

Congressional Testimony

Examining the Domestic Terrorism Threat in the Wake of the Attack on the U.S. Capitol

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House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee

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

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Chair Thompson, Ranking Member Katko, Members of the Committee, good morning. I am Jonathan Greenblatt, Chief Executive Officer and National Director at the ADL, and it is an honor to appear before you today to address the issue of domestic terrorism and the dire threat that it poses.

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 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 threats to communities.

As ADL has said time and time again, extremists must be taken at their word. Anyone who has been paying attention to extremist activity across the country, or to the chorus of disinformation and hatred rampant across extremist media and some corners of social media, will tell you that what happened at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th was in some ways the most predictable outbreak of political violence in American history.

For many of the people who were roused to violence that day, their actions were the product of years of incitement, spread with stunning speed, scope and impact on social media. A portion of these individuals constitute a new breed of extremist, one foundationally animated by devotion to now-former President Trump. They are also living in an entire ecosphere of disinformation, lies, and conspiracy theories, ones fertilized by Alex Jones, QAnon, groups like the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and Three Percenters, the former President, and many others.

But the insurrectionists who stormed the Capitol last month are by no means our nation’s only concern when it comes to domestic extremism. Without a doubt, **violence from white supremacists and other right-wing extremist actors is currently the greatest domestic extremism threat.** 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. 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.

Right now, many policymakers and pundits are looking for a silver bullet – a one-size-fits-all approach that will solve the challenge of domestic terrorism. Unfortunately, we know from our extensive work and analysis in this field that no such panacea exists. That is why ADL is launching the **PROTECT** plan – a comprehensive, seven-part plan to mitigate the threat of domestic terrorism while protecting civil rights and civil liberties. The key elements of this plan, discussed in more detail below, are appropriately prioritizing and allocating sufficient resources – informational, legal and financial – to address this extremist threat. Together, they can have an immediate and deeply significant impact in preventing and countering domestic terrorism and

the extremism associated with it— more so than any one law – and can accomplish these goals while protecting vulnerable people and communities against the risk of government overreach.

In my testimony today, I will explain and elaborate on this framework and offer concrete steps that Congress can take to begin to confront and reduce the lethal threat of domestic extremism and domestic terrorism. First, however, I will contextualize the events as they unfolded on January 6th and summarize what we know and what the data tells us regarding the rising threat of domestic extremism and domestic terrorism in our nation today.

INSURRECTION AT THE CAPITOL

Overview of Events

On January 6th, a broad coalition of right-wing extremists descended on Washington, D.C. and a number of state capitals. Ostensibly gathered to hear President Trump and his family speak and to dispute the results of the 2020 presidential election, rioters stoked violence against law enforcement officers before storming the U.S. Capitol in an extraordinary display of political violence.¹ By the afternoon, the Capitol was under siege by domestic terrorists who had taken over the building, videoing and photographing themselves in the House chamber, calling for the execution of administration officials and members of this Congress, violently attacking overwhelmed law enforcement members charged with protecting this body, and trapping Members and staffers throughout the building.

As the chaos unfolded, President Trump tweeted his support for the insurrectionists: “These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long. Go home with love & in peace. Remember this day forever!” The tweet was later deleted by Twitter, and the President’s account was put on a temporary suspension, which has since been made permanent.

Earlier in the day, Metropolitan Police discovered and successfully detonated two homemade bombs which were placed near the buildings housing the offices of the Democratic and Republican National Committees.

The siege resulted in at least five deaths: three from “medical emergencies,” one pro-Trump extremist who was shot by Capitol Police, apparently while breaking into the Capitol, and one Capitol Police officer who apparently was hit repeatedly by protesters wielding a fire extinguisher and subsequently died from his injuries. Furthermore, two officers who responded to the violent insurrection reportedly died by suicide in the intervening days, and dozens of officers present at the scene have sustained documented injuries.²

¹ Washington Post Staff, “Woman dies after shooting in U.S. Capitol; D.C. National Guard activated after mob breaches building,” *Washington Post*, January 7, 2021. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/01/06/dc-protests-trump-rally-live-updates/#link-FLU6WSIEHRHQRJKE6ANICM7ZQQ>)

² Caitlin Emma and Sarah Ferris, “Second police officer died by suicide following Capitol attack,” *Politico*, January 27, 2021. (<https://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/27/second-officer-suicide-following-capitol-riot-463123>)

Context

The attack on our Capitol took place against a political and cultural backdrop in which hate has proliferated and gone largely unchecked, particularly over the past five years. This has served only to embolden extremists, especially white supremacist and other right-wing violent extremists. Right-wing extremists – including anti-government extremists – have been responsible for 75% of domestic extremist-related killings in the United States over the course of the past decade, most of them targeting marginalized communities.³

Therefore, the attack on the Capitol does not mark a sudden increase in extremist violence. Rather, it is the unfortunate and largely predictable result of years of growing hate and violence coming home to roost. Just as the attack did not materialize out of nowhere, the threat has not dissipated in its aftermath. We are all at risk if we do nothing.

For years, ADL has warned of the growing threat of white supremacist violence here in the U.S. This goes hand in hand with a significant threat of violence from anti-government extremists, including militia groups.

The White Supremacist Threat

Since the 2016 presidential election campaign, white supremacy has experienced a resurgence, driven in large part by the rise of the alt right, the newest segment of the white supremacist movement.

Modern white supremacist ideology is centered on the belief that white people are in danger of extinction, drowned by a rising “tide” of people who are not white, who are being controlled and manipulated by Jews. White supremacists believe that almost any action is justified if it will help “save” the white race from “replacement.”

Violence and crime represent the most serious problems emanating from the white supremacist movement. White supremacists have killed more people in recent years than any other type of domestic extremist, accounting for 58% of all domestic extremist-related murders in the past 10 years.⁴ They are also a troubling source of domestic terror incidents, including 21 plots or attacks within the past 5 years.⁵

Yet murders and terror plots represent only the tip of the iceberg of white supremacist violence, as there are many more incidents involving less severe crimes, including attempted murders, assaults, weapons and explosives violations, and more. In addition, white supremacists engage in a large amount of non-ideological crime, including crimes of violence against women and drug-related crimes.

From 2011 through 2020, white supremacists alone killed 249 people in the United States in terrorist acts, hate crimes, and other violent acts. Other right-wing extremists added 107 more deaths to the grisly toll.

³ ADL, “Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2019.” (<https://www.adl.org/media/14107/download>) Over the past 10 years, right-wing extremists committed 75% of extremist-related murders, making the 2019 figure higher than average.

⁴ ADL, “Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2020.” (<https://www.adl.org/murder-and-extremism-2020>)

⁵ ADL H.E.A.T. Map. (<https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resource-knowledge-base/adl-heat-map>)

Describing these as “lone wolf” attacks is often a mischaracterization or tells only part of the story. There is a throughline from the attacks at Charleston and Charlottesville and Pittsburgh to Poway and El Paso, as well as to attacks by white supremacists that took place outside of the United States, such as the massacre of Muslim worshippers in Christchurch, New Zealand.

And each attack was followed by white supremacists celebrating online. Extremists use the internet as a gathering place, a place to extoll supposed martyrs, a place to declare their intentions, and a place to share encouragement and instructions. As we’ve said before, a number of online forums and platforms host what amounts to a 24/7 extremist rally. We need to recognize that because of the internet, extremists need not travel to a training camp to be inculcated with a toxic ideology and learn how to carry out deadly attacks.

Antisemitism and Racism on Display

The domestic terrorists who attacked our Capitol wore racist and antisemitic clothing, and triumphantly marched a Confederate flag through the halls of the Capitol building. This mix of racism and antisemitism was not an accident, nor was its display a coincidence.⁶ The goal of the January 6 attack was not merely to assert political power and to overturn the result of the 2020 presidential election. For some, it was also to assert white power and create fear in marginalized communities.

After the insurrection, various extremist channels celebrated the attack as a victory against Jews and other communities and expressed optimism about the potential for future violence.⁷ On Telegram, for example, the “National Socialist Network”⁸ channel posted that “the brave White men in Washington DC have lit a flame that will never go out. By storming the spiritual home of the global parasite class, those heroes proved – before the whole world – that the Jews and their lackeys are not invulnerable.” The “White American National Socialist” channel similarly exclaimed, “what Whites must do now is to go out there and oppose these Jews & Sellout Politicians more and more because we finally showed ourselves we can be United and we achieve Victory here in America taking back our country along with showing the White People that we won’t be tolerated by a lousy Jewish Minority!”⁹

What Went Wrong

The attack on the U.S. Capitol was not a failure of intelligence. Planning for this event took place in plain sight, largely on social media; it was there for all the world to see. Then-President Trump – and some of his closest supporters – incited it in broad daylight. ADL knew that a severe conflagration might be coming, even publishing a roundup of some of the violent calls to arms that we were seeing in the days leading up to the event.¹⁰

⁶ ADL, “Antisemites Implicate Jews, Zionists in DC Violence,” ADL Blog, January 7, 2021. (<https://www.adl.org/blog/antisemites-implicate-jews-zionists-in-dc-violence>)

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ ADL, *National Socialist Movement*. (<https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/national-socialist-movement>)

⁹ ADL, “Antisemites Implicate Jews, Zionists in DC Violence,” ADL Blog, January 7, 2021. (<https://www.adl.org/blog/antisemites-implicate-jews-zionists-in-dc-violence>)

¹⁰ ADL, “Extremists and Mainstream Trump Supporters Plan to Protest Congressional Certification of Biden’s Victory,” ADL Blog, January 4, 2021. (<https://www.adl.org/blog/extremists-and-mainstream-trump-supporters-plan-to-protest-congressional-certification-of>)

After President Trump lost the election and started reasserting ever more baseless accusations of voter fraud, ADL also warned of the danger that his words posed. In light of the tension across the country and the demonstrated tendency of right-wing extremists to resort to violence, we warned that his charges placed our nation “in a red zone without precedent.”¹¹ We urged elected officials, particularly members of the GOP, to call for calm, for law enforcement authorities at all levels to monitor these threats with utmost vigilance, and for social media services to remove any content that endorsed violence in any form. We watched extremist Trump supporters (and some mainstream ones) gather in D.C. on November 14th for the so-called “Million MAGA March,”¹² and then again on December 12th for multiple pro-Trump demonstrations,¹³ including one that was organized by white supremacists and another that featured extremist speakers on its dais.

In the days leading up to January 6th, online chatter among potential attendees increased dramatically. On “TheDonald.Win” forum, users shared messages filled with violent rhetoric directed at a wide range of perceived enemies. In response to a user who wondered what would happen if Congress ignored ostensible “evidence” that President Trump won the election, another user wrote, “Storm the capitol” and another added, “My truck is lifted and I have a plow on it right now. What do you need Mr. President?”

Many extremist Trump supporters, and some mainstream ones, began framing the rallies as a last stand to prevent Joe Biden from being sworn in as the next President, and chatter indicated that there was a desire among some people to engage in radical or violent tactics to ensure that the election was not stolen from President Trump. As one user wrote on a militia forum, “The 6th is the line for me. It will change or it will begin.” Added another, “I am waiting until the 06 Jan date, then if Trump does nothing...I have a few LEO [law enforcement officer] friends who are going to do some major action and I am joining them.”

All of this information was readily available — to the public, to elected leaders, to extremism experts, and to law enforcement. What was missing, and what has been missing for quite some time, is the political will to appropriately identify, adequately prioritize, and allocate sufficient resources to this ever-growing threat. As recently as late September 2020, for example, ADL expressed concern about the nomination of Chad Wolf for Homeland Security Secretary, in part due to his serious downplaying of the threat posed by white supremacists and right-wing extremists in the year-plus that he had already spent in leadership at the Department of Homeland Security.

Reportedly, the DHS intelligence office was “gutted” months ahead of the Capitol attack¹⁴ — the same office in which the Trump Administration had previously disbanded the unit

¹¹ ADL, “Extremists and Mainstream Trump Supporters Plan to Protest Congressional Certification of Biden's Victory,” ADL Blog, January 4, 2021. (<https://www.adl.org/blog/extremists-others-respond-to-president-trumps-calls-to-stop-the-count>)

¹² ADL, “Extremists and Mainstream Trump Supporters Gather for “Million MAGA March,”” ADL Blog, November 15, 2020. (<https://www.adl.org/blog/extremists-and-mainstream-trump-supporters-gather-for-million-maga-march>)

¹³ ADL, “Pro-Trump Rallies in DC Attract Extremists & Erupt into Violence,” ADL Blog, December 13, 2020. (<https://www.adl.org/blog/pro-trump-rallies-in-dc-attract-extremists-erupt-into-violence>)

¹⁴ Josh Margolin and Lucien Bruggeman. “Months Ahead of Capitol Riot, DHS Threat Assessment Group was Gutted: Officials.” ABC News. 9 January 2021. (<https://abcnews.go.com/US/months-ahead-capitol-riot-dhs-threat-assessment-group/story?id=75155673>)

specializing in addressing domestic terrorism.¹⁵ A former DHS intelligence official claims to have been ordered to downplay the threat of white supremacist terrorism, despite a clear intelligence picture that it was a rising and present threat.¹⁶

Almost exactly one year ago, I myself testified before the House Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism on the topic of confronting the rise in antisemitic domestic terrorism.¹⁷ I warned then, as I do again today, of the unique dangers posed by white supremacist extremism and the urgent need for action. Without a concerted, committed effort by our political and social leaders to combat this threat now as a major priority, we cannot hope to meaningfully address it.

CURRENT TRENDS: THE GROWING THREAT OF DOMESTIC TERRORISM

After years of manifestos and mass killings by domestic extremists in the United States, these attacks should no longer come as a surprise to anyone. Lawmakers, law enforcement, and the public need to recognize the grave and dangerous threat posed by right-wing extremism and white supremacist extremism in particular. We cannot begin to defeat this deadly form of hatred if we fail to recognize it.

ADL Trends: By the Numbers

ADL's 2020 Murder & Extremism Report

ADL will soon be publishing our Center on Extremism's sixth annual report on extremist-related murders, "Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2020." The good news is that 2020 saw a significant decrease in extremist-related killings — primarily because we were fortunate, for the first time in several years, to avoid mass killing attacks. However, the relatively low number of murders does not mean that extremists were less active overall. In fact, the opposite is true.

In 2020, domestic extremists killed at least 17 people in the United States in 15 separate incidents. This represents a significant decrease from the 45 extremist-related murders documented in 2019, and the 54 murders of 2018. This is the lowest annual total in ADL statistics since 2004, which saw 14 extremist-related murders.

It is important, however, to look at these extremism-related murders in context. First, 2020 was consistent with years past in terms of the proportion of the murderers who displayed right-wing extremist ideologies. Second, this drop in numbers is an apparent outlier when compared to other years, though we would certainly wish for this dip to continue.

As has been the case for most of the past 30 years, the extremist-related murders in 2020 were overwhelmingly tied to right-wing extremists. All but one of the incidents last year (16 of the 17 murders) were linked to right-wing extremism; more than half had ties to white supremacists.

¹⁵ Swan, Betsey. "Homeland Security Disbands Domestic Terror Intelligence Unit." Daily Beast. 2 April 2019. (<https://www.thedailybeast.com/homeland-security-disbands-domestic-terror-intelligence-unit>)

¹⁶ Zolan Kanno-Youngs and Nicholas Fandos. "DHS Downplayed Threats from Russia and White Supremacists, Whistle Blower Says." New York Times. 9 September 2020. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/09/us/politics/homeland-security-russia-trump.html>)

¹⁷ Testimony of Jonathan Greenblatt before the House Homeland Security Committee Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism, "Confronting the Rise in Anti-Semitic Domestic Terrorism," January 15, 2020. (<https://www.adl.org/media/13948/download>)

Similarly, all but one of the 42 extremist-related murders in 2019 (the sixth-deadliest year for domestic extremist-related killings since 1970) were perpetrated by right-wing extremists.¹⁸

Taking a longer view, of the 429 people killed by domestic extremists in the last 10 years, 75% were murdered by right-wing extremists — 77% of whom were white supremacists. This makes white supremacists the deadliest type of extremist movement in the United States over the past 10 years, by far.¹⁹

Despite the relatively low number of extremism-related murders in 2020, extremists were not less active overall in 2020. ADL recorded 16 right-wing extremist-related terrorist plots or attacks through November 2020, an increase from the 13 documented in 2019. We also counted more than 5,000 incidents of white supremacist propaganda distribution in the U.S. in 2020, compared to 2,724 in 2019 — nearly a 100% increase.

ADL’s Audit of Antisemitic Incidents

Since 1979, ADL has compiled an annual *Audit of Antisemitic Incidents* (the Audit) tracking both criminal and non-criminal acts of harassment and intimidation throughout the United States, including distribution of hate propaganda, threats, and slurs. The data we have compiled from the last three years show that antisemitism in America is increasingly pervasive. Our 2019 Audit, for example, recorded 2,107 antisemitic incidents in the United States,²⁰ a 12% increase from the 1,879 incidents recorded in 2018. There were incidents reported in every state except Alaska and Hawaii. The Audit found that there were, on average, as many as six antisemitic incidents in the U.S. for each day of the year — the highest level of antisemitic activity ever recorded by ADL. 2019 also included 5 fatalities directly linked to antisemitic violence, and another 91 individuals were targeted in physical assaults.²¹

While most antisemitic incidents are not directly carried out by extremists, a growing number of incidents do have ties to extremism. In 2019, ADL recorded 270 antisemitic incidents attributed to known extremist groups or individuals inspired by extremist ideology. This represents 13% of the total number of incidents, tying 2018 for the highest level of antisemitic incidents with known connections to extremists or extremist groups since 2004.

For even more up-to-date information regarding antisemitic incidents on an ongoing basis, we urge your Committee to regularly consult ADL’s “Tracker of Antisemitic Incidents,”²² which includes more recent cases of anti-Jewish vandalism, harassment, and assault reported to or detected by ADL.

¹⁸ ADL, “Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2019,” *ADL Center on Extremism*, February 2020. (<https://www.adl.org/media/14107/download>)

¹⁹ ADL, “Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2020,” *ADL Center on Extremism*, February 2021. (<https://www.adl.org/murder-and-extremism-2020>)

²⁰ ADL, “Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents: Year in Review 2019.” (<https://www.adl.org/audit2019>)

²¹ *Id.*

²² ADL, Tracker of Anti-Semitic Incidents. (https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resource-knowledge-base/adl-tracker-of-antisemitic-incidents?field_incident_location_state_target_id=All&page=1)

Latest Hate Crime Data

While countering domestic terrorism in particular is the core objective of this hearing, we cannot ignore the relevance of other crimes, such as hate crimes, that are often committed with the same discriminatory motivations, even if they are not carried out by extremists or rise to the level of domestic terrorism.

The FBI's annual Hate Crime Statistics Act (HCSA) report reveals that 2019, the most recent year for which the Bureau has data, was the deadliest year on record, with 51 hate crime murders — a 113% increase over the previous record of 24 set in 2018. Total hate crime incidents rose to 7,314, marking the fourth increase in the past 5 years.

It is instructive to look at the short-term trends. Race-based hate crimes remained the most common type of hate crime, as has been the case every year since the FBI began reporting hate crime data nearly three decades ago. Constituting over 50% of all hate crimes reported to the FBI, in 2019 race-based hate crimes underscore the importance of the national action to counter systemic and pervasive anti-Black racism.²³

After declining in 2018, religion-based hate crimes increased by 7% in 2019, with fully 63% of the total number of reported religion-based hate crimes directed at Jews and Jewish institutions. Anti-Hispanic hate crimes rose nearly 9%, the fourth straight year of escalating numbers. In our experts' views, this is spurred by the escalation of anti-immigrant rhetoric, bigotry, and dehumanization in the public discourse emanating in part from the previous Administration. After a 41% increase in 2018, hate crimes targeting individuals based on gender identity rose another 18% last year.

The increase in reported hate crimes comes despite the fact that, for the second straight year, the number of law enforcement agencies providing data to the FBI has declined. The FBI's annual report has consistently provided the most comprehensive snapshot of bias-motivated criminal activity in the United States, but a notable reporting gap has long existed that has resulted in a significant underestimate of the true number of hate crimes that occur each year. Hate crime reporting by law enforcement agencies is voluntary, and in 2019, 86% of participating agencies did not report a single hate crime to the FBI, including at least 71 cities with populations over 100,000. That is simply not credible. In order to effectively combat hate crimes, the government needs to be able to measure and analyze them, and that endeavor is undermined by underreporting or the lack of any reporting in certain areas.

Congress should act swiftly to ensure that the federal government transparently reports on hate crimes to the public, and that state and local governments are empowered to effectively report hate crimes to the federal government to guarantee this reporting accurately represents the threat of hate in our communities.

It would be remiss not to mention that another significant problem in reporting hate crimes comes from the distrust of government felt by many in communities that are disproportionately targeted by such crimes. Building greater trust between law enforcement and those communities is essential and should be a law enforcement priority.

²³ FBI, *Hate Crime Statistics 2019*. (<https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2019/hate-crime>)

White Supremacist Propaganda

With hate and extremism in America on the rise, white supremacist extremism in particular poses a grave and underappreciated threat to everyone in this country.

The white supremacist movement is not as overt about its true objectives as it might once have been when racist skinheads dominated white supremacists' ranks in the 1980s and early 1990s. Within the white supremacist community, there is some disagreement about the best strategy to pursue. Many now seek to dress in a nondescript manner and use coded language. They feel the need to adhere to "optics"²⁴ and purposefully obfuscate their views in an effort to infiltrate mainstream politics. Others hope to purposefully spark a race war, an ideology known as "accelerationism."²⁵ With one approach involving secrecy and coded language, and the other sometimes including seemingly random acts of violence, both approaches are alarming in different ways.

In 2020, ADL documented more than 5,000 incidents of white supremacist propaganda distribution, by far the highest number of propaganda incidents ADL has ever recorded.²⁶

Propaganda allows white supremacists 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. It can include everything from veiled white supremacist language to explicitly racist images and words, often features a recruitment element, and frequently targets marginalized communities, including Jews, Muslims, Black people, non-white immigrants and the LGBTQ+ community. We urge your Committee to regularly consult ADL's Hate, Extremism, Antisemitism, and Terrorism (H.E.A.T.) Map,²⁷ which provides the public with a jurisdiction-specific, ongoing opportunity to review incident and propaganda data from all 50 states and Washington, D.C.

ADL's Efforts to Combat Election-Related Extremism

In the months leading up to the 2020 presidential election, we increased our efforts to combat election-motivated violent extremism. ADL's Center on Extremism, in conjunction with ADL's Center for Technology and Society, released a series of news briefs and blog posts on topics of concern regarding the role extremists and extremism more broadly were playing in regard to our political environment. We worked with partners to analyze the chatter and trends we were seeing online across numerous platforms used by extremists, and broke down information geographically to assist local partners and otherwise mitigate the impact of online extremist propaganda.

We engaged state Attorneys General, Secretaries of State, Governors, Mayors, law enforcement, and other key players to bring visibility to the extremist threat to election safety and to empower officials to respond to these threats, briefing approximately 400 state and local government

²⁴ ADL, "Tree of Life Shooting Revives 'Optics' Debate Among White Supremacists," *ADL Blog*, November 6, 2018. (<https://www.adl.org/blog/tree-of-life-shooting-revives-optics-debate-among-white-supremacists>)

²⁵ ADL, "White Supremacists Embrace 'Accelerationism,'" *ADL Blog*, April 16, 2019. (<https://www.adl.org/blog/white-supremacists-embrace-accelerationism>)

²⁶ ADL, "Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2020," *ADL Center on Extremism*, February 2021. (<https://www.adl.org/murder-and-extremism-2020>)

²⁷ ADL, H.E.A.T. Map p. (<https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resource-knowledge-base/adl-heat-map>)

officials on election security. We created and disseminated a toolkit for state and local officials with actions to mitigate election-related extremist violence. ADL also established a new online incident reporting tool that would enable voters to flag any potential hate crimes or disruptions involving extremists.

Our work became even more urgent in the immediate aftermath of the election, when the country heard then-President Trump make baseless and increasingly wild accusations of massive voter fraud grounded in conspiracy theories. In light of the tension across the country and the amply-demonstrated tendency of right-wing extremists to try to manipulate such tensions and resort to violence, these charges were not just unprecedented — they were an abuse of power and unequivocally dangerous, like throwing a match into a stack of kindling that could light the country aflame.

It wasn't long before "Protect the Vote" and "Stop the Steal" pro-Trump rallies began popping up nationwide, with particular attention being paid to Las Vegas,²⁸ Detroit, Philadelphia, Phoenix²⁹ and Atlanta — all cities in states where results were close, or where the Trump campaign was contesting the count. On Facebook, support for the "Stop the Steal" campaign grew rapidly among some mainstream Trump supporters. One "Stop the Steal" Facebook group, which included posts promoting disinformation and violence, reportedly³⁰ gained more than 300,000 members within a matter of days before Facebook finally shut it down. Extremists across less mainstream social media platforms, including Parler, Telegram, and militia forums, also continued to promote the false "Democratic election theft" narrative.³¹ After all major media outlets called the presidential election for President Joe Biden, right-wing extremists reacted to the news as expected — with anger, distrust, and nebulous, non-specific threats of violence.

At the time, Trump ally and former White House adviser Sebastian Gorka appeared to advocate extreme actions in response to Democrats' alleged fraud, telling listeners of his November 5 "America First" radio show, "We need the judges to enforce the rule of law, and if the local bureaucrats prevent us from seeing the evidence, from seeing the legitimate votes, we need the U.S. Marshals to deploy and they need to break down the doors of those polling stations and stop the crimes being committed. It is that simple." Gorka added, "Now, now, now, get out on the streets, protest and show them who you are and that they can't get away with it."³² Donald Trump, Jr. appeared to urge "total war" over the election results, tweeting: "The best thing for America's future is for Donald Trump to go to total war over this election to expose all of the fraud, cheating, dead/no longer in state voters, that has been going on for far too long."³³

²⁸ Tea Party Patriots, *Protect the Vote*. (<https://www.teapartypatriots.org/protect-the-vote/>)

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ David Gilbert, "A GOP-Linked 'Stop the Steal' Facebook Group Is Gaining Thousands of Members a Minute," *Vice*, November 5, 2020. (<https://www.vice.com/en/article/xgzx8q/a-gop-linked-stop-the-count-facebook-group-is-gaining-thousands-of-members-a-minute>)

³¹ ADL, "Extremists, Others Respond to President Trump's Calls to 'Stop the Count,'" ADL Blog, November 6, 2020. (<https://www.adl.org/blog/extremists-others-respond-to-president-trumps-calls-to-stop-the-count>)

³² Media Matters Staff, "Sebastian Gorka: 'We need the U.S. Marshals to deploy and they need to break down the doors of those polling stations,'" *Media Matters*, November 5, 2020. (<https://www.mediamatters.org/sebastian-gorka/sebastian-gorka-we-need-us-marshals-deploy-and-they-need-break-down-doors-those>)

³³ Chantal da Silva, "'Reckless' and 'stupid': Trump Jr calls for 'total war' over election results," *Independent*, November 6, 2020. (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-election-2020/trump-jr-election-results-war-b1634841.html>)

Our Center on Extremism prioritized monitoring and reporting on election-related extremism, both before and after the election itself. We dedicated additional staff and resources to ensure that we would be able to continue producing news briefs, blog posts, and expertise on this rapidly-evolving situation.

The Growing Threat of Online Hate

The internet is an incredibly powerful tool that, by its nature, gives every user a platform and a loudspeaker. However, the internet is only a tool, neither good nor bad, and can therefore be used by bad actors and for destructive ends. The particularly viral spread of misinformation and hate depends upon two things: one a human bias and the other a factor related to the dominant tech business model, which relies on engagement.

As much evidence has shown – and as tech companies well know – inflammatory content such as that which taps into existing grievances and beliefs will generate quick engagement. As that content is clicked on, liked, hovered over, forwarded, commented on or replied to, tech company algorithms almost immediately show it to still more users, prompting more and more engagement, and thus more revenue. Among other things, at its worst, this turns social media into likely the most powerful confirmation bias machine we have ever seen, and also explains why some advocates have even labeled this business model “hate by design.”³⁴

And indeed, two significant concerns at ADL are the use of social media to spread stereotypes and hate, and the use of social media to coordinate extremist activity.

Amplification of Hate and Harassment

Where people go, hate follows. This past year, we have seen communities shift into a virtual-first world and, against the backdrop of COVID-19, our institutions have relied on digital spaces to continue to function. We have increasingly relied on the internet to facilitate work, school, worship, and social activities. So too, however, has the digital world facilitated hate, harassment, racism, extremism, and the proliferation of conspiracy theories. The Asian, Jewish, Muslim, Latinx, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ communities in particular are experiencing an onslaught of targeted hate, fueled in large part by white supremacists and other extremists.

Whether you consider it the catalyst or just a conduit, the fact is that social media often amplifies hate. It’s frequently a font for conspiracy theories, weakening societal tolerance post after post, tweet after tweet, like after like. And the hate festering on social media inevitably targets the most vulnerable — particularly marginalized groups like religious, ethnic, and racial minorities, as well as members of the LGBTQ+ community.

We do not have nearly enough information about the prevalence of hate and extremism online, the connection between online hate and offline domestic terrorism, or the measures that can be taken to most effectively counter this phenomenon. We do know, however, that online hate and harassment is extraordinarily prevalent. According to ADL’s 2020 Online Hate and Harassment survey,³⁵ 44% of Americans experienced online harassment and 28% experienced severe online

³⁴ Brookings Institution, “How Misinformation Spreads on Social Media -- and What to Do About It,” May 9, 2018 (<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/05/09/how-misinformation-spreads-on-social-media-and-what-to-do-about-it/>)

³⁵ ADL Survey, “Online Hate and Harassment Report: The American Experience 2020.” (<https://www.adl.org/online-hate-2020>)

harassment — including stalking, physical threats, swatting, doxing and sustained harassment. ADL’s research also shows that targeting based on specific identity-based characteristics has increased — 1 in 3 Americans who are harassed online attribute the harassment to their identity. The 2020 ADL data, for example, show that race-based harassment affected 55% of Asian-American respondents and 42% of Hispanic and African-American respondents. Sixty-one percent of Muslim-American respondents who reported experiencing online harassment felt they were targeted because of their religion and 43% of Jewish-American respondents felt they were targeted with hateful content because of their religion. Additionally, 37% of female-identified respondents felt they were targeted because of their gender. Finally, 48% of LGBTQ+ respondents reported harassment based on sexual orientation in particular.

Coordination by Extremists

In addition to amplifying hate, the internet has also become a forum for extremists to communicate, organize, and mobilize. It is also a place for extremists to recruit, and the rising mainstream popularity of alt-tech platforms like Gab and Telegram, among many others, allows extremists to mix with – and possibly influence – non-extremists.

Without a doubt, extremists relied on “fringe” platforms and apps such as Parler, Gab, and thedonald.win both before and during the events of January 6th. According to at least one report, for example, directions for which streets to take to avoid the police and which tools to bring to help pry open doors were exchanged in comments on Gab leading up to the attack. On the day of the attack, Gab CEO and founder Andrew Torba posted on Gab: “In a system with rigged elections there are no longer any viable political solutions.” The phrase “there is no political solution” is used in online accelerationist white supremacist circles and embraces political violence as the only valid response. Before hundreds of rioters broke into the Capitol building, Torba reportedly posted on his platform: “would be a real shame if the people outside stormed the Senate.”³⁶

Yet hate-fueled violence isn’t limited to the darkest corners of the Internet. Many extremists also use mainstream platforms – Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit – to communicate their message and recruit adherents, and it’s clear that these outlets are playing a central role in the radicalization of domestic extremists too. Platforms like Facebook, which employ algorithms designed to promote engagement and thus end up amplifying the most corrosive content, serve up a firehose of material that glorifies hate and violence.

LONG-TERM TRENDS

You cannot successfully defeat an enemy that you do not know. While new strains of extremism are always evolving, there are observable long-term trends that we can study and analyze now to help us understand exactly what it is that we are up against and can reasonably expect to face in the foreseeable future. While trends are just that – neither an exhaustive list nor a guaranteed prediction – they can be deeply informative in helping us understand the state of extremism, the threat it poses, and the mindframe of extremists today.

³⁶ADL, “ADL Calls on U.S. Justice Department to Investigate Gab For Possible Criminal Liability in Capitol Attack,” January 13, 2021. (<https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-calls-on-us-justice-department-to-investigate-gab-for-possible-criminal>)

Extremist Groups

The January 6th attack on the Capitol reflected some of today's most active extremist groups, including the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, and other far-right contingents, including some white supremacists.³⁷ ADL's Center on Extremism immediately started working to identify those who participated in the assault. We remained in close communication with law enforcement leading up to, during, and after the event. This was a natural extension of not only the work that we have been doing to track "Stop the Steal" and similar events since the election, but the work that our Center on Extremism has been doing for years to monitor and expose domestic extremists. In 2020 alone, ADL provided over 1,000 tips to law enforcement to address these threats.

Our assessment of the white supremacist threat is outlined in detail above. The following provides additional information about three specific groups that played a significant role in the January 6, 2021 siege on the U.S. Capitol.

Proud Boys

The Proud Boys are a right-wing extremist group with a long track record of violence. Members of the group have always loudly insisted that they are not racist. In the face of any accusation of antisemitism or white supremacy, they make a show of pointing to their Cuban-American leader, their Black and Latino members, or their tiny chapter in Israel.

Proud Boys leadership has carefully crafted a public image of an inclusive club for men of all races, backgrounds and sexual orientations who subscribe to one mantra: The West (i.e. "Western" culture) is best, and anyone who "opposes" it ("leftists" of all stripes and feminists, among others) is the enemy.

The group has been remarkably successful at building a brand and they have become popular public allies and security providers for a host of right-wing and conservative activists and politicians, even receiving positive attention from President Trump.³⁸ Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrío seems to understand that expressing overt antisemitism or racism would not help them, and Tarrío's continuing assurances of anti-racism as well as his own Latino background provide the Proud Boys with a ready way to defend themselves against charges of bigotry. However, the actions of the group's members and even leadership have repeatedly belied the official party line.

At the December 12th pro-Trump rally in Washington, D.C., a member of the Proud Boys attacked a counter-protester while screaming "Fucking Jew."³⁹ The incident was captured on video that ADL has viewed.

Later that night, Tarrío, alongside an unidentified member of the Proud Boys, allegedly tore down and set fire to a Black Lives Matter banner outside the Asbury Methodist Church, one of

³⁷ ADL, "Extremists Engage in Political Violence During Pro-Trump Rallies," *ADL Blog*, January 6, 2021. (<https://www.adl.org/blog/extremists-engage-in-political-violence-during-pro-trump-rallies>)

³⁸ Neil MacFarquhar et al., "Far-Right Group That Trades in Political Violence Gets a Boost," *New York Times*, September 30, 2020. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/30/us/proud-boys-trump.html>)

³⁹ ADL, "Pro-Trump Rallies in DC Attract Extremists & Erupt into Violence," *ADL Blog*, December 13, 2020. (<https://www.adl.org/blog/pro-trump-rallies-in-dc-attract-extremists-erupt-into-violence>)

the oldest Black churches in Washington, D.C.⁴⁰ Tarrío later claimed that the attack was not motivated by race, but rather because “BLM is a Marxist movement,” adding, “the burning of this banner wasn’t about race religion [sic] or political ideology it [sic] was about a racist movement that has terrorized the citizens of this country.” However, his action is being investigated as a potential hate crime by Washington’s Metropolitan Police Department.⁴¹ Tarrío was arrested and charged for his actions upon arriving in D.C. ahead of January 6th’s events.⁴²

The Proud Boys’ history of racist associations goes back to its founding. The 2016 creation of the group was first announced in *Taki’s Magazine*, a right-wing publication that has published virulent racists like Jared Taylor and Richard Spencer.⁴³ Since then, there have been many examples of close ties between the Proud Boys and racist right-wing extremists, just some of which are outlined here.

In 2017, members of the Proud Boys marched at the deadly Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, although the organization denounced the event and warned members that they would be banned from the group if they marched.⁴⁴ At the time of the event, Unite the Right’s organizer Jason Kessler was a member of the group.

Despite their loud and persistent denials, the Proud Boys are all too willing to embrace racists, antisemites, and bigots of all kinds as long as they subscribe to the superiority of “western” civilization. The Proud Boys powerfully illustrate that an organization with a Latino leader and Jewish members is quite capable of racism and antisemitism.

Three Percenters

Three Percenters (also known as 3%ers, III%ers, and Threepers) are anti-government extremists who are part of the militia movement. Three Percenters have a track record of criminal activity ranging from weapons violations to terrorist plots and attacks. They believe that, just as a small revolutionary vanguard overthrew the tyrannical British rule in America, a dedicated group of modern patriots could rid the United States of today’s alleged tyranny. The term itself is a reference to a false belief that the number of Americans who fought against the British during the Revolutionary War amounted to only three percent of the population at the time (historians say that percentage was actually far higher).⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Peter Hermann, “Proud Boys Leader Says He Burned Black Lives Matter Banner Stolen From Church During Demonstrations in D.C.,” *Washington Post*, December 18, 2020. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/enrique-tarrío-proud-boys-black-lives-matter-sign/2020/12/18/c056c05e-415a-11eb-8db8-395dedaaa036_story.html)

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² Elliot Hannon, “Proud Boys Leader Arrested and Charged With Burning D.C. Church’s Black Lives Matter Banner,” *Slate*, January 5, 2021. (<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2021/01/proud-boys-leader-arrested-charged-burning-church-black-lives-matter-banner.html>)

⁴³ Gavin McInnes, “Introducing: The Proud Boys,” *Taki’s Magazine*, September 15, 2016. (https://www.takimag.com/article/introducing_the_proud_boys_gavin_mcinnes/)

⁴⁴ Leighton Akio Woodhouse, “After Charlottesville, The American Far Right Is Tearing Itself Apart,” *The Intercept*, September 21, 2017. (<https://theintercept.com/2017/09/21/gavin-mcinnes-alt-right-proud-boys-richard-spencer-charlottesville/>)

⁴⁵ John A. Tures, “More Americans Fought in the American Revolution Than We Thought,” *Observer*, July 3, 2017. (<https://observer.com/2017/07/soldiers-militia-american-revolution/>)

Though the media often refer to Three Percenters as a movement or a group, they are neither. Rather, they constitute a major part of the broader anti-government militia movement, whose ideology they share. Some Three Percenters form militia groups, while others form non-paramilitary groups or create online networks; even more are active as individual or unaffiliated Three Percenters.

At its core, the Three Percenter concept may be best understood as a way to simplify, popularize and spread the ideology and beliefs of the militia movement — a right-wing anti-government extremist movement that arose in 1993-94. Its core belief centers on the idea that the federal government is collaborating with a shadowy globalist and socialist conspiracy (often referred to as the “New World Order”) in order to strip Americans of their rights and freedoms, starting with their right to bear arms, so that Americans can be made slaves to the New World Order and its agenda. Militia activists view the federal government as tyrannical and illegitimate; some seek to defend Americans from its perceived ravages, while others occasionally plot to attack the government.

The Three Percenter concept both contributed to and benefited from the resurgence of the militia movement in 2008 through a blog, the Sipse Street Irregulars. The blog was run by Mike Vanderboegh, an Alabama-based anti-government extremist who had been involved in the militia movement for many years. Vanderboegh’s creation of the Three Percenter concept occurred at a propitious time for the militia movement, due in part to anger and anxiety caused by the recession and mortgage crisis as well as the election of Barack Obama as president. These developments gave right-wing anti-government activists in both mainstream America and on its far right fringes a new focus for their anger.

In keeping with militia movement ideology, Three Percenters have typically focused most of their anger on the federal government. Their anti-government ire usually focuses on gun control or on perceived “victims of government” militia that Three Percenters seek to protect. Many adherents of the militia movement strongly support President Trump. As a result, Three Percenters have not been as active in opposing the federal government in recent years, directing their anger at other perceived foes, including leftists, antifa, Muslims, and immigrants.

Three Percenters have been active in 2019-2020 in reaction to a range of issues, including attempts to pass state level gun control measures, state-imposed restrictions and lockdowns to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and the protests that have taken place across the country over the May 2020 murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

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.⁴⁶

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. Their propaganda reminds potential recruits that they swore an oath to defend the Constitution “from all enemies, foreign and domestic,” and asks them to pledge to disobey theoretical unconstitutional orders they might get

⁴⁶ ADL, “Oath Keepers,” *ADL Blog*. (<https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/oath-keepers>)

from superiors — orders that explicitly or implicitly reference militia-related conspiracy theories,⁴⁷ such as mass gun confiscation or rounding up Americans to put them in concentration camps.⁴⁸ Each theory goes back to the idea that the U.S. government has fallen under global governance and will at some point use police and military members to enforce the New World Order’s plans. The Oath Keepers urge military and law enforcement personnel to step up to stop the conspirators.

The number of active duty police and military personnel who have publicly admitted to being Oath Keepers is very small; the number of closeted members may be larger. The Oath Keepers have had more success in recruiting former military personnel, which is a much larger pool to draw from; many Oath Keepers speak of past military service. The group has also recruited from among people already involved in the anti-government extremist movement. Membership has never actually required current or former ties with military, police, or first responders. The popularity of Oath Keepers social media accounts illustrates clearly that many more people support the Oath Keepers without ever officially joining (which requires paying dues).

Based on its monitoring of the Oath Keepers, ADL estimates that the group has up to several thousand members, though the Oath Keepers have claimed far more. This estimated size would still make the Oath Keepers larger than any single traditional militia group. Though there is a formal national leadership, on the local level many Oath Keepers are essentially self-organized, forming official, semi-official, or informal groupings of Oath Keepers in specific, sometimes even overlapping, geographic areas.

The Oath Keepers were particularly active in 2020, participating in various anti-lockdown protests, providing vigilante-style “security” for local communities and businesses during the Black Lives Matter protests that spread in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, and warning about a potential takeover by the “Marxist left” during the 2020 election.

The group also gained notoriety for their armed participation in disputes between ranchers or miners and federal agencies, particularly in 2014 and 2015. However, their decision to retreat from the Bundy Ranch standoff in 2014 out of a fear of possible drone strikes tarnished the group’s reputation among other anti-government extremists.

Members of the Oath Keepers have also been arrested in connection with a wide range of criminal activities, including various firearms violations, conspiracy to impede federal workers, possession of explosives, and threatening public officials.

A New Breed of Extremists

President Trump has provided extremists the gift of a narrative that will carry them through at least the next four years. Extremists are often animated by the angry and paranoid conviction that something sacred is being or has been taken away from them, and the former president has

⁴⁷ Mike Giglio, “A Pro-Trump Militant Group Has Recruited Thousands of Police, Soldiers, and Veterans,” *The Atlantic*, September 30, 2020. (<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/11/right-wing-militias-civil-war/616473/>)

⁴⁸ Jennifer Williams, “The Oath Keepers, the far-right group answering Trump’s call to watch the polls, explained,” *Vox*, November 7, 2016. (<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/11/7/13489640/oath-keepers-donald-trump-voter-fraud-intimidation-rigged>)

offered a story about a “stolen election,” all thanks to the treasonous “left” and mainstream media, who are, as the narrative goes, suppressing the rights and voices of “real Americans.”

Many of the people who were roused to violent extremism for the first time on January 6th as the result of such incitement. They constitute a new breed of extremist, one foundationally animated by devotion to President Trump, placing him over party or country. They are living in an entire ecosphere of disinformation, lies, and conspiracy theories, one fertilized by Alex Jones, QAnon, President Trump and his most devoted enablers, and many others.

Over the coming months and years, as they mingle with established extremists – including white supremacists, antigovernment extremists, antisemites, and hardcore conspiracy theorists – these individuals could coalesce into a distinct and potent extremist movement. Alternatively, they could eventually add to the ranks of those other hateful causes.

To be clear, this is not to argue that supporters of President Trump’s policy agenda are domestic extremists. Indeed, seventy-four million Americans voted for him in the 2020 general election, and their interests, perspectives, and concerns should not be thoughtlessly dismissed. However, we must also recognize that Donald Trump’s sustained propagation of falsehoods and acrimony – especially but not exclusively regarding the election result – has played an essential part in fueling our nation’s crisis of domestic extremist radicalization, recruitment, and violence.

Looking Ahead

While it is hard to say with certainty what lies ahead, we know that white supremacists and some other extremists, including Islamophobes, anti-immigrant extremists and antisemites, are also driven by manufactured fears around demographic change. Some within the movement believe these changes will only accelerate during the Biden Administration as it enacts more welcoming policies towards immigrants and refugees who are people of color. Extremists equate those policies to “white genocide.”

Militia and other antigovernment 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 over the past few years dulled that anger. A Biden Administration will allow militias to return to their foundational grievances — the belief that a tyrannical government in league with a globalist conspiracy is coming to enslave them by first taking 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. Many of the key narratives, especially the conspiracy theories that animated the D.C. attackers, are also drivers of antisemitism.

Conspiracy Theories

No one who stormed the Capitol was radicalized the day before. They were animated over time by a conspiracy theory about a stolen election, stoked by politicians up to and including President Trump, and a fervent commitment to preserving the status quo. One of the most prominent conspiracy theories supporting President Trump is QAnon, with substantial numbers of adherents coming to “Stop the Steal” events across the country after the election and establishing a notable presence at the Capitol attack.

QAnon

QAnon is not a coherent organization or movement. It is instead an ill-defined and wide-ranging conspiracy theory that encompasses a host of other conspiracy theories. It has spread from the backwaters of the internet onto mainstream platforms, where it has built a substantial following among supporters of former President Trump. Since the inauguration of President Biden, QAnon's adherents have been scrambling for purpose and direction.

At its core, QAnon is a sprawling global conspiracy holding that rings of pedophiles control world governments. In the U.S., QAnon adherents accuse leading Democrats and a supposed "Deep State," which includes high profile celebrities, of being part of a cabal of pedophiles who were determined to bring down President Trump. In recent months, QAnon has been a primary driver of the false conspiracy theory that the election was stolen from President Trump by virtue of massive voter fraud. The violent mob action and assault on the U.S. Capitol on January 6th grew out of the viral spread of these conspiracy theories. Yet for years, there have been warning signs that social media platforms such as Twitter were providing a fertile environment for increased radicalization and potential violence from conspiracy groups like QAnon.⁴⁹

QAnon played a key role in the attack on the U.S. Capitol, with QAnon accounts on Twitter and other platforms hailing the violence as the first step in a civil war.⁵⁰ Reportedly, QAnon supporters were the first rioters to enter the Capitol. One of them, Jake Angeli, a far-right conspiracy theorist dubbed the "QAnon Shaman," has been a predictable presence at far-right rallies supporting President Trump's attempts to discredit the 2020 election.⁵¹ After several QAnon supporters claimed Angeli was a member of antifa, Angeli publicly denied the charges and reiterated his support for QAnon.

QAnon's wide-reaching conspiracy theory is popular among a range of right-wing extremists and some public supporters of President Trump,⁵² including a number of recent candidates for federal office and two members of Congress.⁵³ Its adherents follow the anonymous poster "Q" and believe that a shadowy cabal of pedophiles who control world governments must eventually be brought to justice. This dangerous conspiracy theory, which originated on the online message board 4chan in 2017, has been connected with a number of violent events,⁵⁴ such as an armed

⁴⁹ Craig Timberg and Elizabeth Dwoskin, "As QAnon grew, Facebook and Twitter missed years of warning signs about the conspiracy theory's violent nature," *Washington Post*, October 3, 2020.

(<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/10/01/facebook-qanon-conspiracies-trump/>)
⁵⁰ Jessica Guynn, "'Burn down DC': Violence that erupted at Capitol was incited by pro-Trump mob on social media," *USA Today*, January 6, 2021. (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2021/01/06/trump-riot-twitter-parler-proud-boys-boogaloos-antifa-qanon/6570794002/>)

⁵¹ Rachel E. Greenspan and Haven Orecchio-Egresitz, "A well-known QAnon influencer dubbed the 'Q Shaman' has been arrested after playing a highly visible role in the Capitol siege," *yahoo!news*, January 9, 2021. (<https://news.yahoo.com/well-known-qanon-influencer-dubbed-230306934.html>)

⁵² ADL, "QAnon," *ADL Blog*. (<https://www.adl.org/qanon>)

⁵³ Em Steck et al., "The congressional candidates who have engaged with the QAnon conspiracy theory," *CNN*, October 30, 2020. (<https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/10/politics/qanon-cong-candidates/>)

⁵⁴ Lois Beckett, "QAnon: a timeline of violence linked to the conspiracy theory," *The Guardian*, October 16, 2020. (<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/oct/15/qanon-violence-crimes-timeline>)

standoff near the Hoover Dam,⁵⁵ in addition to the attack on the Capitol in Washington, D.C. and an array of other plots noted in Representative Malinowski’s bipartisan House resolution H. Res. 1154 that was passed resoundingly in October by 371 to 18 with ADL’s endorsement.

THE TIME IS RIPE FOR CHANGE

According to a recent ADL survey⁵⁶ taken shortly after the events of January 6th, approximately two-thirds of Americans believe that Donald Trump (67%) and members of white supremacist, far-right, or militia groups (64%) are at least somewhat responsible for the violence at the Capitol. Roughly three-quarters of Americans are at least somewhat concerned about violence in the next year from anti-government and militia movement members (77%) and white supremacists (75%).

Over half of Americans also believe that social media companies like Facebook and Twitter (61%) and Congressional Republicans who said they would oppose certification of election results (55%) are at least somewhat responsible for the violence on January 6.

Unequivocally, Americans want the government to do more to address violent domestic extremism. Sixty-five percent want the government to do more to address the rise of far-right extremism. Sixty-six percent of Americans believe that the government should prosecute individuals who stormed the Capitol, and 63% agree that social media companies should ban posts and individuals encouraging or celebrating extremism and conspiracy theories.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Just as the attack on our Capitol did not materialize out of nowhere, so too has the threat not dissipated in its aftermath. Those who perpetrated the attack will not readily abandon their principles, nor will those who supported this act of domestic terrorism from afar. We cannot expect there to be a change unless we change something about our approach. The trauma of January 6th must not be in vain. It is time, at long last, for action. It is time for a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to combating domestic extremism.

With that in mind, ADL respectfully presents to this Committee the **PROTECT** plan — a comprehensive, seven-part plan to mitigate the threat posed by domestic extremism and domestic terrorism while protecting civil rights and civil liberties. Together, these seven steps 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 vulnerable people and communities against the risk of government overreach. Our suggestions are that you:

⁵⁵ William Mansell, “Man pleads guilty to terrorism charge after blocking Hoover Dam bridge with armored truck,” *ABC News*, February 13, 2020. (<https://abcnews.go.com/US/man-pleads-guilty-terrorism-charge-blocking-bridge-armored/story?id=68955385>)

⁵⁶ The survey of U.S. adults was conducted from Jan. 7-8, 2021 by YouGov, a leading public opinion and data analytics firm, on behalf of ADL. There were 1,176 respondents, 1,102 of whom were aware of the incident in the Capitol. The figures have been weighed and are representative of all U.S. adults aged 18 or over. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 2.95 percentage points. ADL, “American Attitudes toward Extremist Threats: A Survey Following the Events at the U.S. Capitol.” (<https://www.adl.org/american-attitudes-toward-extremist-threats>)

- P Prioritize Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism
- R Resource According to the Threat
- O Oppose Extremists in Government Service
- T Take 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. Civil society has an important role to play in this effort. We must all work together towards a common goal if we hope to be successful.

- The Biden-Harris Administration must ensure interagency coordination, as well as coordination between federal, state, and local stakeholders, civil society and the private sector. An important starting point would be the hosting of a “Preventing Domestic Terrorism Summit” with civil society groups.
- The Biden-Harris Administration must work to develop a comprehensive interagency strategy designed to prevent and counter domestic extremism and domestic terrorism, including any international connections. This strategy must prioritize transparency and oversight, so that the public can see how the government is analyzing the threat and that resources are being devoted proportionately.
- Law enforcement must be both instructed and trained to use the available existing legal authorities, which are sufficient, to investigate and prosecute domestic terrorist threats, and provided adequate resources to do so.⁵⁷
- Congress should, to the maximum extent possible, work with the Biden-Harris Administration to restore and empower offices, like the domestic terrorism unit within the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A),⁵⁸ that have been hindered in their work to address the threat of domestic terrorism in recent years.
- Congress must explore opportunities to keep firearms out of the hands of convicted hate crimes perpetrators and to disarm violent hateful groups. It is clear that guns are the weapon of choice among America’s extremist murderers, regardless of their ideology, and a major reason why the death toll of such attacks has risen over time.
- The Domestic Terrorism Documentation and Analysis of Threats in America (DATA) Act provided for appropriate coordination, accountability, and transparency in the

⁵⁷ Notably, this plan does not include the creation of a new federal criminal domestic terrorism statute. Although there are a number of existing authorities for charging individuals with committing certain acts of domestic terrorism, a broad criminal domestic terrorism statute has not yet been codified at the federal level, and for good reason. The government’s history of targeting marginalized communities and political activists in the name of national security, as well as First Amendment, Fourth Amendment and other civil rights concerns, raise serious questions about its feasibility. Trying to address the threat of white supremacist violence through reforms that overstep or infringe on civil liberties and potentially expand racial profiling or unwarranted, discriminatory surveillance and harassment of marginalized communities would be unacceptable. Indeed, as a number of experts who are former law enforcement involved in counterterrorism have noted, law enforcement has all of the investigatory and prosecutorial powers it requires and that are consistent with constitutional limitations, to effectively combat domestic terrorism.

⁵⁸ Woodruff, Betsy. “Homeland Security Disbands Domestic Terror Intelligence Unit.” *Daily Beast*. April 2, 2019. (<https://www.thedailybeast.com/homeland-security-disbands-domestic-terror-intelligence-unit>)

collection and recording of data on domestic terrorism. A version of the bill passed in the Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act that became law in December 2019, yet has not been fully implemented. Congress should continue to monitor implementation of these requirements and ensure that we have accurate and comprehensive data on domestic terrorism.

- Congress must call out domestic terrorism as “terrorism.” Federal prosecutors have a range of charges to choose from in individual cases and make those decisions based on specific facts to which the general public is generally not privy. Whether someone is formally charged with committing an act of domestic terrorism in court is distinct from whether they have committed an act of domestic terrorism as a definitional matter — namely, criminal acts that are dangerous to human life and intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population or influence the policy or conduct of the government. Public officials have an obligation to use their bully pulpit to call domestic terrorism what it is, regardless of what formal charges are brought. That sends an important message, and notably, means the government is acknowledging that the priority threat in the United States at this time - right-wing and often white supremacist political violence - is in fact domestic terrorism.

Resource According to the Threat

Second, we must ensure that the authorities and resources the government uses to address violent threats are proportionate to the risk of lethality of those threats. In other words, allocation of resources must never be politicized, but rather transparently based on 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.
- Along with prioritizing the threat within existing budgets, legislative appropriators must work to expand the funding resources available to federal and state officials to address the threat of domestic terrorism.

Oppose Extremists in Government Service

Third, it is essential that we recognize the potential for harm from when extremists gain positions of power, including in government, law enforcement, and the military. Of broader concern, however, is the inherent power imbalance between civilians and those in government, law enforcement, and the military. As such, we must be especially thoughtful about whom we give government authority and sensitive resources. In the wrong hands, it can be deadly.

- 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 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.
- Finally, it is imperative that appropriate steps be taken to identify any elected officials who have endorsed, given credence to, or intentionally promoted QAnon content, and leaders should decline to assign them to positions of authority, which in ADL's view should also mean removing such Members from Congressional committees.

Take Domestic Terrorism Prevention Measures

Fourth, 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. We can and must approach this problem holistically rather than through an exclusively reactive lens.

- 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, countermeasures and offramping, 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, of course, be accompanied by an assurance of careful oversight and safeguards. They must also meaningfully engage communities who have been targeted by domestic terrorism and who have been targeted when prior terrorism authorities have been misused. They must be responsive to community concerns, publicly demonstrate careful oversight, and ensure that they do not stigmatize communities.
 - While Congress has funded a small grant program for prevention measures domestically, the program is too small to have an impact at scale and, in some cases, DHS' implementation of the program has lost the confidence of communities. The Administration should reform the Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention office at DHS and 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

Fifth, Congress must prioritize countering online extremism and ensuring that perpetrators who engage in unlawful activity online can be held accountable with regard both to criminal charges and civil liability, and do so without implicating First Amendment concerns. There is clearly a role for government here; we note, for example, that the few meaningful steps taken by the large social media companies to self-regulate came about only when the companies also faced a combination of legislative and regulatory pressure, as well as public outrage and significant reputational damage. It has also become abundantly clear that self-regulation will never be enough.

We need aggressive enforcement actions, increased transparency and accountability from social media platforms, and reports studying the prevalence of hate, harassment, and extremism across

key platforms. We also need cyberhate victim resource centers, training for law enforcement, and funding for innovative tools to combat these issues.

So-called “transparency” reports touted by platforms such as Facebook are opaque and inadequate at best. Indeed, as ADL and others have reported, it is nearly impossible to understand the prevalence and impact of hate on social media, as well as accurate measurements of how effective enforcement is, based on platforms’ current transparency reports. This is not surprising because platform transparency reports are self-initiated and, thus, there is no independent oversight of reporting requirements. Without clear and accurate reporting, there will inevitably be significant gaps in our understanding of how online extremism and cyberhate influence or impact domestic terrorism and hate crimes.

The public also urgently needs more research on the impact of social media platforms’ recommendation systems and algorithmic amplification mechanisms on the mental health of users, especially related to addiction and radicalization. This can give us an important understanding of the role social media plays in amplifying extremism. Another imperative is more funding and support for technology innovation to mitigate online hate, including tools related to the measurement, detection, support, and mitigation of hate and abuse.

Another area that urgently lacks research and data is the world of online games and its relation to white supremacy, harassment, and domestic extremism. Studying similarities between online games and social media platforms is crucial to determine the need for better oversight of their potential market power, influence on youth and adult consumers, and impact on our democratic systems. ADL’s research shows that more than 80 percent of the 66 million U.S. online multiplayer gamers aged 18-45 have experienced harassment while gaming online.⁵⁹ Alarmingly, nearly one in ten online multiplayer gamers (9%) witnessed discussions on white supremacist ideology. We need to learn more about how gaming platforms enable hate and extremism. Online gaming should be considered a key part of the conversation about preventing online extremism and creating more just and inclusive digital social spaces.

- Congress can work with independent extremism experts to protect vulnerable targets from becoming either victims of abuse or radicalized perpetrators of violence. Legislation like the National Commission on Online Platforms and Homeland Security Act,⁶⁰ for example, would establish a commission to investigate how online content implicates certain national security threats, such as targeted violence. Congress should also pass legislation like the Raising the Bar Act,⁶¹ which would attempt to reduce the amount of content related to terrorism on social media platforms.
- 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,⁶² which, among other things, would have provided federal protections against doxing and swatting. It is time to pass

⁵⁹ ADL, “Free to Play? Hate, Harassment and Positive Social Experience in Online Games 2020.” (<https://www.adl.org/free-to-play-2020#results>)

⁶⁰ H.R. 4782 - National Commission on Online Platforms and Homeland Security Act, 116th Congress (2019-2020). (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/4782>)

⁶¹ Emily Birnbaum, “Democratic lawmaker introduces bill to tackle online terrorist activity,” *The Hill*, November 20, 2019. (<https://thehill.com/policy/technology/471226-dem-lawmaker-introduces-bill-to-tackle-online-terrorist-activity>)

⁶² H.R. 3067 - Online Safety Modernization Act of 2017, 115th Congress (2017-2018). (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/3067>)

laws that cover these types of harms. It is crucial that legislation provide private rights of action.

- We also need to train law enforcement to investigate cybercrimes and require better reporting of these crimes. Only then can we fully understand the extent of the problem.
- Finally, Congress must amend Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act to make tech companies legally accountable for their role in enabling stalking, facilitating violence, civil rights violations, and inciting domestic terrorism. We do not support the elimination of Section 230 altogether for the simple reason that doing so will have the unintended consequence of allowing more hate online where that hate is heinous and harmful, but doesn't on its own rise to the level of being unlawful. We are also well aware that too blunt a legislative instrument in this area could silence and harm the very communities and speech we seek to protect. We therefore urge lawmakers to seriously consider Section 230 reform proposals that prioritize equity and justice for users and bar immunity when platforms put profit over people. This could include enacting measures such as the Protecting Americans from Dangerous Algorithms Act,⁶³ which would prevent the use of algorithms to amplify discriminatory content, or aid and abet terrorism. We will separately be providing more details on ADL's views on reform.

Create an Independent Clearinghouse for Online Extremist Content

Sixth, 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. The Center should be well-funded with sustained, ongoing funding, but should be independent of the federal government.

- This approach is needed because those empowered with law enforcement and intelligence capabilities must not be tasked with new investigative and other powers that implicate 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

Finally, Congress must recognize that white supremacist extremism is a major global threat of our era and mobilize with that mindset. Foreign white supremacists influence domestic extremists and vice versa. Like the social media channels through which it courses, white supremacy knows no borders.

- 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. The National Security Council should immediately hold a

⁶³ “Reps. Malinowski and Eshoo Introduce Bill to Hold Tech Platforms Liable for Algorithmic Promotion of Extremism,” October 20, 2020. (<https://malinowski.house.gov/media/press-releases/rep-malinowski-and-eshoo-introduce-bill-hold-tech-platforms-liable-algorithmic>)

Committee meeting to review how these designation decisions were made, if 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 doing so would help advance U.S. national interests.⁶⁴

- The Biden-Harris Administration must also ensure consistent analysis of the global nature of the white supremacist terrorist threat, including by scrutinizing links between foreign and domestic white supremacist extremist groups. The recent surge of mass shootings targeting Jews, immigrants, Hispanics, Blacks and Muslims from Pittsburgh to Christchurch - and many others - provide ample evidence of the global influence and network of the threat. One way to target foreign white supremacists is by empowering the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) to analyze the threat to the fullest extent permitted by law. Another would be for the U.S. Department of State to create a comprehensive strategy to address the issue (as required by the NDAA) and carefully carry that strategy out. Congress and the Administration should consider additional measures as well.
- States also have a role to play, including working closely with federal authorities to identify and investigate foreign connections to domestic terrorist activity. Many times the first line of defense to a domestic threat is a state or local law enforcement official. States should ensure officials are aware of their role in protecting against this global threat and that they are working seamlessly with federal counterparts.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before this Committee and for calling a hearing on this urgent topic. ADL data clearly and decisively illustrates 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 to allocate our resources to address the threat accordingly, while assiduously preserving civil liberties.

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.

⁶⁴ The First Amendment's assembly and speech protections would not permit designation of white supremacist organizations operating here in the U.S., but designating *foreign* white supremacist groups could make knowingly providing material support or resources to them a crime – extending authority for law enforcement officials to investigate whether such a crime is being planned or is occurring. Mary B. McCord, "White Nationalist Killers Are Terrorists. We Should Fight Them Like Terrorists," *Washington Post*, Aug. 8, 2019. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/white-nationalist-killers-are-terrorists-we-should-fight-them-like-terrorists/2019/08/08/3f8b761a-b964-11e9-bad6-609f75bfd97f_story.html)