

REPORT

Hate in the Lone Star State: Extremism & Antisemitism in Texas



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Introduction

Since the start of 2021, Texas has experienced a significant amount of extremist activity. One driver of this phenomenon is Patriot Front, a white supremacist group that has [distributed propaganda](#) across Texas – and the rest of the U.S. – with alarming frequency, using the state as a base of operations. Two other factors are

extremists who continue to target the LGBTQ+ community and QAnon supporters who have gathered for conferences and rallies across the state.

Texas has also seen a significant increase in antisemitic incidents over the last two years. It recorded the country's fifth-highest number of antisemitic incidents in 2022, at a time when ADL has tracked the highest-ever number of antisemitic incidents nationwide.

This report will explore a range of extremist groups and movements operating in Texas and highlights the key extremist and antisemitic trends and incidents in the state in 2021 and 2022. It also includes noteworthy events and incidents from the first half of 2023.

Key Statistics

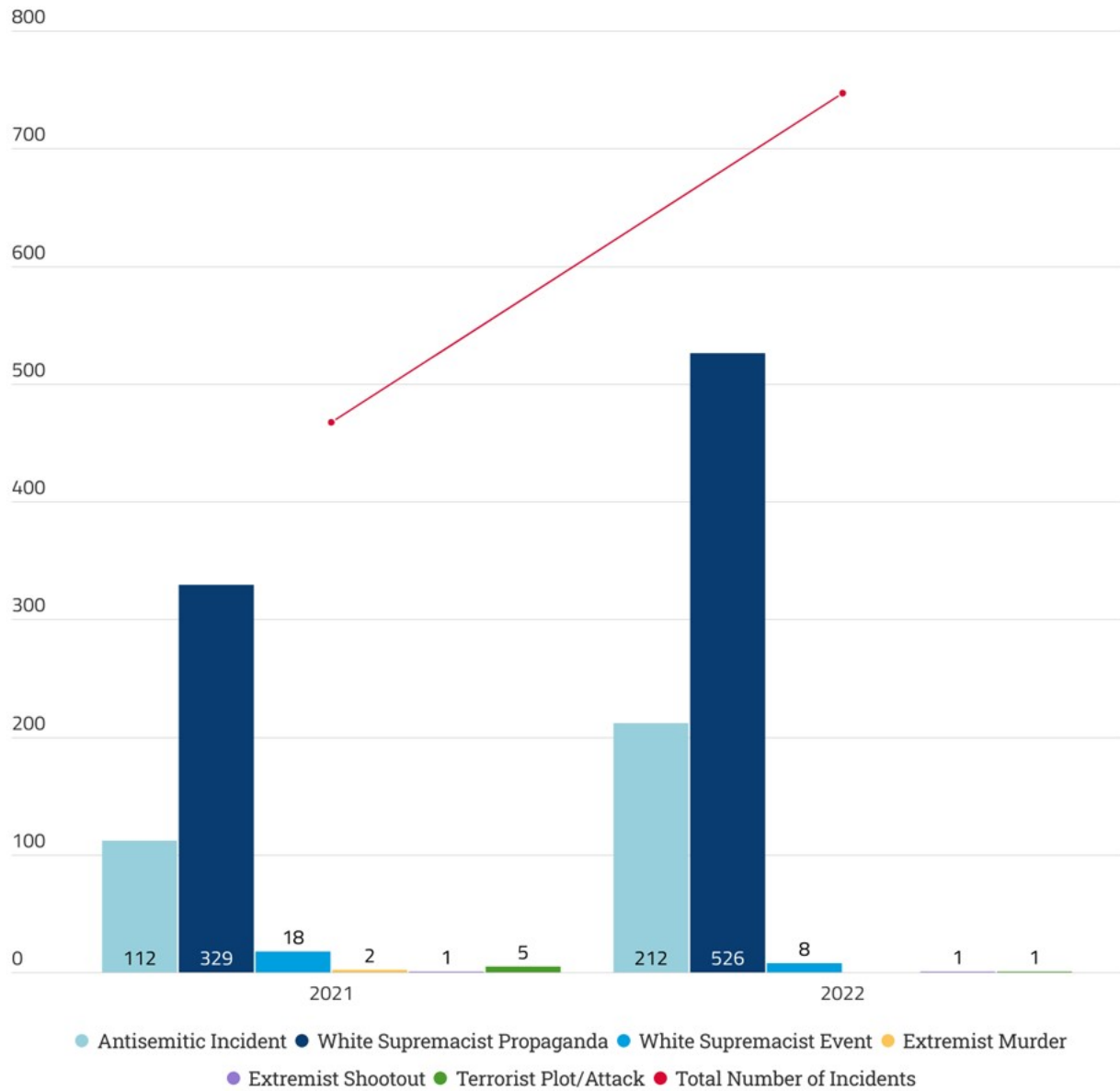
- **Antisemitic Incidents:** According to the ADL's annual [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents](#), Texas has seen a dramatic rise in antisemitic incidents in recent years. In 2022, the number of incidents increased by 89% from 2021 levels, rising from 112 to 212 incidents. Since 2021, ADL has tracked a total of 365 incidents in the state.
- **Extremist Plots and Murders:** In 2021 and 2022, ADL documented two extremist murders in Texas and six terrorist plots. In 2023, a gunman who embraced [antisemitism, misogyny and white supremacy](#) opened fire in a mall parking lot in Allen, [killing eight people and wounding seven more](#) before police shot and killed him.
- **Extremist Events:** Since 2021, ADL has documented 28 extremist events in Texas, including banner drops, flash demonstrations, training events, fight nights, protests, rallies and meetings.
- **White Supremacist Propaganda:** In 2022, ADL documented 526 instances of white supremacist propaganda distributions across Texas, a 60% increase from 2021

(329). There have been 1,073 propaganda incidents since 2021. The groups responsible for the majority of the incidents were [Patriot Front](#) and the [Goyim Defense League \(GDL\)](#).

- **Hate Crimes Statistics:** According to the [latest](#) FBI hate crimes statistics from 2021, there were 542 reported hate crimes in Texas in that year, an increase of 33% from the 406 incidents recorded in 2020. Hate and bias crime data in Texas and nationally highlights how hate crimes disproportionately impact the Black community.
- **Insurrection Statistics:** Seventy-four of the 968 individuals logged by the [George Washington University Program on Extremism](#) who have been charged in relation to the [January 6, 2021 attack](#) on the U.S. Capitol are Texas residents, the second most in the nation.
- **ADL and Princeton's Bridging Divides Initiative Threats and Harassment Dataset:** The [Threats and Harassment Dataset \(THD\)](#) tracks unique incidents of threats and harassment against local U.S. officials between January 1, 2020, and September 23, 2022 in three policy areas (election, education and health). Texas recorded seven incidents of threats and harassment against local officials.

Incidents in Texas by Type, 2021-2022

Data from the Center on Extremism Hate, Extremism, Antisemitism, Terrorism (H.E.A.T.) Map



Note: Some incidents are coded as multiple incident types.



Antisemitism

ADL's 2022 [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents](#) documented the highest number of antisemitic incidents since reporting began in 1979, with more than 3,697 acts of assault, vandalism and harassment nationwide, a 36% increase from 2021. Texas

reported 212 antisemitic incidents in 2022, the fifth-highest number behind New York, California, New Jersey and Florida. Instances of vandalism increased by 418% (88 incidents in 2022, compared to 17 in 2021), while harassment increased by 28% (122 incidents in 2022, compared to 95 in 2021). Two antisemitic assaults occurred in Texas in 2022, up from zero in 2021.

Significant instances of antisemitism in Texas include:

- In October 2022, an individual associated with the Goyim Defense League, a small network of virulently antisemitic provocateurs, pepper-sprayed an Austin high schooler who attempted to remove the antisemitic propaganda the individual was distributing.
- In October 2022, an Israeli flag was torn from a sukkah at the University of Texas in San Antonio.
- In July 2022, an online threat was made against synagogues in Texas, leading to a disruption of Shabbat services in the San Antonio area.
- In January 2022, a Jewish student in Houston was harassed by a classmate who stated, "Your grandma should have died in the gas chambers."
- In December 2021, an individual's car was keyed with a swastika and hateful slurs in Austin.
- In November 2021, a rock was thrown through the window of an Austin home displaying a menorah.
- In October 2021, Franklin Barrett Sechriest allegedly committed an arson at an Austin synagogue, Congregation Beth Israel, that caused \$25,000 in damage. Authorities say Sechriest had stickers with white supremacist propaganda and symbols in his possession, as well as journals containing racist and antisemitic writings.
- In April 2021, a swastika, SS lightning bolts and a message that read "Happy Birthday Hitler" were found spray-painted on the side of a Hurst shopping center.



Members of the white supremacist group Patriot Front marched in Austin on July 8, 2023. (Telegram)

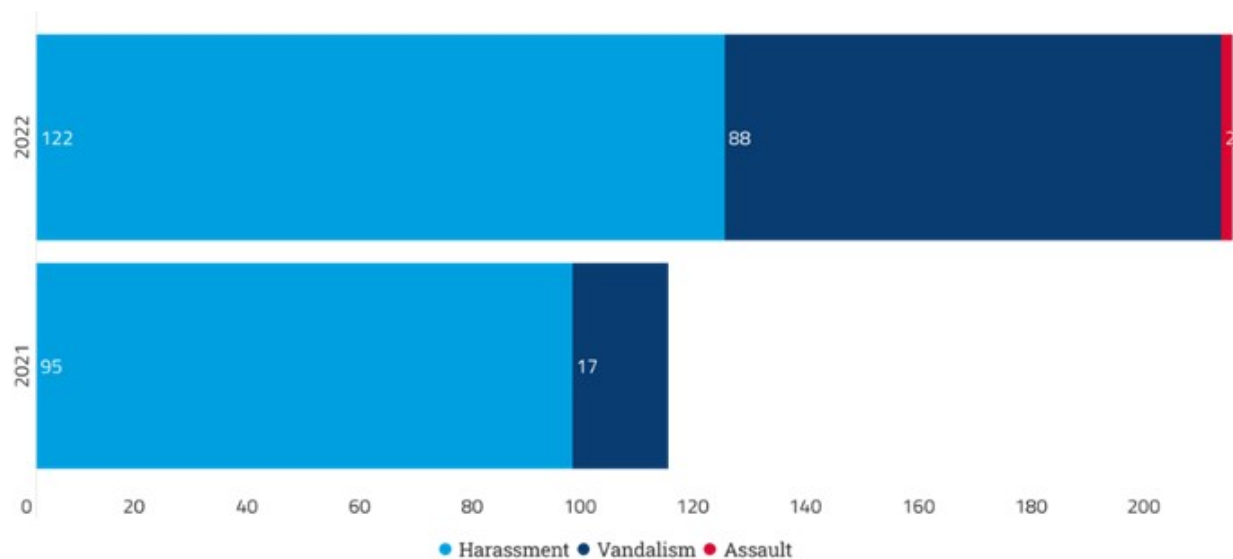
The nation's attention was drawn to [Colleyville](#) on January 15, 2022, when British citizen Malik Faisal Akram, who traveled to the United States two weeks prior, took four people hostage at the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue, claiming to have weapons and bombs. He subsequently demanded that suspected Al Qaeda courier [Aafia Siddiqui](#) be released from the nearby federal prison where she was being held. After a day-long ordeal, the hostages escaped the building while Akram was killed by law enforcement. Illustrating the perniciousness of antisemitism, Akram apparently chose the location because he believed "America only cares about Jewish lives."

In addition, in October 2021, approximately 24 individuals associated with the [Goyim Defense League](#) (GDL) held a "Name the Nose" tour in Texas, making appearances in Austin, Houston, San Antonio, Selma, Tyler and Universal City. During this tour, the group harassed individuals on the streets and highways, protested outside Jewish institutions, distributed antisemitic propaganda and drove around in a van shouting

profanity-laced slurs from the windows. One of GDL's key organizers, Florida resident Dominic Di Giorgio, was arrested by police in Tyler for possession of a license plate flipper, which allows a car's owner to rotate or "flip" between two license plates.

Antisemitic Incidents in Texas by Type, 2021-2022

Data from the Center on Extremism Hate, Extremism, Antisemitism, Terrorism (H.E.A.T.) Map



ADL

Notable Extremist Activity

Texas is home to Patriot Front, the most prolific spreader of white supremacist content nationwide.

According to ADL Center on Extremism data, Texas had 855 incidents of white supremacist propaganda between 2021 and 2022, the highest total number in the United States. The overwhelming majority of propaganda content was produced by [Patriot Front](#), a white supremacist group responsible for at least 604 instances, or 71%, of all white supremacist propaganda incidents in Texas during that period. This trend has continued through June 2023 as Patriot Front is believed to be responsible for at least 120 instances, or 55%, of white supremacist propaganda in the state.

Founded in 2018, Patriot Front is a Texas-based white supremacist group that fuses

extreme nationalism with a neo-fascist ideology. Though the group is careful with its public-facing image and claims loyalty to America as a nation, the group ultimately seeks to form a new state that advocates for the “descendants of its creators,” namely, white men.

The group frequently uses red, white and blue colors in its propaganda and has commonly avoided using traditional white supremacist language and symbols in its messaging, instead using ambiguous phrasing like “For the Nation Against the State,” “Reclaim America” and “America First.” However, in December 2022, they began reincorporating antisemitic and white supremacist phrases into their propaganda, and in the first six months of 2023, ADL found that Patriot Front distributed antisemitic propaganda six times in Texas that read: “No Zionists in government, we serve one Nation.”



Members of the white supremacist group Patriot Front marched in Austin on July 8, 2023. (Telegram)

Patriot Front remains active in their home state, where the group's founder, Thomas Rousseau, continues to reside. On July 8, 2023, an estimated 100 masked group members recognized Independence Day by holding a flash demonstration in Austin while carrying riot shields, a banner reading "Reclaim America" and upside-down American flags. In addition, the group frequently distributes banners, fliers, posters and stickers in communities across Texas. For example, on April 10, 2022, approximately ten individuals associated with Patriot Front, including Rousseau, handed out white supremacist fliers in Fort Worth.

Though based in Texas, Patriot Front has a nationwide footprint with members around the country. As such, their activities occur throughout the U.S., and the group was responsible for the vast majority – 80% – of nationwide propaganda distributions in 2022, a trend replicated every year since 2019. In addition, the group has held rallies in major American cities, including Washington, D.C., Boston, Philadelphia and Indianapolis. These events are frequently the largest public white supremacist gatherings in the country. On June 11, 2022, police arrested 31 members of Patriot Front – including Rousseau and six other [Texans](#) – after they stopped a U-Haul truck near a "Pride in the Park" event in Idaho and found the extremists inside the truck equipped with riot shields. Every present Patriot Front member was charged with criminal conspiracy to riot.

Extremists target the LGBTQ+ community, fueled by false narratives and baseless accusations.

Similar to the rest of the nation, Texas has experienced a surge of extremist activity surrounding LGBTQ+ issues, including many motivated by false narratives such as the baseless, dangerous [groomer narrative](#). In total, ADL tracked 22 anti-LGBTQ+ incidents in 2022 across Texas; there were ten incidents through the first five months of 2023 alone. While some of these actions solely involved extremists, others involved more mainstream anti-LGBTQ+ entities, creating opportunities for extremists to expose new audiences to other forms of hate and potentially radicalize individuals

to join their cause.

Several white supremacist groups have engaged in extensive anti-LGBTQ+ activity across Texas:

- The white supremacist [Aryan Freedom Network](#) (AFN) demonstrated in Texas five times in 2022, with four of those demonstrations targeting the LGBTQ+ community. For example, in September 2022, approximately seven individuals associated with AFN gathered near a restaurant hosting a drag brunch in Pflugerville. Participants meshed anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs with their white supremacist worldview, displaying Nazi flags and signs that read, "Transvestite is not a gender; it is a mental disorder" and "It's okay to be white."
- Members of the much smaller American National Socialist Party (ANSP) have also targeted the LGBTQ+ community with their protests. In May 2022, ANSP and AFN held an "anti-grooming" protest in Austin. According to AFN's leader, the groups were there to protest "the grooming of children at an Austin, TX school."
- The Goyim Defense League was responsible for many of the anti-LGBTQ+ incidents tracked by ADL in 2022, and thus far in 2023, as they spread propaganda accusing Jews of being behind "Disney child grooming." These fliers illustrate how various forms of hatred and bigotry can be used to reinforce each other.
- Texas white supremacists have also latched on to anti-LGBTQ+ rallies organized by anti-LGBTQ+ groups, giving them a larger platform to spread their hateful ideologies. In September 2022, Kelly Neidert, an anti-LGBTQ+ activist and the director of the anti-LGBTQ+ group Protect Texas Kids, organized a protest outside of a drag queen bingo event at a church in Katy that was attended by several individuals variously affiliated with AFN, ANSP, Patriot Front and the [14 First Foundation](#). Though Neidert has stated [previously](#) that neo-Nazis are not invited to events organized by Protect Texas Kids, they do not appear to be barred from attending, and white supremacists have shared Protect Texas Kids' fliers in their telegram channels ahead of events.

White supremacists' attendance at these events increases the potential for violence. For example, in December 2022, AFN joined an anti-LGBTQ+ demonstration organized by Protect Texas Kids in Grand Prairie. Protestors waved AFN flags, held signs advertising the AFN website and screamed [racist](#) and [homophobic](#) slurs at passersby. A [video](#) captured during the December 2022 event shows a masked individual affiliated with AFN grabbing a concealed handgun and threatening counter-protesters.

Unfortunately, this hateful activity is not limited to events. Patriot Front members have targeted and stolen pro-LGBTQ+ signs and flags, and have posted pictures and videos on social media bragging about their "activism." In one such video, members are shown burning transgender pride flags as one member states, "For those who destroy our nation, we will destroy your symbols and all that you worship, to think that we will lay down and perish, you are greatly mistaken. Burn 'em."

The violent, far-right [Proud Boys](#) have also attended numerous anti-LGBTQ+ events in Texas:

- On December 17, 2022, a group of Proud Boys joined an anti-LGBTQ+ protest at a holiday drag show in Grand Prairie that also included Protect Texas Kids, AFN, Patriot Front and American Nationalist Initiative, a small white supremacist group.
- On June 25, 2022, [video footage](#) showed a group of armed Proud Boys allegedly attacking an activist outside of an LGBTQ+ Pride family storytime event at the Roy and Helen Hall Memorial Library in McKinney. According to attendees, the Proud Boys called them "groomers," "pedophiles" and "whores." Parents and activists had to form a wall to block them from entering and disrupting the event.
- On June 12, 2022, approximately seven Proud Boys joined a protest organized by Protect Texas Kids at a Disney Drag Brunch event in Arlington. Attendees claimed the purpose of the protest was "protecting kids" from the LGBTQ+ community,

despite the event enforcing a minimum age requirement of 21. Video footage from the protest shows a Proud Boys member verbally confronting an individual, yelling anti-LGBTQ+ slurs and calling him a pedophile.

- On May 28, 2022, approximately 20 Proud Boys gathered as counter-protesters outside of an NRA convention at the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston, [allegedly shouting anti-LGBTQ+ slurs](#) at a group protesting the convention after the school shooting in Uvalde four days earlier.

Similarly, the Texas Defense Force Security (TXDF), a security company licensed by the Texas Department of Public Safety and owned by militia-aligned Robert Beverly, protested a New Braunfels drag show in May 2023. Beverly is the former president of This is Texas Freedom Force (TITFF), a far-right [militia](#) group that protested drag shows in the state, including a December 2022 holiday drag show in San Antonio.

QAnon Takes Root in Texas

Over the last few years, Texas has been at the heart of several notable [QAnon](#) events and incidents. The state has been home to multiple QAnon-themed conferences, highlighting the mainstreaming of QAnon and other conspiracies among conservative communities and the GOP. The most notable was “[For God & Country: Patriot Roundup](#),” which took place on Memorial Day weekend 2021. Organized by [John Sabal](#), known online as “QAnon John” and “The Patriot Voice,” the event featured then-Congressman Louie Gohmert (R-TX), then-Texas GOP chair Allen West, Lt. General Michael Flynn, attorney and conspiracy theorist Sidney Powell and various QAnon influencers. During the event, Michael Flynn seemingly [endorsed](#) a Myanmar-style coup in the U.S., although he has since backtracked on his remarks.

However, QAnon activity in Texas is not limited to conferences; on November 2, 2021, hundreds of QAnon supporters [descended upon](#) Dallas’s Dealey Plaza to await the return of John F. Kennedy, Jr. despite his death in a 1999 plane crash. The gathering came after [Michael Protzman](#), a fringe conspiracist who was known online as

“Negative48,” predicted that JFK Jr. and his parents, former President John F. Kennedy (who was assassinated in 1963) and former First Lady Jackie Kennedy (who died from non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma in 1994), would reveal themselves to the world and usher in the reinstatement of Donald Trump as president, with JFK, Jr. as his new vice president. The Kennedys, of course, never showed. Protzman passed away in July 2023; however, before his death, he and a dwindling group of followers (who call themselves the “Protzmanians”) crisscrossed the U.S., attending [Trump rallies](#) and other events as Protzman continued to issue failed “predictions” about appearances of the Kennedys and various celebrities, such as Michael Jackson and Princess Diana.



Michael Protzman's group gathers for a parade in Dallas on Dec. 4, 2021. (Telegram)

In February 2022, the National Butterfly Center, located in Mission, [closed temporarily](#)

following a slew of harassment and threats from right-wing conspiracists, who have long accused the center, which is situated along the U.S.-Mexico border, of being a hub for human trafficking and drug smuggling. The center had closed the weekend prior [due to concerns](#) that attendees at a nearby right-wing conference, “We Stand America,” would stop by during a “caravan to the border.” The ADL Center On Extremism found that at least two “We Stand America” attendees visited the National Butterfly Center during the conference. In a video uploaded to Rumble, Christie Hutcherson and then-South Carolina Congressional candidate Lynz Piper-Loomis, visited the center, asking aloud, “Why are you more concerned about butterflies than you are about the little children who are being trafficked right behind this center? They use the butterfly land to come up through and bring these children who are trafficked and these women who are trafficked.”

The month prior, [Kimberly Lowe](#), a Congressional candidate from Virginia, showed up at the center with a woman claiming to be a Secret Service agent, demanding access to the property so that they could see where migrants were crossing.

Additional Extremist Activity

Violence

On May 6, 2023, Mauricio Garcia entered the Allen Premium Outlets shopping mall in Allen and opened fire with an AR-15, killing nine people and injuring seven others before he was killed by law enforcement. [Research](#) by the ADL Center on Extremism showed that Garcia was obsessed with violence and subscribed to a range of extremist ideologies, including antisemitism, violent misogyny and white supremacy.

Unfortunately, incidents like these have become all too common in Texas over the last two years. Between 2021 and 2022, the state experienced eight extremist plots and murders, the most in the nation. These include:

- On October 31, 2021, Franklin Barrett Sechriest committed arson at an Austin synagogue that caused \$25,000 in damage. According to officials, Sechriest had stickers with white supremacist propaganda and symbols in his possession, as well as journals containing antisemitic and racist writings. Sechriest **pleaded** guilty to federal charges in April 2023.
- On October 24, 2021, Jason Heyer Neumann, a self-proclaimed **Aryan Circle** member, was arrested for the murder of Huntington resident William Wade Pierce. Police have not yet released information about a motive.
- On September 29, 2021, Ryan Faircloth threw a Molotov cocktail at the Democratic Party headquarters for Travis County while wearing a face mask and an American flag bandana. The explosive did not fully ignite but did start a small fire. Faircloth left a note threatening the Democratic Party. Following his arrest, he reportedly blamed the Democratic Party office for "a lot of the issues that he saw as problems with the country." He pleaded guilty and was **sentenced** to six years in prison.

Texas is a Fertile Ground for Anti-Immigrant Extremism

In recent years, Texas has been targeted by extremists pushing an anti-immigrant agenda. A variety of extremists in the state – including border vigilantes, militia groups, white supremacists and conspiracy theorists – have promoted divisive, dangerous anti-immigrant rhetoric that demonizes and dehumanizes immigrants.

Border vigilante groups are a part of the broader anti-immigrant extremist movement that seeks an end to all immigration to the United States or to limit immigration to the same number of people who leave the U.S. each year. As their name suggests, border vigilantes specialize in conducting armed, sometimes paramilitary patrols along the U.S.-Mexico border to chase and detain migrants, often claiming that they are defending America from drug cartels and human traffickers. Arizona has been the hub for border vigilante groups for many years, but Texas has recently experienced considerable activity. Border vigilantes in the Lone Star State have developed ties to

other extremist movements, from militia groups to MAGA extremists, and drew some support from conservatives with anti-immigrant sentiments.

The primary driver of border vigilante activity in Texas is Patriots for America (PFA). PFA was formed by Samuel Hall in 2015 to protect participants at right-wing events and protests; however, in 2021, the group shifted its efforts to “protecting” the Texas-Mexico border, using armed volunteers from around the country to conduct armed vigilante patrols along the border. Hall has embraced the QAnon-related conspiracy theory that migrants are accomplices in child sex trafficking. The group garnered attention in December 2021 when PFA illegally detained three migrants during a “border mission;” Hall posted a video of members holding down and questioning the captured migrants until a local sheriff’s deputy arrived.

White supremacists in Texas have also engaged in organized anti-immigrant activity. In addition to targeting Jewish people, minorities and the LGBTQ+ community, the [Aryan Freedom Network](#) has also targeted immigrants. On June 3, 2023, approximately a dozen AFN members demonstrated in Centerville to protest the May 2022 murder of a Centerville family by an escaped prison inmate, whom AFN claimed to be a Mexican cartel hitman. A few days later, on June 6, the group announced a new campaign to stop purported violence carried out by immigrants against white families, farmers and ranchers. The group claimed it would stage a series of protests across Texas, demanding the closure of the southern border and the deportation of undocumented immigrants.

Similarly, during Patriot Front’s July 8, 2023 flash demonstration, the group’s leader, Thomas Rousseau, gave a short speech emphasizing the group’s anti-immigrant stance, saying: “The liberties our people fought so long to preserve are now given freely to foreigners who mock our identity and then claim that they too are American.”

Texas has also attracted extremists from other states. In June 2023, two militia members from Tennessee and Missouri were [arrested](#) on charges connected to a plot to go “hunting” for migrants crossing the Texas-Mexico border. They also allegedly planned to target U.S. Customs and Border Patrol personnel, whom the extremists claimed were guilty of treason for allowing migrants to cross the border.

Sovereign Citizens

Texas is home to two of the most popular [sovereign citizen](#) gurus in the U.S. today, [David Straight](#) and his wife, Bonnie Allen Thomas. The couple has hosted seminars across the U.S., teaching “sovereignty” with a QAnon bent, urging followers to become "[American State Nationals](#)" before Trump is reinstated as president. They were previously affiliated with the sovereign citizen group “Republic of Texas,” serving as “Commander of the Texian [sic] Rangers” and “Consul General,” respectively, until they had a [falling out](#) in early 2023.

Straight and Thomas both ran into [legal trouble](#) in 2023. On April 10, Bonnie Thomas was arrested on an outstanding warrant for a weapons charge from 2015; she was sentenced to five years in prison in May. David Straight was also arrested that same day in a separate incident, when he was pulled over for driving without a valid license or license plates, but was released on bond.

Their arrests have had little impact on their activity, with David Straight continuing to host seminars despite his wife’s incarceration. In May 2023, he joined fellow sovereign citizen guru [Bobby Lawrence](#) for a three-day conference called “1776 Live” in Grapevine, their largest event to date. The conference, which drew several hundred people, featured various workshops led by Lawrence and other affiliates on topics such as land patents, private member associations, and trusts. Bonnie Thomas has also reportedly been “educating” other incarcerated women about becoming American State Nationals while in prison, assisting them with paperwork and connecting them with Straight.

Oath Keepers

According to a published database, 3,301 Texas residents – the most in the nation – have paid membership dues to the [Oath Keepers](#) since the group's founding in 2009. A Center on Extremism [analysis](#) of this information published in September 2022 found that this list included eight individuals holding or running for public office as of August 2022, 33 individuals believed to be active members of law enforcement, ten believed to be active members of the military and seven believed to currently be first responders.

Black Nationalist Extremists

Texas is home to a wide range of Black nationalist groups and individuals, including:

- The [New Black Panther Party for Self Defense](#) (NBPP) is the country's largest organized Black militant group, and its ideology blends aspects of Black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, antisemitism and anti-white bigotry. The group is active in Texas, where activities include holding armed demonstrations, leading trainings and organizing community events.
- The [Nation of Islam \(NOI\)](#), a notoriously antisemitic Black nationalist organization led at the national level by [Louis Farrakhan](#), operates multiple local chapters in Texas; larger chapters are recognized as numbered Muhammad Mosques, while smaller chapters constitute study groups. Muhammad Mosque No. 45 in Houston serves as the NOI's Southwest Regional Headquarters and is led by [Abdul Haleem \(aka Robert\) Muhammad](#), who has promoted antisemitism on social media, blamed Jews for the coronavirus pandemic, and referred to Jews as "wicked," "fake" and the "Synagogue of Satan."
- The [Black Hebrew Israelite \(BHI\) movement](#) is a fringe religious movement that rejects widely accepted definitions of Judaism and asserts that people of color are the true children of Israel; the movement includes both [extremist](#) and non-extremist sects. Prominent extremist BHI groups that have an active presence in Texas include the New York-based [Israel United in Christ \(IUIC\)](#), the Pennsylvania-

based Israelite School of Universal Practical Knowledge (ISUPK) and the California-based Sicarii Hebrew Israelites (aka Exodus 1715).

New Independent Fundamental Baptist Movement

The **New Independent Fundamental Baptist (New IFB) movement** is a loose network of independent churches in the U.S. connected by their belief in certain religious doctrines and a shared brand of deeply anti-LGBTQ+, antisemitic and other bigoted teachings. New IFB-affiliated churches in Texas include Stedfast Baptist Church in Cedar Hill and Pure Words Baptist Church in Houston. Pastor **Jonathan Shelley**, Brother Dillon Awes, Brother Duncan Urbanek and other local New IFB leaders have an extensive history of expressing violent extremist rhetoric, such as calling for LGBTQ+ people to be stoned to death or “shot in the back of the head” by the government. In 2022, local New IFB leaders spoke at city council meetings in Arlington and Watauga, falsely labeling the LGBTQ+ community as “a bunch of predators” and stating that the government should treat homosexuality as a crime “worthy of capital punishment.”



Pastor Jonathan Shelley preaches at Stedfast Baptist Church in April 2023. (Rumble)



Brother Dillon Awes preaches at Stedfast Baptist Church in July 2021. (Rumble)

Recommendations for Policymakers

ADL advocates for a range of policies and activities that can help address antisemitism, hate and extremism while preserving civil liberties. ADL's [PROTECT Plan](#) outlines categories of policies to address domestic violent extremism, our [COMBAT Plan](#) outlines categories of policies to combat antisemitism and our [REPAIR Plan](#) outlines categories of policies to facilitate transparency and accountability in the technology sector. Beyond those frameworks, ADL recommends that Texas policymakers take on the following initiatives.

1) Convene Cross-Sector Stakeholders to Address Hate-Fueled Violence

In 2021, Governor Abbott was instrumental in signing HB 3257, which created the Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission. Just as it was necessary to better assess how to improve Holocaust education to better protect against future harm, so too is it necessary to study hate-fueled violence and how

Texas can reduce the alarming statistics and incidents contained in this report. To that end, we urge Governor Abbott to convene a United We Stand Summit for Texas. In September of last year, following calls from ADL and coalition partners, the White House held the first United We Stand Summit, bringing together a cross-section of national leaders representing communities at risk of hate-fueled violence, civil rights leaders and experts in addressing hate and extremism. Texas should follow up on this type of effort by holding a Texas-specific Summit to align a cross-section of statewide stakeholders.

2) Prevent and Counter Domestic Terrorism

State of Texas officials should consult ADL's [PROTECT Plan](#) – our comprehensive plan to address domestic violent extremism while preserving civil liberties. Some adaptations of these concepts for Texas could include:

- *Create a Strategy to Address Domestic Violent Extremism through a Violent Extremism Commission:* It is difficult to pursue a whole-of-government approach without a comprehensive strategy. At the federal level, the Biden Administration released the National Strategy to Counter Domestic Terrorism in June 2021. Texas could create a State Strategy to Counter Hate-Motivated Terrorism to frame statewide efforts. At the state level, Maryland created a commission to study the state's efforts in addressing domestic extremism in partnership with state government agencies and diverse communities. Texas can also create a similar commission to assess and create transparency mechanisms for how it sees the threat, such as an annual assessment like that shared by [the State of New Jersey](#). This transparency could inform the public and policymakers alike of the gaps that exist in current state law.
- *Create a Terrorism Prevention Strategy and Grant Program:* Texas should create a comprehensive strategy and a new state grant program. The National Governors' Association – with ADL's support – released a [roadmap](#) and [toolkit](#) for creating

terrorism prevention programs at the state level, mirroring the public health-style programming supported by the DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships. The DHS program has provided grants to programs that focus on terrorism prevention in Texas – including the Texas Department of Public Safety – to develop curriculum and training on addressing domestic terrorism. These types of projects make Texas a top state for terrorism prevention capabilities: the State should build on that success by developing a statewide strategy and state grant program for these types of initiatives.

- *Continue funding to supplement the Nonprofit Security Grant Program:* In the 2023 legislative session, the Texas Legislature took an important first step in helping to protect houses of worship from extremists by supplementing the federal Nonprofit Security Grant Program with \$2 million in state funding. The Nonprofit Security Grant Program provides funding support for target hardening and other physical security enhancements and activities to nonprofit organizations that are at high risk of terrorist attacks. Texas should continue to supplement the existing federal program and increase funding to meet the needs of the community in the next legislative session.
- *Introduce Legislation to Create Accountable Offices to Address the Challenge:* At the federal level, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act (H.R. 350) in the 117th Congress to: (1) create offices to specialize in domestic terrorism issues at DHS, FBI and the Department of Justice; (2) require those offices to release biannual reports and for resources to be used proportionately to the threats identified in the reporting; (3) provide training on domestic violent extremism; (4) explore the connection between hate crimes and terrorism through analysis and grants; and (5) consider white supremacist infiltration of law enforcement agencies. Texas should consider establishing similar offices to specialize in the threat of domestic terrorism – which could be housed in Texas’ Department of Public Safety, Intelligence and Counterterrorism Division and the Texas Division of Emergency Services. These offices would allow

for an increased understanding of the hate crimes nexus of domestic violent extremism and options for law enforcement insider threat vetting. While some of these measures can be accomplished through executive action, the State Legislature should consider codifying these measures into law.

3) Hold Social Media Platforms Accountable and Enhance Access to Justice for Targets of Hate

Social media platforms have created an unprecedented opportunity for individuals around the world to build communities and connect with one another; however, they have also created an avenue for the amplification and spread of rampant hate, harassment, and extremism. The ADL Center for Technology and Society's [2023 Online Hate and Harassment Report](#) and [Support for Targets of Online Hate Report Card](#) demonstrate that although identity-based hate and harassment are at record highs, social media platforms are not doing enough to keep their users safe. It is imperative that social media platforms implement anti-hate policies and adopt a victim-centered approach to supporting targets of online hate. ADL is a strong proponent of transparency by social media platforms, so that users can understand that the processes and business decisions directly impact their lives. Similarly, we recommend the creation of a task force to conduct research and develop best practices for reducing hate on social media platforms in Texas.

In addition to urging platform accountability and transparency, we recommend that Texas work to enhance justice for victims of severe forms of harassment, such as doxing. ADL champions recent strides that states like Nevada and Illinois have taken in creating a civil right of action for doxing victims and encourages Texas to adopt similar legislation to protect doxing victims in the state.

4) Strengthen Texas's Response to Hate Crimes

Comprehensive approaches to addressing hate crimes are critical to fighting antisemitism, hate and extremism. 2023 marks the somber 25-year anniversary of the tragic murder of James Byrd Jr. in Jasper, Texas. The race-based killing of Byrd Jr. is a stark reminder of how a crime that is motivated by discriminatory animus impacts both the victim and the victim's community at large. In 2009, President Obama signed the Matthews Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act into law. As we reflect on the past 25 years, we must also examine how hate crime laws are written, enforced and reported in Texas Governor Abbott and state legislators should consider approaches to:

- *Explore innovative ways to address hate and extremism:* ADL encourages Texas to follow other states' efforts and create a [Commission on the State of Hate](#) to gather information and assess new options for addressing hate in Texas. In order to be successful, any potential commission would need strong support from state officials and significant input and participation from the communities that have been historically disproportionately targeted by hate crimes, and the commission's findings should be carefully considered.
- *Mandate that law enforcement agencies report hate crimes data to the FBI:* Law enforcement agencies in Texas should be required to report hate crimes data to the FBI pursuant to the data collection process under the federal Hate Crime Statistics Act. Absent comprehensive and inclusive data, policymakers will lack the critical information that is needed to address these concerning trends.
- *Require hate crimes training for law enforcement:* Texas should require training for law enforcement on identifying, investigating, responding to and reporting hate crimes. Although Texas currently has a statute requiring training for prosecuting attorneys on hate crimes, it does not have a training requirement for police, who are typically the state's first responders when a hate crime occurs.
- *Strengthen hate crimes laws:* Legislators should consider opportunities to strengthen Texas's hate crime statute (Tex. Code Crim. Proc., Art. 42.014) to

ensure that it is as comprehensive as possible, including by: (1) adding ethnicity and gender identity to the list of protected identity characteristics and removing the incorrect and exclusive terminology of 'sexual preference,' (2) ensuring that the statute covers 'mixed motive' hate crimes and (3) ensuring that the statute, like many other states' hate crime laws, explicitly covers so-called 'mistaken identity' hate crimes (by adding "actual or perceived" language).

- *Promote whole-of-society approaches to hate crime reduction:* Whole-of-society approaches that prioritize the voices and needs of marginalized communities disproportionately targeted by hate crimes are necessary in order to effectively address hate crimes. Victim-centered solutions – including a) support services and financial support for hate crime victims and the community organizations that directly serve them, b) alternative mechanisms for victims to report hate crimes that take into account the significant barriers that communities often face to reporting to and interacting with police and c) restorative justice approaches such as education and community service, when welcomed by the impacted community – should be strongly considered. In addition, although hate crimes laws are a critically important tool to respond to hate crimes when they occur, it is of course preferable to prevent hate crimes in the first place. Approaches should include anti-bias education for young people.

5) Protect Civil Rights

Protecting the civil rights of all people in Texas, especially members of marginalized communities, is crucial for countering discrimination and bias. By way of example, ADL has long supported measures that would extend nondiscrimination protections to LGBTQ+ people in employment, housing and public accommodations; measures that counter antisemitism; measures that would remove discriminatory barriers that prevent equitable access to the ballot; measures that address racial discrimination and injustice; and measures that help protect the safety, dignity and well-being of immigrants and refugees. In the 2023 legislative session, various measures were

introduced in order to create protections for marginalized communities. For example, HB 256 would have prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity in employment, public accommodations, housing and state contractors. HB 725 would have updated Texas hate crimes laws to add gender identity or expression. Texas should adopt similar meaningful legal protections for marginalized communities in the next legislative session in order to protect the civil rights of all Texans and combat hate and extremism.

RELATED RESOURCES:

Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2022

QAnon

Patriot Front