

## **Congressional Testimony**

**“Countering Violent Extremism, Terrorism, and Antisemitic Threats in New Jersey”**

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### **HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY**

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

## INTRODUCTION TO ADL

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

Domestic violent extremism has been on the rise in recent years. The Jewish community continues to be a primary target of extremists, regardless of ideology.

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

## CURRENT TRENDS

### Antisemitic Violence

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

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

## Rising Antisemitism

ADL has recorded a 37% increase in antisemitic incidents over the past five years. While antisemitism has commonalities with racism, anti-Muslim bias, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and other forms of hate and discrimination, it also has certain unique characteristics as a specific set of ideologies about Jews that have migrated across discourses – and across centuries. In almost every part of our society, this hatred has been conjured and adjusted to suit the values, beliefs and fears of specific demographics and contexts. The underlying conspiracy theories employing Jew-hatred morph to fit the anxieties and upheavals of the time – for example, that Jews were responsible for the Black Death in medieval times and for “inventing,” spreading, or profiting from COVID in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; or that Jews exercise extraordinary power over governments, media, and finance – from the charges of a conspiracy to achieve world domination set forth in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and used by the Nazis, to thinly veiled antisemitism blaming “globalism” and “cosmopolitan elites” for all the ills of the world and for planning a “new world order.”

Each year, ADL’s Center on Extremism (COE) tracks incidents of antisemitic harassment, vandalism, and assault in the United States. Since 1979, we have published this information in an annual [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents](#). ADL’s 2021 Audit of Antisemitic Incidents in the United States recorded 2,717 acts of assault, vandalism, and harassment in 2021 alone, an average of more than seven incidents per day. This represents a thirty-four percent increase from 2020 and **the highest year of incidents on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979.**

Known extremist groups or individuals inspired by extremist ideology were responsible for 484 incidents in 2021, up from 332 incidents in 2020. This represents 18% of the total number of incidents in 2021.

ADL’s 2021 audit also revealed that antisemitic incidents in the U.S. more than doubled during the May 2021 military conflict between Israel and Hamas and its immediate aftermath compared to the same time period in 2020. For the entire month of May, 387 antisemitic incidents were tabulated by ADL. The lion’s share of 297 occurred between May 10 – the official start of military action – and the end of the month, an increase of 141% over the same period in 2020 (123). The perpetrators of many of these incidents explicitly referred to the conflict between Israel and Hamas. After peaking during that period, incident levels gradually returned to a baseline level.

## Murder and Extremism: By the Numbers

The alarming uptick in antisemitic incidents is representative of the rising hate and extremist violence threatening minority and marginalized communities across the country.

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

Most of the murders (26 of 29) were committed by right-wing extremists, who have been responsible for roughly 3 in 4 domestic extremist murders over the last decade.

## **White Supremacist Propaganda**

ADL's [Center on Extremism \(COE\)](#) tracked a near-doubling of white supremacist propaganda efforts in 2020, which included the distribution of racist, antisemitic and anti-LGBTQ+ fliers, stickers, banners and posters. [The 2021 data](#) shows a slight 5% drop in incidents from the previous year, with a total of 4,851 cases reported to ADL, compared to 5,125 in 2020. Despite the drop in overall incidents, 2021 saw a 27 percent increase in antisemitic propaganda distributions, rising from 277 incidents in 2020 to 352 incidents in 2021.

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

## **Modern White Supremacy**

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

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

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

Today, white supremacist ideology, no matter what version or variation, tends to focus on the notion that the white race itself is now threatened with imminent extinction, doomed — unless white people take imminent action — due to a rising tide of people of color who are being controlled and manipulated by Jews. Extremist white supremacists promote the concept of ongoing or future “white genocide” in their efforts to wake white people up to their supposedly dire racial future.

The popular white supremacist slogan known as the “Fourteen Words” reflects these beliefs and holds center stage: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children” — secure a future, as white supremacists see it, in the face of their enemies’ efforts to destroy it.

This twisted and conspiratorial ideology was on display in 2017 in Charlottesville as white supremacists marched with tiki torches chanting [“Jews will not replace us,”](#) a rally that ended in

the death of counter-protester Heather Heyer. It was on display in 2019 during the horrific mass shooting in El Paso. When [a white supremacist opened fire in a shopping center](#), killing 23 people, he was motivated by what he called “the Hispanic invasion of Texas.” And when the mass shooter at the Pittsburgh Tree of Life synagogue massacred 11 Jews on the Jewish Sabbath, he shouted not only “All Jews Must Die!” but claimed to be murdering Jews because they were helping to transport members of the large groups of undocumented immigrants making their way north towards the U.S. from Latin America, which is perceived by white supremacists as a Jewish effort to replace the “rightful” white population of the U.S.

The world watched in horror as this rhetoric took violent form yet again in May 2022, when a gunman killed 10 people and injured 3 more inside a Tops supermarket in Buffalo, New York, after espousing violent white supremacist and antisemitic views online. This shooter was the latest in a long line of violent domestic terrorists who embraced the virulently racist and antisemitic “[Great Replacement](#)” conspiracy theory, which argues that Jews are responsible for non-white immigration into the United States, and that non-white immigrants will eventually replace (and lead to the extinction of) the white race.

### **Anti-Zionist and anti-Israel Antisemitism**

While the preponderance of antisemitism and violent threats to the Jewish community emanate from the right, a steady stream of antisemitism on the left persists, often related to Israel. Of course, some criticism of Israel is part of a healthy political ecosystem. However, a segment of the left sometimes espouses ideas that go beyond legitimate critique and into antisemitic tropes or the vilification and ostracization of Jews. Often, anti-Israel activists will claim they are only targeting “Zionists,” but this encompasses the vast majority of Jews who feel a connection to or affinity with Israel as part of their Jewish identities. The bottom line is that the Jewish community suffers.

The vilification of Zionism and ostracization of Zionists is increasingly emerging as a common phenomenon within some left-wing spaces. Zionism, broadly defined as the movement for Jewish self-determination and statehood in the Jewish people’s historic homeland in the Land of Israel, is increasingly seen by left-wing activists as unjustifiable or illegitimate. This has absolutely no basis in reality. To be clear: Zionism is not in opposition to the Palestinians and affords the Palestinians the exact same rights to self-determination and statehood as the Jewish people. Yet anti-Zionist activists on the left often invoke the words “Zionism” and “Zionist” in a pejorative manner to demean, disparage and attempt to ostracize Jews. Some claim one cannot be a feminist and a Zionist or that Zionism and Zionists are inherently linked to white supremacy. This has real-world consequences:

- About a year ago, we saw the DC chapter of environmental justice group Sunrise Movement attempt to exclude Jewish groups from their coalition due to their “Zionism.” The DC chapter apologized and reversed course- but not without significant organizing by the Jewish community – and pushback from many anti-Zionist activists.
- In at least two cases just this year, student groups expelled members due to their “Zionism.” In February 2022, a student testified that she was harassed on campus and dismissed from her a cappella group for being a Zionist [UConn]. Also in February 2022, two members of a campus support group for sexual assault survivors [at SUNY New Paltz] were forced to resign from the group due to their self-identification as Zionist.

Segments of the left are increasingly holding American Jews or "Zionists" responsible for alleged human rights abuses committed by the state of Israel against the Palestinians, which can lead to not only ostracization but harassment:

- In June 2021, someone in a vehicle passing Hillel at Princeton University yelled "Free Palestine" at a group of Jewish students and faculty who were preparing to begin religious services on the lawn.
- In Lakewood in March 2021, an individual yelled at a visibly Jewish person, "Free the Palestine" and "F\*\*\* the Jews."
- In Brooklyn in September 2021, a visibly Jewish boy with a group of other Jewish children was approached by a man on a subway platform. The man shook the child's arm and yelled at him, asking why they were "killing kids in Gaza."

On campus, we have also seen the vandalizing of Hillel property, calls for Hillel to be cut off from the broader campus community and anti-Israel protests outside of Hillel. Off campus, we have seen protestors outside of synagogues. Protesting outside a synagogue, Hillel or any Jewish institution may be considered tantamount to holding the Jewish community responsible for the alleged actions of the Israeli state.

The espousal of antisemitic tropes by some anti-Zionist and left-wing activists is also an issue. "Zionists," or mainstream American Jewish institutions, have been accused of having outsized and nefarious influence in government, control over the media, or of having excessive financial greed. For instance, Roger Waters, who is often invited to speak by anti-Zionist groups, has claimed that a nefarious "Israel lobby" prevented the election of Jeremy Corbyn in the UK. He has also referred to Zionists with the antisemitic canard "cabal." On campus, just this April, in an email to much of the student body, NYU Law's SJP (Students for Justice in Palestine) group alleged that "the Zionist grip on the media is omnipresent."

These tropes are becoming more and more normalized in mainstream progressive spaces. Today, unfortunately, Jews on campus who so much as publicly express affinity with Israel's existence are ever more likely to have a difficult time being accepted. Some Jews may feel forced to hide their connection to Israel in order to be included. The net effect is that much of the Jewish community feels a sense of being under siege.

## **Online Hate**

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

## *Mainstream Social Media Platforms*

Fringe platforms, despite having relatively small user bases, leverage Big Tech platforms like Twitter and Facebook to increase their reach and influence. In the case of Big Tech, white supremacist propaganda has found its viral channel. It's a perfect storm. First, there is the well-researched human propensity to engage with the most incendiary, inciting, and hateful content. This in turn meets the business model of Big Tech, which depends on increasing engagement of users to surveil them and collect copious amounts of data about them—and their associates and activities—all to sell as many hyper-targeted advertisements as possible. The profit incentive demands engagement; hate, antisemitism, and extremism deliver it; and then algorithms amplify that hateful and antisemitic content to generate even more engagement. Toxic speech is thus given reach and impact unparalleled in human history. For example, in 2020, a single “Stop the Steal” Facebook group gained more than 300,000 members within 24 hours. Thousands of newcomers a minute joined this group and some of them openly advocated civil war.

## *Meta*

Meta, which owns platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, claims that it is meaningfully addressing hate and antisemitism on its platforms. ADL and others, however, continue to expose egregious examples of online antisemitism, hate, misinformation, and extremism across the company's products. The spread of QAnon and its consistent elevation of antisemitism, the mainstreaming of the foundational white supremacist and neo-Nazi [“Replacement Theory,”](#) the Big Lie about the 2020 presidential election, and COVID conspiracies, all are examples of extremism, antisemitism, and hate that has become increasingly normalized and mainstreamed—in large part because of its viral spread online.

Social media companies, like Meta, know their role in the spread and normalization of this hate. Documents disclosed to the SEC by Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen made it clear that Facebook was aware of both the specific role its platform played in the insurrection and the broader role the platform plays in the spread of disinformation, extremism, and hate. The SEC disclosure included statements from Facebook's internal documents. These documents acknowledged Facebook's role in augmenting “combustible election misinformation,” noting “we amplify them and give them broader distribution.” Internal Facebook documents also stated that the company had “evidence from a variety of sources that hate speech, divisive political speech and misinformation on Facebook and the family of apps are affecting societies around the world...Our core products mechanics, such as virality, recommendations, and optimizing for engagement, are a significant part of why these types of speech flourish.”

Notably, extremists leverage mainstream platforms like Meta's Facebook to ensure that the hateful and antisemitic philosophies, which often began to germinate on message boards like Gab and 8chan (now 8kun), find a new and much larger audience. Meta's platforms have served as a gateway for extremists and hatermongers to recruit curious individuals. Extremists use strategies like creating private pages and events; using coded language (called dog whistles) to imply and spread a hateful and antisemitic ideology on mainstream platforms; and linking to hate-filled sites (versus outright posting certain content) to avoid content moderation.

## *TikTok*

In less than seven years, TikTok—the social media app that allows users to create and share short videos—has amassed over 1 billion users. It is particularly popular among young people. As ADL [documented in August 2020](#) and [June 2021](#), while much of the content on TikTok is lighthearted and fun, extremists and antisemites have exploited TikTok to share hateful messages and recruit new adherents. Antisemitism continues to percolate across the app, with posts perpetuating age-old anti-Jewish tropes and conspiracy theories. Recordings of [Louis Farrakhan](#), Rick Wiles (of TruNews), and Stephen Anderson—all antisemitic individuals whose bigotry has been thoroughly documented by ADL—were readily available on TikTok in 2021. One such post, shared on May 23, 2021, showed a clip of a TruNews segment in which Rick Wiles states: “And our leaders are lowlife scum that screw little girls so the Jews can screw America...we’ve allowed Kabbalah practicing Jews to defile the nation.” [TruNews](#), a fundamentalist Christian streaming news and opinion platform that produces antisemitic, anti-Zionist, anti-LGBTQ+, and Islamophobic content, has been banned from YouTube and Facebook for violating the platforms’ content rules.

## *Twitter*

The pending purchase of Twitter by billionaire Elon Musk has significantly damaged Twitter’s efforts to address extremism and antisemitism. Musk has expressed open disdain both for the idea of content moderation and for the work of specific Twitter staff in making the platform safer and more inclusive. In July 2022, [ADL tested Twitter’s enforcement against antisemitism](#) by reporting 225 strongly antisemitic tweets to the platform. Twitter only removed 5% of the reported content (11 tweets). Their reasoning was not that this was an enforcement error but rather that they either took “non-removal actions” or that the tweets in question did not have “repeated” antisemitic content, and thus did not rise to a level of breaking their platform policies. The response from Twitter significantly minimizes the impact that antisemitism and hate have on individuals from targeted communities. In [another study from this year](#), ADL found a 37% overlap between a set of Twitter users that tweeted false and misleading narratives about the Buffalo extremist attack in May 2022 and disinformation related to the outcome of the 2020 election. Twitter took no or minimal action on these users who repeatedly spread harmful and dangerous false information, which is further evidence of the significant work Twitter must undertake to make their platform safe against antisemitism and harmful false information.

## *YouTube*

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

ADL’s February 2021 Belfer Fellow report indicates that exposure to videos from extremist or white supremacist channels on YouTube remains disturbingly common. The report’s authors conducted a study that measured the browsing habits of a diverse national sample of participants and found that approximately one in ten participants viewed at least one video from an extremist channel (9.2%) and approximately two in ten (22.1%) viewed at least one video from an alternative (gateway) channel. Moreover, participants often received and sometimes followed

YouTube recommendations for videos from alternative and extremist channels. Overall, consumption of alternative and extremist content was concentrated among highly engaged respondents, most frequently among those with negative racial views. In total, people with high racial resentment were responsible for more than 90% of views for videos from alternative and extremist channels.

An [investigation undertaken this year](#) showed the ways in which hateful organizations such as the antisemitic and anti-LGBTQ+ New Independent Fundamental Baptist Movement (New IFB) have utilized new product features on YouTube to grow their followings, and how YouTube has not put sufficient protections in place to keep hateful groups from weaponizing their product features. Utilizing the new “YouTube Shorts” product feature, the New IFB was able to grow the views on their content by over 100-fold from an average of 85 views to an average of 8,500 views.

## **Extremism in 2021 and 2022**

The January 6, 2021 siege on the Capitol was an assault on our country and our democracy. Many of those who were roused to violence that day did so as the result of weeks and months (and years) of incitement, on and offline. These individuals included a range of right-wing extremists united by their fury with the perceived large-scale betrayal by “unprincipled” Republican legislators. Many of the individuals who stormed the Capitol have ties to known right-wing extremist groups, including [Oath Keepers](#), [Proud Boys](#), [Groypers](#) and other white supremacists, and those who believe the [QAnon](#) conspiracy theory. A number of Proud Boys members and Oath Keepers have [been charged with conspiracy in connection](#) with the January 6 insurrection. More information on these extremist groups is provided below.

Others who participated in the attack on the U.S. Capitol are considered part of the [new pro-Trump extremist movement](#), a decentralized but enthusiastic faction made up of self-described “patriots” who continue to pledge their fidelity to the former President and his false assertions that he actually won the 2020 election and that it was stolen from him by, among other things, massive voter fraud. This new breed of extremist is foundationally animated by devotion to Trump, placing him over party or country. They are living inside an ecosphere of misinformation, disinformation, lies and conspiracy theories, fertilized by Alex Jones, QAnon, the former President and his enablers, and many others.

### *Oath Keepers*

The Oath Keepers are a large but loosely organized collection of right-wing anti-government extremists who are part of the [militia movement](#), which believes that the federal government has been seized by a shadowy conspiracy that is trying to strip U.S. citizens of their rights. Though the Oath Keepers will accept anyone as members, what differentiates them from other anti-government extremist groups is their explicit focus on recruiting current and former military, law enforcement, and first responder personnel.

New analysis from ADL’s Center on Extremism (COE) found that the leaked membership list for the [Oath Keepers](#) includes hundreds of elected officials, law enforcement officers, members of the military, and first responders.

In September 2021, the non-profit journalist collective Distributed Denial of Secrets released the membership database for the Oath Keepers organization. The membership data, which includes

more than 38,000 names, provides unique insight into the people who signed up for the organization over the years, and helps illuminate the extent to which the group's anti-government ideology has permeated mainstream society.

ADL's analysis uses the leaked data to highlight the number of individuals who signed up for or supported the Oath Keepers in key areas: elected office, law enforcement, the military, and emergency services – as well as in the general population.

### **Key Findings**

- As of August 8, the Center on Extremism (COE) has identified **373 individuals on the Oath Keepers membership list believed to be currently serving in law enforcement agencies across the country**. This number is far higher than any previously identified number of extremists within law enforcement. For comparison, an ADL report released in 2021 identified 76 cases – 73 of which were unique – in which extremists were found serving in law enforcement.
- ADL identified individuals we believe are currently holding senior leadership positions within their respective agencies, **including at least ten chiefs of police and eleven sheriffs**.
- In addition to those actively serving in law enforcement, ADL identified **more than 1,000 individuals who we believe previously served in law enforcement**.
- ADL's Center on Extremism (COE) analysis identified **81 individuals on the Oath Keepers membership list** who are currently holding or running for public office across the country in 2022. These individuals run the gamut from local office – mayors, town council members, school board members – to state representatives and senators.
- Prior to this year's primary season, ADL confirmed 42 Oath Keepers-aligned individuals who were up for election for public office in 2022, consisting of 22 incumbents and 20 candidates.
  - As of August 8, **21 of these candidates** have advanced to the general election either by winning their primary or having their primary cancelled. 13 of the candidates have lost their primary race. Even more concerning, **four individuals** have already won their general election.
- ADL identified **117 individuals who we believe currently serve in the U.S. military**, an additional **11 people who serve in the reserves**, and **31 individuals who hold civilian positions** or are military contractors.
- In addition to those currently serving in the military, ADL estimates that **one in ten of the individuals** in the database previously served in the military in some capacity.

### ***The Proud Boys***

The Proud Boys are a right-wing extremist group with a violent agenda. They are primarily misogynistic, Islamophobic, transphobic and anti-immigration. Some members espouse white supremacist and antisemitic ideologies and/or engage with white supremacist groups. Proud Boys are known to attend public rallies and protests sporting black and yellow Fred Perry polo shirts, other black and yellow clothing, and tactical vests. Members have been known to engage in violent tactics and several members have been convicted of violent crimes.

Nationally, Proud Boys members account for one of the highest numbers of extremist arrestees in relation to the January 6th insurrection, including three New Yorkers who belong to local Proud Boys chapters. Additionally, the Proud Boys latched on to anti-mask and anti-vaccine activism, attending, and at times disrupting, school board meetings as well as related protests and rallies. There are nine chapters affiliated with the Proud Boys in New York, with the newest chapter created in early 2022. Local Proud Boys have staged flash demonstrations and have advertised and participated in protests against COVID-19 measures in multiple locations around the state.

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

### *Groyper/Groyper Army*

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

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

### *QAnon and Other Conspiracy Theories*

QAnon is a global, wide-reaching and remarkably elaborate conspiracy theory that has taken root within [some parts of the pro-Trump movement](#). It is an amalgam of both novel and well-established theories, with marked undertones of antisemitism and xenophobia. Fundamentally, the theory claims that almost every president in recent U.S. history up until Donald Trump has been a puppet put in place by a global elite of power brokers hell-bent on enriching themselves and maintaining their Satanic child-murdering sex cult. These theories are based largely on cryptic posts from an anonymous user called “Q” who started posting on message boards such as 4chan in late 2017 and claims to have high-level access to secret intelligence within the U.S. government. Q is a reference to “Q clearance” or “Q access authorization”—terms used to describe a top-secret clearance level within the Department of Energy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

These narratives include:

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

These narratives go well beyond the mainstream into extreme territory.

## **Long-Term Trends: The Growing Threat of Domestic Terrorism**

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

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

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

## **Extremist and Antisemitic Trends and Incidents in New Jersey**

New Jersey has been a hotbed for extremist activity and antisemitic incidents over the past few years, as white supremacist and extremist groups have continued to maintain an active presence in the state, using propaganda to communicate their hateful messages more broadly and to recruit new members.

In 2020, ADL documented a whopping 323 incidents of white supremacist propaganda distribution across New Jersey.<sup>1</sup> Last year, ADL recorded 179 such incidents—positioning New Jersey among the top 10 states in the country for documented incidents. Patriot Front (101), based in Texas, along with the New Jersey European Heritage Association (59), were the most active groups in the state in 2021, followed by White Lives Matter (10).

The New Jersey European Heritage Association (NJEHA), despite its seemingly innocuous name, is a white supremacist group—active in New Jersey and elsewhere—whose members see themselves as defenders of people of white European descent and white culture. Members hold the white supremacist worldview that unless immediate action is taken, the white race is doomed to extinction by a “rising tide of color” purportedly controlled and manipulated by Jews. The group

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<sup>1</sup> Propaganda incidents are counted as a single incident even if thousands of pamphlets are distributed.

believes its mission is to “wrest political, economic, and social control away from the hostile elite who have usurped power in America.” To do this, followers are called upon to “Reclaim America.” The group espouses antisemitic, racist, and anti-immigrant rhetoric, propagandized in the form of flyers, stickers, banners, and social media posts. Known members have current and former ties to racist skinhead organizations, the neo-Nazi National Socialist Movement, other white supremacist groups, and the White Lives Matter movement. Many of NJEHA’s members or close associates organized and attended the neo-Nazi, antisemitic “Fash Bash 2019” celebrating Hitler’s 130<sup>th</sup> birthday. Most recently, members of the NJEHA disrupted the South Plainfield Labor Day parade carrying a banner that read “Defend American Labor Close the Border.”

In 2021, white supremacist propaganda was distributed in the following New Jersey municipalities: New Brunswick (8), Trenton (8), Montclair (6), Princeton (6), Bordentown (5), Cherry Hill (4), Hamilton (4), Lambertville (3), Asbury Park (3), Somerset (3), Newark (3), Morristown (3), Lyndhurst (3), and Totowa (3). The Northern New Jersey area (Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Somerset, Hunterdon, Morris, Warren, Sussex, Passaic, Bergen, Hudson, Essex, Union) had the most reported incidents of white supremacist propaganda (143). The Southern New Jersey area (Ocean, Burlington, Atlantic, Camden, Gloucester, Salem, Cumberland, Cape May) had 36 reported instances of white supremacist propaganda.

Against this concerning backdrop, antisemitic incidents rose by 25% in New Jersey in 2021, reaching 370 total incidents, as detailed in ADL’s Annual [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents](#) released in April 2022. This is the highest number of antisemitic incidents ever recorded by ADL in New Jersey, and the second-highest number recorded in any state across the country last year (New Jersey was second only to New York).

According to the data, New Jersey experienced increases in antisemitic incidents across all three main categories compiled by ADL—harassment (252 incidents; 34% increase from 2020), vandalism (112 incidents; 7% increase from 2020) and assault (6 incidents; 150% increase from 2020). Incidents took place in public areas (123), in non-Jewish K-12 schools (82), at Jewish institutions (44), at private residences (4), at business establishments (35), and online (29).

Geographically, Bergen County accounted for the highest number of documented antisemitic incidents, with 70 antisemitic incidents recorded in 2021. Ocean County had 44 incidents, Mercer County had 39 incidents, Middlesex County had 31 incidents, and Union County had 30 incidents. Of the 70 reported incidents in Bergen County, 49 were incidents of harassment and 21 were incidents of vandalism. In one notable Bergen County incident, a man smashed the windows of a doctor’s office with a hammer and asked patients, “Are you Jewish?” Three of the six antisemitic assaults in New Jersey in 2021 occurred in Ocean County.

Antisemitic attacks have continued in 2022, and the Jewish community in Lakewood, New Jersey has been particularly vulnerable. In January 2022, for example, a snowplow driver posted a video to his Facebook page appearing to show his plow intentionally targeting two Orthodox Jewish men. Alongside his video post, the driver wrote, “This one’s for you JC.” A few months later, in April 2022, multiple victims were hospitalized following a violent crime spree in nearby Jackson, New Jersey involving a carjacking, stabbing, and two pedestrians being struck by the stolen vehicle. Acting New Jersey Attorney General Matthew Platkin approved a terrorism charge in this case as Prosecutor Bradley Billhimer stated these attacks were “intended to terrorize the Jewish

community in Lakewood and Jackson.”

On New Jersey university and college campuses, there was a 17% increase in incidents of antisemitic harassment in 2021. ADL recorded five incidents of antisemitic vandalism on college campuses in New Jersey in 2021, including swastikas being drawn on academic and residential buildings, mezuzahs being stolen and even a Jewish fraternity being egged. This same Jewish fraternity was egged once again during Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, in 2022.

Jewish institutions also saw a sharp increase in antisemitic incidents in 2021—the 44 incidents that took place at Jewish institutions far exceeded pre-pandemic levels and represented a 76% increase relative to incidents recorded in 2020. Of these incidents, 39 were incidents of harassment, four were incidents of vandalism, and one was an incident of assault.

Incidents related to Israel or Zionism in New Jersey, which may be broadly defined as support for Jewish statehood and self-determination in the Jewish people’s ancestral homeland in the Land of Israel, increased by 35% in 2021, reaching a total of 27 incidents. Notably, ADL recorded the highest number of antisemitic incidents in New Jersey during the month of May 2021 (56), which directly coincided with the escalating conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. This was 86% higher than the state’s average monthly total (30). Of the 56 incidents recorded in New Jersey that month, 14 included explicit references to Israel or Zionism. These included:

- On May 8, an individual in a passing car yelled “Free Palestine” and antisemitic slurs at a group of Jewish people who were praying outside.
- On May 16, four individuals shouted, “Fuck Israel, Free Palestine” after passing a visibly Jewish person on the street.
- On May 17, a Jewish man was harassed with anti-Israel and antisemitic remarks by a passerby in a car.

Consistent with these disturbing trends, 2021 was a record-high year for total reported bias incidents in New Jersey. According to preliminary statistics released by the New Jersey State Police, the overall number of bias incidents reported in 2021 (1,871 incidents) represents the highest annual number of bias incidents reported since the State began tracking them in 1994. Notably, 2021 was the first year in which New Jersey State Police separately tracked incidents occurring in “cyberspace,” which previously were classified as “other/unknown.” There were 275 reported bias incidents occurring in cyberspace in 2021 (roughly 15% of all reported incidents).

Underreporting continues to be a challenge in many New Jersey communities—particularly for those in marginalized communities—as victims of bias crimes and antisemitic incidents face significant barriers to reporting hate crimes in the first instance. There is also significant underreporting of hate crimes to the FBI, particularly where reporting remains voluntary by law enforcement agencies. ADL strongly encourages law enforcement agencies to report hate crime statistics to the FBI and is working with elected officials, law enforcement leaders, and community members across New Jersey to tackle these challenges.

Finally, ADL has been increasingly concerned about anti-government extremist activity across the country and in New Jersey, including from groups like the Oath Keepers. According to the recently leaked Oath Keepers membership list reviewed by ADL’s Center on Extremism (COE), 588

individuals had ties to New Jersey, including 1 elected official, 12 members of law enforcement, 2 active military, and 4 first responders.

### **Extremist and Antisemitic Trends and Incidents in New York**

The last two years have seen a significant proliferation of hate incidents in New York State, as detailed in ADL's Center on Extremism's (COE) June 2022 joint report with the Community Security Initiative (CSI) – [\*Hate In The Empire State\*](#). There is a broad diversity of extremist threats in New York, including from anti-government extremists, militias, white supremacists, and radical Islamists. Throughout 2020 and 2021, extremist groups have engaged in an array of activities, including: threatening local officials, disrupting school board meetings, running for elected positions, funding terrorism, conducting cyber-attacks, organizing rallies, engaging in propaganda distributions and even committing violence.

White supremacist propaganda distribution accounts for a large proportion of extremist-related incidents in New York. In 2021, New York State ranked seventh nationally in terms of white supremacist propaganda distribution incidents, with 212 such incidents recorded across the state.

The Goyim Defense League (GDL), a network of virulently antisemitic propagandists attracting a range of antisemites and white supremacists, has already been very active in 2022. Other extremist groups active in New York include Black nationalist extremist groups, Islamist extremists that align with Al-Qa'ida and ISIS, QAnon, and the New York Watchmen. Oath Keepers also has a strong presence. ADL researchers recently documented 1,996 individuals on the leaked Oath Keepers membership list who have ties to New York—5 are elected officials and 45 are members of law enforcement.

Extremist incidents in New York, as is the case across the country, are often rooted in widespread campaigns of disinformation and conspiracy theories. A tragic manifestation of this national phenomena occurred on May 14, 2022 in Buffalo, New York, when a gunman killed 10 people and injured 3 more inside a Tops supermarket. According to an online screed allegedly written by the shooter and posted before the attack, he espoused white supremacist, racist, and antisemitic conspiracy theories (including the Great Replacement Theory) and claimed his goal was to “spread awareness to my fellow whites about the real problems the West is facing,” and “encourage further attacks that will eventually start the war that will save the Western world.”

Hate crimes remain a significant concern across New York State, and in New York City specifically, where documented hate crimes have more than doubled since 2020. Indeed, according to NYPD data, hate crimes increased 196% from 2020 (266 incidents) to 2021 (522 incidents). At the state level, and according to FBI data, antisemitic hate crimes accounted for 88.3% of the religiously motivated hate crime incidents in 2020.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that New York leads the nation in antisemitic incidents, according to the ADL's annual Audit of Antisemitic Incidents. In 2021, the number of reported incidents increased 24% over 2020 numbers, rising from 336 to 416 incidents. These numbers include a spike in antisemitic incidents driven by extreme anti-Israel sentiment during the May 2021 Israel-Hamas conflict. Incidents motivated by such animus included assault, arson threats, and harassment. For example:

- On May 11, a Jewish preschool received a harassing phone call from an individual who accused Jews of persecuting Palestinians and said that Jews should die.
- On May 15, a Jewish family was harassed while walking to synagogue by a woman who yelled at them, “You evil Jewish people are killing Palestinian children.”
- On May 20, a number of individuals beat and yelled antisemitic slurs at a Jewish man in Times Square.

Overall, ADL’s annual Audit of Antisemitic Incidents found a total of 62 reported incidents in New York in 2021 which occurred at Jewish institutions such as synagogues, Jewish community centers, and Jewish schools – an increase of 41% from 2020. One hundred and sixty-one incidents involved a swastika, and 51 incidents involved assault, the highest number ever recorded by ADL in New York.

ADL has continued to track a series of deeply concerning antisemitic incidents in 2022. One particularly troubling incident took place on April 20, 2022, when a 28-year-old man on crutches, who was carrying an Israeli flag, was allegedly assaulted at 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and Lexington Avenue in Manhattan by a pro-Palestinian activist. According to reports, the victim was punched and knocked to the ground, dragged across the sidewalk and kicked, and told, “This is what happens when you’re a terrorist.” He reportedly sustained injuries, including a concussion. The alleged assailant is being charged with a hate crime, as the attack is believed to have been carried out because of the “perceived national origin or religion” of the victim.

Underreporting continues to be a challenge in New York communities for similar reasons as in New Jersey, as described above. In 2020, only 14% of reporting agencies in New York reported one or more hate crimes to the FBI.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

We need a whole-of-government approach to address these threats. ADL strongly recommends urgent action to fight antisemitism, prevent and counter domestic violent extremism, and push hate and extremism back to the fringes of the digital world. To achieve this, ADL created the COMBAT, PROTECT and REPAIR plans. The COMBAT Plan is a comprehensive, six-part framework for elected officials and policymakers to take meaningful action to fight antisemitism. The PROTECT plan is a comprehensive, seven-part plan to mitigate the threat posed by domestic extremism and domestic terrorism while protecting civil rights and civil liberties. The REPAIR plan is a comprehensive, six-part framework for policymakers and platforms to meaningfully decrease online hate, harassment, and extremism. Together, these plans can have an immediate and deeply significant impact in challenging the rise of antisemitism, preventing and countering domestic terrorism, and decreasing online hate – all while protecting civil rights and liberties and ensuring that government overreach does not harm the same vulnerable people and communities that these extremists target. Our suggestions come under these areas:

## **The COMBAT Plan**

- C** Condemn Antisemitism
- O** Oppose Hate and Extremism Driven by Antisemitism
- M** Make Institutions Safe from Antisemitism
- B** Block Antisemitism Online
- A** Act Against Global Antisemitism
- T** Teach About Antisemitism

### *Condemn Antisemitism*

Public officials and civic leaders must use their bully pulpits to speak out against antisemitism and all forms of hate and extremism. Regardless of its origins—from the far left to the far right and anywhere in between—leaders must call out antisemitism and rally their communities to action.

- Condemning all forms of antisemitism, and responding to antisemitic incidents, in timely, specific, and direct ways.
- Challenging antisemitism in the United States via a whole-of-government strategy.
- Adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism.

### *Oppose Hate and Extremism Driven by Antisemitism*

Fighting hate crimes is a critical task, especially as antisemitism, anti-AAPI violence, anti-Black racism, and other forms of bigotry are at such high levels. According to the FBI's annual hate crimes report, hate crimes targeting the Jewish community make up nearly 55% of all religion-based crimes.

- Supporting hate crime laws and improving hate crime data collection and reporting.
- Adopting wide-ranging measures to combat all forms of domestic antisemitic extremism, most notably the array of policy recommendations outlined in ADL's PROTECT plan.

### *Make Institutions Safe from Antisemitism*

Whether the attack at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, the Chabad in Poway, or hate against Jewish students on college campuses, there is an acute threat of antisemitic violence and harassment. The Jewish community must be protected from these threats and counter the movements that produce them.

- Protecting the physical security of Jewish community institutions.
- Safeguarding Jewish students in post-secondary institutions.

### *Block Antisemitism Online*

Federal and state governments have an important role in reducing online hate, harassment, and extremism fueled by antisemitism. 80% of Americans agree there should be more police training

and resources to help people with online hate and harassment. And an overwhelming majority of Americans agree that laws should be strengthened to hold perpetrators of online hate accountable for their conduct (81%).

- Adopting ADL's comprehensive approach to combatting online hate, harassment, and extremism, including antisemitism, as delineated in the REPAIR plan.

### *Act Against Global Antisemitism*

Global antisemitism is on the rise. Cultures of violence, silence, and complacency have helped antisemitism to gain new currency around the world. Without the requisite proactivity and knowledge to recognize this evil, we are at a disadvantage to stop it.

- Strengthening the Office of the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism.
- Amplifying intergovernmental cooperation between the U.S. and foreign governments to fight global antisemitism and specific regional manifestations.
- Countering state-sponsored antisemitism and related terrorism.
- Mobilizing against the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign and other efforts to demonize, delegitimize and isolate Israel in international fora.

### *Teach About Antisemitism*

Eliminating antisemitism and other forms of bigotry requires government and civil society leaders to promote anti-hate, anti-bias, and civics education programs. Particularly now, better understanding of the Jewish community, and robust Holocaust and antisemitism education are crucial to mitigating the hate threatening all of our communities.

- Promoting understanding of Jewish people today.
- Including antisemitism in anti-bias education and related training.

## **The PROTECT Plan**

- P** Prioritize Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism
- R** Resource According to the Threat
- O** Oppose Extremists in Government Service
- T** Take Public Health and Other Domestic Terrorism Prevention Measures
- E** End the Complicity of social media in Facilitating Extremism
- C** Create an Independent Clearinghouse for Online Extremist Content
- T** Target Foreign White Supremacist Terrorist Groups for Sanctions

### *Prioritize Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism*

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

- In mid-June 2021, the Biden-Harris Administration released the first-ever National Strategy to Counter Domestic Terrorism. The strategy is laudable, and a step in the right direction. However, many critical details were left unaddressed. Congress must press for further details into how the plan will be implemented, and the steps that will be taken to ensure protection for civil rights and civil liberties. Further, Departments and Agencies must create their own implementation plans for the Strategy.
- As Congress considers appropriations bills, resources to prevent and counter domestic terrorism are critical to mitigating the threat. ADL urges Committee Members to consider supporting significant increases for these necessary resources across the government in the Commerce, Justice, and Science; Homeland Security; Defense; State and Foreign Operations; Interior; and Labor, Health, and Human Services appropriations processes.

### *Resource According to the Threat*

We must ensure that the authorities and resources the government uses to address violent threats are proportionate to the risk of the lethality of those threats. In other words, allocation of resources must never be politicized but rather based on transparent and objective security concerns.

- Congress must ensure that offices addressing domestic terrorist threats have the resources they need and can deploy those resources in a manner proportionate to existing threats. Those resources must be matched with transparency and oversight to hold leaders accountable.
- Congress must exercise careful oversight to ensure that no resources are expended on counterterrorism efforts targeting protected political speech or association. Investigations and other efforts to mitigate the threat should be data-driven and proportionate to the violent threat posed by violent extremist movements.

### *Oppose Extremists in Government Service*

It is essential that we recognize the potential for harm when extremists gain positions of power, including in government, law enforcement, and the military.

- To the extent permitted by law and consistent with Constitutional protections, take steps to ensure that individuals engaged in violent extremist activity or associated with violent extremist movements, including violent white supremacist and unlawful militia movements, are deemed unsuitable for employment at the federal, state, and local levels—including in law enforcement. Appropriate steps must be taken to address any current employees, who, upon review, match these criteria.
- To the extent permitted by law and consistent with Constitutional protections, take steps to ensure that individuals engaged in violent extremist activity or associated with violent extremist movements, including violent white supremacist and unlawful militia movements, are not given security clearances or other sensitive law enforcement

credentials. Appropriate steps must be taken to address any current employees, who, upon review, match these criteria. Law enforcement agencies nationwide should explore options for preventing extremists from being among their ranks.

- The Department of Defense (DoD) released its internal extremist threat review on December 20, 2021. While the review represents significant progress, we need more information to truly determine the threat posed by extremists within the ranks. DoD should provide further detail on how it will evaluate white supremacists and related threats, as well as how commanders' ability to adjudicate extremism-related guidelines will be overseen.
- Similarly, DHS announced that it completed a review of extremism in its ranks, but the Department itself noted a lack of capacity to fully understand the threat. DHS must develop ongoing protocols for a comprehensive picture of insider threats related to domestic violent extremism.
- ADL has worked with law enforcement experts to provide tools for identifying and weeding out extremists in the recruitment process as well as within law enforcement ranks. While there is no evidence that white supremacist extremists have large numbers in our law enforcement agencies, we have seen that even a few can undermine the effectiveness and trust that is so essential.

#### *Take Domestic Terrorism Prevention Measures*

We must not wait until after someone has become an extremist or until a terrorist attack occurs to take action. Effective and promising prevention measures exist, which should be scaled.

- Congress can provide funding to civil society and academic programs that have expertise in addressing recruitment to extremist causes and radicalization, whether online or offline. By providing funding for prevention activities, including education, counseling, and off-ramping, Congress can help empower public health and civil society actors to prevent and intervene in the radicalization process and undermine extremist narratives, particularly those that spread rapidly on the internet.
- These initiatives must be accompanied by an assurance of careful oversight with civil rights and civil liberties safeguards. They must also meaningfully engage the communities that have been targeted by domestic terrorism and the civil society organizations already existing within them, and those communities which have been unfairly targeted when prior anti-terrorism authorities have been misused and/or abused. These initiatives must be transparent, responsive to community concerns, publicly demonstrate careful oversight, and ensure that they do not stigmatize communities. Further, DHS should not be the only agency working on prevention; ADL urges the Department to partner with Health and Human Services and other non-security Departments whenever possible.
- While Congress has funded a small grant program for prevention measures domestically, the program is too small to have an impact at scale. Now that the Administration has launched the Center for Prevention Programming and Partnerships within DHS, Congress should significantly scale its grant program; ADL has recommended a \$150 million annual grant level.

### *End the Complicity of Social Media in Facilitating Extremism*

Congress must prioritize countering online extremism and ensure that perpetrators who engage in unlawful activity online can be held accountable. ADL has launched the [REPAIR Plan](#), outlined below, which offers a comprehensive framework for platforms and policymakers to take meaningful action to decrease online hate and extremism.

### *Create an Independent Clearinghouse for Online Extremist Content*

Congress should work with the Biden-Harris Administration to create a publicly funded, independent nonprofit center to track online extremist threat information in real-time and make referrals to social media companies and law enforcement agencies when appropriate.

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

### *Target Foreign White Supremacist Terrorist Groups*

Congress must recognize that white supremacist extremism is a major global threat of our era and mobilize with that mindset.

- To date, no white supremacist organization operating overseas has been designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. Only one has been designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT). Congress should review how these designation decisions are made, whether any additional racially or ethnically motivated extremist groups outside the United States, particularly white supremacist groups, have reached the threshold for either designation, and whether such designations would help advance U.S. national interests.
- The Department of State was required to develop a strategy to counter global white supremacist extremism and to add white supremacist terrorism to annual Country Reports on Terrorism. That State has implemented the Country Reports guidance is laudable, and State may have created the strategy. However, the strategy has not been released publicly, making it impossible to evaluate. We urge more transparency from State in this process, for Congress to seek accountability for any gaps in the strategy, and to provide resources to implement it.
- The Department of State must mobilize a multilateral effort to address the threat of white supremacy globally. Multilateral best-practice institutions, such as the Global Counterterrorism Forum, the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, and the International Institute for Justice and Rule of Law, may be helpful mechanisms through which to channel some efforts. Moreover, the Global Engagement Center should be charged with undermining the propaganda of violent extremist groups—not

just designated terrorist organizations, but overseas white supremacist violent extremists as well. DHS should participate in these efforts, supporting overseas exchanges, partnerships, and best practices sharing to engage in learning from other countries and sharing U.S. best practices, where applicable.

## **The REPAIR Plan**

- R** Reorient and Resource Government
- E** Expose Platform Recklessness
- P** Put People Over Profit
- A** Advocate for Targets of Online Hate and Harassment
- I** Interrupt Disinformation
- R** Regulate Platforms

### *Reorient and Resource Government*

The responsibility to address online harms is fragmented across the federal and state governments, making it difficult to share information, coordinate enforcement, and establish leadership to ensure accountability. To date, the U.S. Government has not adequately invested in efforts to mitigate these problems. Without concerted action, the government continues to cede power to social media companies who shirk their responsibility to protect users.

- Government entities must fully use existing authorities to hold social media companies accountable for their complicity in furthering online harms.
- Policymakers must convene and prioritize the work of coordinating bodies like the White House Task Force to Address Online Harassment and Abuse, develop comprehensive strategies to guide their work, modernize and pass legislation to protect against 21st century hate, bolster research efforts on online harms, and appropriately reorient departments to respond to the fluid and diffuse online threat landscape. Efforts must be adequately resourced to ensure meaningful and lasting change.

### *Expose Platform Recklessness*

Platforms say they have implemented robust protections for users, yet there is no way to independently verify these claims. Moreover, revelations from Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen revealed that, despite Facebook's claims, its "AI systems only catch a very tiny minority of offending content and best-case scenario in the case of something like hate speech, at most they will ever get 10 to 20%." Although platforms allege that providing access to data would undermine user privacy and be too burdensome or expensive to implement, we know Big Tech is made up of billion-and trillion-dollar companies capable of improving systems, hiring additional staff, developing better products and practices, and providing genuine transparency.

- Policymakers must prioritize passing legislation that increases independent oversight and transparency of social media platforms. ADL's [Stop Hiding Hate](#) campaign advocated for

California Assembly Bill 587, which was signed into law in September 2022, to ensure platforms produce transparency reports we can read. Congress must build off of measured solutions, such as AB 587 to truly understand how platform practices impact society and its most vulnerable.

- Platforms must provide access to robust data for researchers, watchdogs, and users. Social media companies must also increase independent oversight of their platforms, including engaging in independent audits of platforms' algorithmic systems, enhanced content moderation, and improvements to user engagement features to help safeguard users. Simultaneously, policymakers should explore legislative solutions such as these to better hold platforms accountable for their wrongdoing and protect users' civil rights.

### *Put People Over Profit*

Targeted advertising, the fundamental business model utilized by mainstream social media platforms, maximizes profits by optimizing product mechanics that will keep users engaged online. To do this, social media companies recommend, rank, and amplify content that keeps us scrolling, reacting, and sharing. The longer users spend online and the more engaged they are, the more social media companies track and analyze their activity so platforms can better predict what content to suggest and find as many opportunities as possible to serve users targeted ads. Unfortunately, as research and whistleblowers have shown, the most engaging content is often the most corrosive and divisive. This problematic content, amplified by platforms' algorithms, radicalizes users and mainstreams fringe narratives previously relegated to the underbelly of the Internet.

- Policymakers must bolster data privacy and ban surveillance advertising to disrupt harmful business models to protect users, especially children.
- Government agencies and authorities tasked with protecting consumers must boost efforts to protect platform users as tech companies continue to engage in unfair and deceptive practices.
- Platforms must implement recommendations found in ADL's [Social Pattern Library](#) and build anti-hate by design principles into their products.
- Infrastructure providers who host platforms complicit in the spread of online harms must be held accountable. Providers can no longer support and profit from platforms that are agnostic about content that incites, promotes, or glorifies violence.

### *Advocate for Targets of Online Hate and Harassment*

Online harassment intrudes into users' lives in many ways and often hampers their ability to communicate. While many users have been affected by this activity, data demonstrates online harassment disproportionately impacts members of marginalized communities in their ability to work, socialize, learn, and express themselves online. According to ADL's latest data, 65% of marginalized groups, including women, religious minorities, people of color, LGBTQ+ people, and people with disabilities reported being harassed for an aspect of their identity. These harms are also prevalent in online gaming spaces. Findings from ADL's 2021 online gaming survey showed 5 in 6 adults ages 18-45 have experienced harassment in online multiplayer games. This cannot continue, especially in spaces designed to be pro-social.

- ADL’s [Backspace Hate](#) campaign supports legislative reform to close gaps in laws that deny victims redress for serious acts of online harassment and abuse like doxing, swatting and non-consensual distribution of intimate imagery.
- Congress must continue to modernize hate crime laws and data collection practices to capture the totality of online hate in the 21st century.
- Law enforcement agencies need enhanced training and additional resources for tracking crimes and developing prudent policies to protect targets of online hate.
- Platforms must provide sufficient support services for targets of online harassment and abuse.

### *Interrupt Disinformation*

Violent extremists and malicious actors spread falsehoods to terrorize vulnerable communities, chill civic participation, and disrupt democracy, all while advancing their political aims, radicalizing followers, and inciting violence. Their messages become further engrained in the mainstream by algorithms optimized to amplify content that increases user engagement. Influential people, including elected and appointed officials, candidates, media pundits, and ideological influencers, spread and normalize this content further, exacerbating profound distrust in government institutions and processes, science, medicine, and education. The deadly insurrection at the United States Capitol in January 2021 is a key example of how violence can erupt when social media amplifies falsehoods.

- Policymakers and platforms must take a proactive approach to stem the flow of disinformation. Despite fact checks on online content, some studies suggest people tend to remember the original falsehood rather than its correction. This behavioral bias underscores the need for creative, forward leaning solutions. New and meaningful ways to counter disinformation should be identified, including implementing tactics that increase “friction” to slow down and mitigate the spread of harmful content.
- Policymakers must establish effective media literacy programs and share information with the public in a timely and transparent fashion to stymie potential harms from disinformation.
- Platforms must prioritize and increase resources to combat English and non-English language disinformation.
- Policymakers, especially those in party leadership, should penalize elected or appointed officials when they spread disinformation.

### *Regulate Platforms*

Tech platforms provide the means for transmitting hateful content on a massive scale, while frequently amplifying and legitimizing this content through algorithmic promotion. Although algorithms can assist with facilitating discrimination, harassment, and increased offline harms, platforms are almost completely shielded from legal liability due to the breadth of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (Section 230) and the broad interpretation it has been given by the courts. These sweeping legal protections enjoyed by tech platforms are harmful and continue to

perpetuate an online ecosystem of hate.

- ADL supports careful legislative reform, but not elimination, of Section 230 to hold social media companies accountable for their role in fomenting hate and extremism that leads to violence. Section 230 reform must address social media platforms' role in amplifying content that incites violence, discriminates against users, and promotes terrorism. Reform must be focused so that it does not result in an overbroad suppression of free speech, nor unintentionally cement the monopolistic power of Big Tech. Any reform effort must learn from past mistakes and ensure that well-intentioned policy changes do not adversely impact those they are meant to protect. Thoughtful and targeted reform of Section 230 is an important and necessary component to fighting online harms and creating a more equitable Internet.

## **CONCLUSION**

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