By the time Twitter finally started removing QAnon-supporting accounts on January 8, 2021, the consequences of misinformation had already become frighteningly real.

YouTube

YouTube, has remained under the radar for its role in spreading disinformation and misinformation, compared to Facebook and Twitter. YouTube waited more than a month after the 2020 presidential election to remove videos claiming electoral fraud—by then, millions of people had been exposed to false information that eroded trust in our democracy. Furthermore, [ADL research](#) shows YouTube continues to push people into extremist content despite the company’s claim that it has overhauled its recommendation algorithms.

As our February 2021 Belfer Fellow report indicates, exposure to videos from extremist or white supremacist channels on YouTube remains disturbingly common. The report’s authors conducted a study that measured the browsing habits of a diverse national sample of participants and found that approximately one in ten participants viewed at least one video from an extremist channel (9.2%) and approximately two in ten (22.1%) viewed at least one video from an alternative channel. Moreover, participants often received and sometimes followed YouTube recommendations for videos from alternative and extremist channels. Overall, consumption of alternative and extremist content was concentrated among highly engaged respondents, most frequently among those with negative racial views. In total, people with high racial resentment were responsible for more than 90% of views for videos from alternative and extremist channels.

Extremism in 2021

The January 6, 2021, siege on the Capitol was an assault on our country and our democracy, incited in broad daylight by the former President and many of his supporters. Many of those who were roused to violence that day did so as the result of weeks and months and years of similar incitement.

The ADL Center on Extremism (COE) has identified 544 of the roughly 800 individuals who are believed to have breached the U.S. Capitol. The emerging snapshot of the insurrectionists shows a [range of right-wing extremists](#) united by their fury with the perceived large-scale betrayal by “unprincipled” Republican legislators.

Of the 544 individuals identified by COE, at least 127 (or 23 percent) have ties to known right-wing extremist groups, including [Oath Keepers](#) (22 people), [Proud Boys](#) (42), [Groypers](#) and other white supremacists (12) and the [QAnon](#) conspiracy theory (31). A number of Proud Boys members and Oath Keepers have [been charged with conspiracy](#) in [connection](#) with the January 6 insurrection. More information on these extremist groups is provided below.

The remaining 77 percent of those identified by COE are considered part of the [new pro-Trump extremist movement](#), a decentralized but enthusiastic faction made up of self-described “patriots” who continue to pledge their fidelity to the former President and his false assertions that he actually won the election and that it was stolen from him by, among other things, massive voter fraud. This new breed of extremist is foundationally animated by devotion to Trump, placing him over party or country. They are living inside an ecosphere of misinformation, disinformation, lies and conspiracy theories, one fertilized by Alex Jones, QAnon, the former President and his enablers, and many others.

Oath Keepers

The Oath Keepers are a large but loosely organized collection of right-wing anti-government extremists who are part of the [militia movement](#), which believes that the federal government has been co-opted by a shadowy conspiracy that is trying to strip American citizens of their rights. Though the Oath Keepers will accept anyone as members, what differentiates them from other anti-government extremist groups is their explicit focus on recruiting current and former military, law enforcement and first responder personnel. While there is a formal national leadership, on the local level many Oath Keepers are essentially self-organized and form official, semi-official or informal groupings of Oath Keepers.

The Proud Boys

The Proud Boys represent an unconventional strain of American right-wing extremism. While the group can be described as [violent](#), [nationalistic](#), [Islamophobic](#), [transphobic and misogynistic](#), its members represent a range of ethnic and racial backgrounds, and its leaders vehemently protest any allegations of racism. Their founder, Gavin McInnes, went so far as to file a [defamation lawsuit](#) against the Southern Poverty Law Center when the SPLC designated the Proud Boys as a hate group.

In McInnes’ own words, the Proud Boys are a “pro-western fraternity,” essentially a drinking club dedicated to male bonding, socializing and the celebration of all things related to western culture. In reality, the Proud Boys is an extremist group that bears many of the hallmarks of a [gang](#), and its members have taken part in multiple acts of brutal [violence and intimidation](#). While the Proud Boys insist that they only act in self-defense, several incidents — including one in which two members of the group were [convicted](#) of attempted gang assault, attempted assault and riot — belie their self-professed peaceful nature. Indeed, many members have criminal records for violent behavior and the organization [actively pursues violence](#) against their perceived enemies. Ideologically, members subscribe to a scattershot array of libertarian and nationalist tropes, referring to themselves as anti-communist and anti-political correctness,

but in favor of free speech and free markets.

In recent years the Proud Boys have established themselves as a dominant force within what has been referred to as [the alt lite](#). Often easily recognizable thanks to their black and yellow Fred Perry polo shirts and red Make America Great Again baseball caps, members are regulars at far-right demonstrations and Trump rallies. After several years of forging alliances with members of the Republican political establishment, the Proud Boys have carved out a niche for themselves as both a right-wing fight club and a [volunteer security force for the GOP](#). Despite their associations with mainstream politicians, Proud Boys' actions and statements repeatedly land them in the company of white supremacists and right-wing extremists. Jason Kessler, the primary organizer of the deadly 2017 [Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville](#), is a former Proud Boy. (Indeed, the federal civil rights case brought against the neo-Nazis who organized that rally is entitled [Sines v. Kessler](#). The case, for which ADL provided expert and financial support, was a historic win for the plaintiffs in November 2021.) Several members attended the violent August 12, 2017, demonstration that ended in the death of counter-protester Heather Heyer.

During an [October 2018](#) brawl [outside the Metropolitan Republican Club in Manhattan](#), for which two Proud Boys members were convicted and sentenced to substantial prison terms, and seven others pled guilty, the Proud Boys were joined by 211 Bootboys, an ultra-nationalist and violent skinhead gang based in New York City. In October 2019, members of the Denver chapter of the Proud Boys marched with members of [Patriot Front](#) and former members of the now-defunct neo-Nazi group [Traditionalist Worker Party](#). These relationships show the Proud Boys to be less a pro-western drinking club and instead an extremist, right-wing gang.

In 2020, the Proud Boys solidified their status as the most visible and most active right-wing extremist group in the country. As the nation grappled with the pandemic, members of the Proud Boys became a [regular sight](#) at anti-lockdown protests, using the demonstrations not only to raise their profile, but as recruitment opportunities. The group is not unique in this sense – [Boogaloo bois](#) and [militia members](#) were also frequent participants at these rallies. Another key factor in the Proud Boys 2020 activity was [their embrace of the #Saveourchildren campaign](#), alongside [QAnon](#) adherents. The new links with QAnon allowed the Proud Boys access to untapped segments of the pro-Trump extremist movement.

Events held in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd allowed the Proud Boys to brand themselves as a “law and order” counterpoint to Black Lives Matter protesters, although the Proud Boys themselves generally precipitated the most egregious acts of [violence and intimidation](#) against protesters. This dynamic produced some of the most brutal clashes between Proud Boys and their adversaries, particularly in Portland, Oregon, which saw over 100 days of continuous unrest. There were violent and armed [clashes on August 22](#), and a [MAGA convoy on August 29](#) led to the death of Aaron “Jay” Danielson, [a member of the right-wing group Patriot Prayer, a frequent ally of the Proud Boys](#).

The Proud Boys' profile was given an additional boost when President Trump, in his [September 29, 2020 debate](#) against Joe Biden, instructed the Proud Boys to “[stand back, and stand by.](#)” Emboldened by the attention from the President, the Proud Boys rallied for Trump twice in Washington, D.C. following his election loss. The first rally took place on [November 14, 2020](#) and the second on [December 12, 2020](#), with the second rally ending with four members of the [Proud Boys suffering stab wounds](#) from a brawl.

During that same rally, Proud Boys members allegedly set fire to a BLM banner they stole from

Asbury United Methodist Church, a historically Black church. Proud Boys leader, Enrique Tarrío, took responsibility for the incident and was later charged with destruction of property. He was arrested, carrying two extended gun magazines, on the eve of the January 6, 2021, rally that led to the storming of the U.S. Capitol. As a condition of his release, a judge barred Tarrío from attending the January 6 protest. Tarrío ultimately [pleaded guilty](#) to destruction of property and attempting to possess a high-capacity gun magazine, both misdemeanors. A civil case brought by the Church against the Proud Boys and Tarrío last April resulted in a [default judgment against the Proud Boys](#).

In [December 2021](#), ADL joined District Attorney General Karl Racine and other pro bono counsel in bringing a civil lawsuit arising out of the January 6 insurrection on behalf of the District against the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and individuals associated with both groups. The case, which brings allegations under the Reconstruction Era KKK Act, among other laws, seeks to hold accountable the groups and affiliated individuals for their role in planning and executing the attack on the Capitol in an attempt to overturn a lawful presidential election.

Groypers/Groyper Army

The so-called “Groyper army” (the term “Groyper” is explained below) is a white supremacist group, led by Nick Fuentes, that presents its ideology as more nuanced than that of other groups in the white supremacist sphere. While the group and its leadership’s views align with those held by the white supremacist alt right, Groypers attempt to normalize their ideology by aligning themselves with “Christianity” and “traditional values” ostensibly championed by the church, including marriage and family.

Like the alt right and other white supremacists, Groypers believe they are working to defend against demographic and cultural changes that are destroying the “true America” – a white, Christian nation. However, Groypers differ in a number of ways from the alt right. They identify themselves as “American nationalists” who are part of the “America First” movement. To the Groypers, “America First” means that the U.S. should close its borders, bar immigrants, oppose globalism and promote “traditional” values like Christianity and oppose “liberal” values such as feminism and LGBTQ+ rights. They claim not to be racist or antisemitic and see their bigoted views as “normal” and necessary to preserve white, European-American identity and culture. However, some members have expressed racist and antisemitic views on multiple occasions. They believe their views are shared by the majority of white people.

QAnon and Other Conspiracy Theories

QAnon is a global, wide-reaching and remarkably elaborate conspiracy theory that has taken root within [some parts of the pro-Trump movement](#). It is an amalgam of both novel and well-established theories, with marked undertones of antisemitism and xenophobia. Fundamentally, the theory claims that almost every president in recent U.S. history up until Donald Trump has been a puppet put in place by a global elite of power brokers hell bent on enriching themselves and maintaining their Satanic child-murdering sex cult. Q is a reference to “Q clearance” or “Q access authorization,” terms used to describe a top-secret clearance level within the Department of Energy.

According to QAnon lore, this global elite, known as “The Deep State” or “The Cabal,” control not just world governments, but the banking system, the Catholic church, the agricultural and pharmaceutical industries, the media, and entertainment industry — all working around the clock

to keep the people of the world poor, ignorant and enslaved.

Conspiracy theories, rampant in the United States, have an unusual power to motivate people to action. Some conspiracy theories are associated with various right-wing or left-wing ideologies, while others transcend ideology, like those surrounding the 9/11 attacks or the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Under the right circumstances, such theories can motivate people to violence, especially if the conspiracy theories single out specific people or organizations as the villains.

Most extremist movements develop or depend on conspiracy theories to some degree. In the United States, extreme right-wing movements have a particularly close relationship to conspiracy theories. Anti-Muslim extremists promote “Sharia law” conspiracy theories, for example, to increase anti-Muslim animus, while anti-immigrant border vigilantes justify their patrols with conspiracy theories about Mexican drug cartels waging a secret invasion of the United States.

For some right-wing extremist movements, conspiracy theories lie at the heart of their extreme worldviews. The modern white supremacist movement, for example, centers its beliefs on the notion that the white race is in danger of extinction from growing numbers of people of color who are controlled and manipulated by a nefarious Jewish conspiracy. Anti-government extremist movements, such as the militia movement and the sovereign citizen movement, are based on conspiracy theories that focus on the federal government.

As a result, much of the violence stemming from extremist white supremacists and anti-government extremists can be attributed, directly or indirectly, to such conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories often sharpen anger that extremists already feel to the point where they become willing to take violent action.

In 2021, disparate groups of [QAnon](#) adherents, [election fraud promoters](#) and [anti-vaccine](#) activists organized events around the country to promote their causes. This phenomenon underscores the extent to which the line separating the mainstream from the extreme has blurred, and how mainstream efforts to undermine our democratic institutions are bolstered by extremist and conspiratorial narratives and their supporters.

These narratives include:

- That the 2020 presidential election was stolen by the Democrats (touted at the Health and Freedom events organized by right-wing entrepreneur Clay Clark);
- That a global cabal of pedophiles (including Democrats) who are kidnapping children for their blood will be executed when Donald Trump is reinstated as president (popular at The Patriot Voice: For God and Country conference, organized by QAnon influencer John Sabal, a/k/a “QAnon John,” and at the We the People Patriots Day event and the OKC Freedom conference);
- That the coronavirus was co-created in a lab by Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Dr. Anthony Fauci and Microsoft founder Bill Gates;
- That the coronavirus vaccine contains dangerous ingredients that change your DNA and make vaccinated people “shed” dangerous toxins;
- That Satanic socialists are attempting to take over the country; and
- That if Democrats and “the left” remain in power, a confrontation, potentially violent, will be necessary to “reclaim” the country.

These narratives go well beyond the mainstream into extreme territory.

Long Term Trends: The Growing Threat of Domestic Terrorism

While it is impossible to say with absolute certainty what lies ahead, we know that white supremacists and some other extremists, including anti-Muslim extremists, anti-immigrant extremists and antisemites, are driven by conspiracy theories as well as manufactured fears around demographic change, which some extremists fear will only accelerate as the Biden Administration is perceived by them to enact more humane policies towards immigrants and refugees who are people of color. Extremists equate those policies to “white genocide.”

Militia and other anti-government groups may also be very active in the next few years. The militia movement has historically derived much of its energy and vitality from its rage towards the federal government. However, the movement’s support of President Trump during his administration dulled that anger. As it progresses, the Biden Administration’s existence may give militias an excuse to return to their foundational grievances: the belief that a tyrannical government in league with a globalist conspiracy is coming to enslave them by taking first their guns and then the remainder of their rights.

Finally, antisemitism will likely continue to be a central part of the conspiratorial views that fuel right-wing violence, as it has been for so long. It is crucial to recognize not only the threat to Jews and Jewish institutions this poses, but also both the foundational and animating impetus it gives violent white extremism, whatever its targets. And it is also vitally important to understand the role that antisemitic conspiracies play in the wider threat to our democracy. Antisemitism isn’t just bigotry directed toward Jews; it uses that hatred and bigotry against the Jewish community to undermine democratic practices by framing democracy as a conspiracy, as Eric Ward of the Western States Center notes, “rather than as a tool of empowerment or a functional tool of governance. In other words, the more people buy into antisemitism and its understanding of the world, the more they lose faith in democracy.”

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

We need a whole-of-government approach to address the threat. ADL strongly recommends urgent action to prevent and counter domestic violent extremism. 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. Our suggestions come under these seven areas:

- P** Prioritize Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism
- R** Resource According to the Threat
- O** Oppose Extremists in Government Service
- T** Take Public Health and Other Domestic Terrorism Prevention Measures
- E** End the Complicity of Social Media in Facilitating Extremism
- C** Create an Independent Clearinghouse for Online Extremist Content

T Target Foreign White Supremacist Terrorist Groups for Sanctions

Prioritize Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism

First, we urge Congress to adopt a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to preventing and countering domestic terrorism.

- In mid-June 2021, the Biden-Harris Administration released the first-ever National Strategy to Counter Domestic Terrorism. The strategy is laudable, and a step in the right direction. However, many critical details were left unaddressed. Congress must press for further details into how the plan will be implemented, and the steps that will be taken to ensure protection for civil rights and civil liberties. Further, Departments and Agencies must create their own implementation plans for the Strategy.
- The Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol must be allowed to operate in good faith, absent politicization of its important work. The American public needs a careful review of the brazen and lethal attack on the very seat of our democracy. We urge Congress to search for answers, publicly release information whenever possible, and to issue bipartisan recommendations to ensure that no attack like that on January 6, 2021, can take place again.
- As Congress considers appropriations bills, resources to prevent and counter domestic terrorism are critical to mitigating the threat. ADL urges Committee Members to consider supporting significant increases for these necessary resources across the government in the Commerce, Justice, and Science; Homeland Security; Defense; State and Foreign Operations; Interior; and Labor, Health, and Human Services appropriations processes. As one example, the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) is woefully under-funded and should be doubled to \$360 million total.

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.

- Congress should immediately pass the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act (DTPA) to enhance the federal government's efforts to prevent domestic terrorism by formally authorizing offices to address domestic terrorism and requiring law enforcement agencies to regularly report on domestic terrorist threats. Congress must ensure that those offices have the resources they need and can deploy those resources in a manner proportionate to existing threats. Further, the transparency that comes with regular reporting is crucial for civil society, Congress, and the public writ large to help oversee the national security process and hold leaders accountable.
- Congress must exercise careful oversight to ensure that no resources are expended on counterterrorism efforts targeting protected political speech or association. Investigations and other efforts to mitigate the threat should be data-driven and proportionate to the violent threat posed by violent extremist movements.

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.

- To the extent permitted by law and consistent with Constitutional protections, take steps to ensure that individuals engaged in violent extremist activity or associated with violent extremist movements, including violent white supremacist and unlawful militia movements, are deemed unsuitable for employment at the federal, state, and local levels — including in law enforcement. Appropriate steps must be taken to address any current employees, who, upon review, match these criteria.
- To the extent permitted by law and consistent with Constitutional protections, take steps to ensure that individuals engaged in violent extremist activity or associated with violent extremist movements, including violent white supremacist and unlawful militia movements, are not given security clearances or other sensitive law enforcement credentials. Appropriate steps must be taken to address any current employees, who, upon review, match these criteria. Law enforcement agencies nationwide should explore options for preventing extremists from being among their ranks.
- The Department of Defense (DoD) released its internal extremist threat review on December 20, 2021. While the review represents significant progress, we need more information to truly determine the threat posed by extremists within the ranks. DoD should provide further detail on how it will evaluate white supremacists and related threats, as well as how commanders' ability to adjudicate extremism-related guidelines will be overseen.
- Similarly, DHS announced that it will be vetting employees for extremist sympathies. ADL applauds this effort and welcomes any details on how the implementation of this vetting will take place, as well as any findings from the review.
- ADL has worked with Law Enforcement experts to provide tools for identifying and weeding out extremists in the recruitment process as well as within law enforcement ranks. While there is no evidence that white supremacist extremists have large numbers in our law enforcement agencies, we have seen that even a few can undermine the effectiveness and trust that is so essential. We have provided resources to LE agencies with guidance on approaches that do not violate First Amendment concerns.

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.

- Congress can provide funding to civil society and academic programs that have expertise in addressing recruitment to extremist causes and radicalization, whether online or offline. By providing funding for prevention activities, including education, counseling, and off-ramping, Congress can help empower public health and civil society actors to prevent and intervene in the radicalization process and undermine extremist narratives, particularly those that spread rapidly on the internet.
- These initiatives must be accompanied by an assurance of careful oversight with civil rights and civil liberties safeguards. They must also meaningfully engage the communities that have been targeted by domestic terrorism and the civil society organizations already

existing within them, and those communities which have been unfairly targeted when prior anti-terrorism authorities have been misused and/or abused. These initiatives must be transparent, responsive to community concerns, publicly demonstrate careful oversight, and ensure that they do not stigmatize communities. Further, DHS should not be the only agency working on prevention; ADL urges the Department to partner with Health and Human Services and other non-security Departments whenever possible.

- While Congress has funded a small grant program for prevention measures domestically, the program is too small to have an impact at scale. Now that the Administration has launched the Center for Prevention Programming and Partnerships within DHS, Congress should significantly scale its grant program; ADL has recommended a \$150 million annual grant level.

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. Like ADL's PROTECT Plan, REPAIR focuses on domestic extremism and terrorism but goes beyond these issues to address other manifestations and harms of online hate, including online harassment, antisemitism, racism, and disinformation.

- Congress has an important role in reducing online hate and extremism. Further, officials at all levels of government can use their bully pulpits to call for better enforcement of technology companies' policies.
- Congress can work with independent extremism experts to protect vulnerable targets from becoming either victim of abuse or perpetrators of violence. Legislation from the 116th Congress like the National Commission on Online Platforms and Homeland Security Act, for example, would establish a commission to investigate how online content implicates certain national security threats, such as targeted violence.
- We also need to provide better recourse for victims and targets of online hate and harassment. In the 115th Congress, Representative Katherine Clark (D-MA) introduced and led H.R. 3067, the Online Safety Modernization Act, which, among other things, would have provided federal protections against doxing and swatting. It is time to pass laws that cover these types of harms. It is crucial that such legislation provide private rights of action.
- To adequately address the threat, the government must direct its resources to understand and mitigate the consequences of hate online. To do so, all levels of government should consider designating funding, to ensure that law enforcement personnel are trained to recognize and to effectively investigate criminal online incidents and have the necessary capacity to do that work.
- Beyond the federal government, businesses have a critical role to play. We need to compel the social media companies to enforce their own terms of service specifically around hate and misinformation – or face repercussions for failing to do so. The firms should go further and fix the algorithms that amplify this noxious content to drive clicks and increase engagement. There is no moral reason to lift up content that brings people down. The

- companies themselves should commit to ending algorithmic amplification of hate, full stop.
- Congress must carefully but considerably amend Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act to make tech companies legally accountable for their role when they enable stalking, facilitate violence and civil rights violations, or incite domestic terrorism. Self-regulation simply has failed on this score. The platforms have been far too laissez-faire for decades, hiding behind Section 230 which immunizes them from legal accountability for even egregious and otherwise unlawful content and actions. They have failed to abide by the basic behaviors that govern nearly all other businesses in every other sector of our economy. We need a drastic reconsideration of Section 230 that enables a free flow of user-generated content but disables the kind of extremism and hate that has festered across social media platforms.
- We urge lawmakers to seriously consider Section 230 reform proposals that prioritize equity and justice for users and bar immunity when platforms place profit over people. This could include enacting measures such as the Protecting Americans from Dangerous Algorithms Act, which would address the previously mentioned issue of algorithmic amplification of discriminatory content or to aid and abet terrorism.

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.

- This approach is needed because those empowered with law enforcement and intelligence capabilities must not be tasked with new investigative and other powers that could infringe upon civil liberties – for example, through broad internet surveillance. Scouring online sources through an independent organization will act as a buffer, but will not prevent the nonprofit center from assisting law enforcement in cases where criminal behavior is suspected. This wall of separation, modeled in part on the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), will help streamline national security tips and resources while preserving civil liberties.

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.

- To date, no white supremacist organization operating overseas has been designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. Only one has been designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT). Congress should review how these designation decisions are made, whether any additional racially or ethnically motivated extremist groups outside the United States, particularly white supremacist groups, have reached the threshold for either designation, and whether such designations would help advance U.S. national interests.
- The Department of State was required to develop a strategy to counter global white supremacist extremism and to add white supremacist terrorism to annual Country Reports on Terrorism. That State has implemented the Country Reports guidance is laudable, and State may have created the strategy. However, the strategy has not been released publicly, making it impossible to evaluate. We urge more transparency from State in this process and for Congress to seek accountability for any gaps in the strategy,

- and to provide resources to implement it.
- The Department of State must mobilize a multilateral effort to address the threat of white supremacy globally. Multilateral best-practice institutions, such as the Global Counterterrorism Forum, the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, and the International Institute for Justice and Rule of Law, may be helpful mechanisms through which to channel some efforts. Moreover, the Global Engagement Center should be charged with undermining the propaganda of violent extremist groups – not just designated terrorist organizations, but overseas white supremacist violent extremists as well. DHS should participate in these efforts, supporting overseas exchanges, partnerships, and best practices sharing to engage in learning from other countries and sharing U.S. best practices, where applicable.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before this august body and for calling a hearing on this urgent topic. ADL data clearly and decisively illustrate that the impact of hate is rising across the United States, and that domestic extremism and terrorism will continue to pose a grave threat. It is long past time to acknowledge that these threats overwhelmingly come from right-wing extremists, especially white supremacists, and allocate our resources to address the threat accordingly. We must also address these threats holistically rather than piecemeal. This is precisely what ADL's PROTECT plan does, applying a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to the fight against hate and extremism. On behalf of ADL, we look forward to working with you as you continue to devote your attention to this critical issue.