

Congressional Testimony

Confronting White Supremacy: The Evolution of Anti-Democratic Extremism and the Continued Threat to Democracy

Oren Segal

Vice President, Center on Extremism

ADL

Committee on Oversight and Reform
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
U.S. House of Representatives

December 13, 2022

Washington, DC



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

INTRODUCTION TO ADL

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

Domestic violent extremism has been on the rise in recent years. The Jewish community continues to be a primary target of extremists, regardless of ideology, alongside and overlapping the LGBTQ+ and Black communities.

Right-wing extremist violence is currently the greatest domestic terrorism threat to everyone in this country. From Charleston to Charlottesville to Pittsburgh, to 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.

The impact of extremist violence and threats are not limited to their primary targets – there are dangerous ripple effects that reach entire communities and, indeed, the country as a whole. Unchecked extremism damages our social fabric and undermines our democratic norms.

These threats to democracy can take many forms, including death threats against public officials, kidnapping plots, and efforts to undermine the election process. None of this is limited to extremist actors, but we have seen significant extremist involvement in these types of actions in recent years. This includes but is not limited to the [attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021](#).

Documented actions include white supremacists and militia members responding to COVID-prevention protocols with threats of violence and death against public officials. Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer was targeted by would-be kidnappers [in a wide-ranging plot](#). The plotters viewed Whitmer as a symbol of “oppression” and hoped their actions would help spark a civil war.

[A recent study from ADL and Princeton’s Bridging Divides Initiative \(BDI\) shows](#) that threats to and harassment of local officials present a significant challenge to American democracy by discouraging civic engagement, undermining the work of public servants, and creating unprecedented stress on the cornerstones of democratic society including elections, education and public safety processes. Moreover, the threat to democracy is exacerbated by the fact that most of the election officials targeted were in swing states with contested elections, where election deniers were focused on the possibility of affecting national as well as state outcomes.

However, the threat to our democracy is not limited to elections. Growing numbers of extremist threats aimed at school administrators, teachers, journalists, public health officials, judges, and law enforcement officers are intended to intimidate, to silence voices with which they disagree, and to limit participation in the public sphere.

The conspiracy theories that radicalize and mobilize white supremacists, as well as other right-wing extremists, are laced with antisemitism and other forms of hatred and are closely associated with support for anti-democratic political violence and insurrectionism. And their adherents are no longer limited to a fringe group of extremists, but have become mainstreamed. A nationally representative survey from September 2022 found that among Americans who believed the use of force was justified to return former President Trump to office even if some people are killed or injured – some five percent of the U.S. population, which translates to [13 million Americans](#) – the biggest drivers were the Great Replacement Theory and QAnon.

Many extremists, including white supremacists, thrive in times of political and social chaos; recent, [widespread efforts to undermine all aspects of democracy](#) – from voting to public health – are evidence of their ongoing commitment to sowing rage, violence, and bitter discord.

The White Supremacist Threat

White supremacist activity in 2022 ranged [from a mass shooting in Buffalo](#) to the [America First Political Action Conference \(AFPAC\)](#) which was attended by a number of U.S. elected officials, to hundreds of incidents of propaganda distribution.

While racism and antisemitism are foundational to white supremacist ideology, these extremists embrace a wide range of hatreds, espousing xenophobia, Islamophobia, misogyny, and anti-LGBTQ+ bigotry. Extremists are learning from one another, echoing the violence of one attack in the planning for the next – from Charleston to Christchurch to Pittsburgh to El Paso to Buffalo. These attacks and the “manifestos” that often accompany them tend to have a lot in common – that’s because these attacks are often livestreamed, and the perpetrators are [emulating and glorifying each other](#).

Perhaps no one epitomizes this trend more [than Buffalo attacker Peyton Gendron](#).

Gendron, who allegedly posted a virulently racist, 180-page manifesto detailing his reasons for the attack, apparently chose a specific store and zip code because he believed a high percentage of Black people lived there. This mirrors the approach taken by the white supremacist shooter who targeted a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, with a substantially Hispanic customer base.

The ADL Center on Extremism also [found remarkable parallels](#) and overlap between online manifestos posted by Gendron and Christchurch shooter [Brenton Tarrant](#). While Gendron’s language is notably more antisemitic than Tarrant’s, 23% of the texts are identical, meaning Gendron lifted parts of Tarrant’s content, wholesale, to post before his own attack.

Gendron was not a member of a particular white supremacist group, but name-checked and applauded other white supremacist “ethno-soldiers” like [John Earnest](#), [Robert Bowers](#), and [Dylann Roof](#), who murdered congregants at synagogues in Poway, California and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and at a historically Black church in Charleston, South Carolina, respectively.

While Gendron, who [covered his weapon](#) with callouts to other white supremacist attacks and figures, attempted to livestream the shooting on the popular game streaming platform Twitch, the

link was quickly taken down. Livestreaming attacks has become a hallmark of white supremacist killing sprees.

These findings underscore the extent to which violent white supremacists, [even when living on opposite sides of the world](#), can easily find, internalize and mimic one another's hateful language – and deadly actions. It also highlights the ease with which people can find violent content online, even months or years after an attack.

Because white supremacy is often rooted in victimhood and anger over a perceived loss of status, its hateful tenets are easily – and frequently – applied to all marginalized communities. Increased extremist activity and targeted vitriol has an undeniable impact on the country and its citizens: In early December 2022, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a bulletin warning of [threats against LGBTQ+, Jewish and migrant communities](#).

Critically, many white supremacists no longer use the term “white supremacist,” preferring various euphemisms ranging from “white nationalist” to “white separatist” to “race realist” or [“identitarian.”](#)

Today's white supremacist ideology focuses on the notion that the white race itself is threatened with imminent extinction — unless white people take action — thanks 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. This is often expressed via the racist, conspiratorial [“Replacement Theory,”](#) or [“The Great Replacement.”](#)

Once largely relegated to white supremacist rhetoric, “The Great Replacement” has made its way into mainstream consciousness in the past several years. From the chants of “Jews Will Not Replace Us” on the University of Virginia campus to then-U.S. Rep. Steve King's tweet, “We can't restore our civilization with somebody else's babies,” to comments by [U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz](#) and television personality [Laura Ingraham](#), the racist conspiracy theory has well and truly arrived.

Pundits and far-right figures, including white supremacists, have taken up this cry; in 2022 everyone from [Tucker Carlson](#) to [Nick Fuentes](#) has expressed some iteration of Replacement Theory, arguing – implicitly or explicitly – that the white race is at risk of dying out. And as noted at the beginning of this testimony, Great Replacement Theory is a primary driver for the millions of Americans who believe violence is justified to restore the former president to office even if injury or death results. Some 60% also believed in Replacement Theory.

In a worrying sign that the white supremacist movement remains robust, a number of very active new groups have emerged in the last few years, including the [White Lives Matter](#) (WLM) network, the [National Socialist Club](#) and [NatSoc Florida](#).

In another indicator of a worsening threat environment, incidents of white supremacist propaganda distribution have been on the rise in recent years, with an increase from 2,723 in 2019 to 4,826 in 2021. Per ADL's initial 2022 numbers, that trend continues in 2022, with more than 500 incidents each month, on average.

This surge is due in part to the antisemitic Goyim Defense League (GDL), which in 2022 became a full-fledged white supremacist network focused on spreading antisemitic propaganda across the country. So far in 2022, ADL has logged more than 350 GDL propaganda incidents in 41 different states, up significantly from 74 incidents in 2021.

White supremacists use propaganda to spread hate, promote themselves, attack their perceived enemies and present themselves as victims of an “anti-white” society. In some cases, they use current events to legitimize their hateful views. Shortly after the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, white supremacists created [propaganda pieces presenting](#) January 6 insurrectionist Ashli Babbitt as a martyr for their cause. Similarly, they [threw their support behind](#) Kyle Rittenhouse, creating propaganda claiming “Kyle was right.” And, in the wake of the [deadly holiday parade attack in Waukesha](#), Wisconsin, white supremacists leveraged the tragedy by sowing racist and antisemitic conspiracy theories on the ground and online.

The coronavirus pandemic likewise provided white supremacists with new targets – including Asian-Americans – and seemed to energize their propaganda efforts. In 2020, white supremacist propaganda incidents [nearly doubled from the year before](#), despite COVID restrictions on travel and public gatherings.

By using propaganda to spread hate, a small number of people can have an outsized impact, giving the appearance of larger numbers and affecting entire communities. These fliers and stickers reflect white supremacists’ equal opportunity approach to hate, targeting racial and religious minorities, women and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Anti-LGBTQ+ Violence and Harassment

In early December 2022 alone, the ADL Center on Extremism (COE) tracked several extremist events targeting the LGBTQ+ community. This wave of bigoted action from the far-right [Proud Boys](#), the virulently antisemitic [Goyim Defense League](#), and two white supremacist groups, comes just weeks after five people were murdered and at least 19 injured in a shooting at an LGBTQ+ club in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Also in December, [a Texas man was arrested for making death threats](#) against a Boston physician who provides gender-affirming care to the LGBTQ+ community, and California State Senator Scott Wiener, who is Jewish and gay, was targeted by threatening [emails referring to him as a "groomer" and a bomb threat](#).

This is part of an ongoing, two-year effort by far-right “activists” and extremists to attack the LGBTQ+ community and demonize people via repeated false claims that LGBTQ+ people are “pedophiles” who are “grooming” children in order to abuse them. This false and malicious narrative has been weaponized to label the LGBTQ+ community as “groomers” and has fueled a slew of hostile legislation and policies aimed at erasing the discussion of LGBTQ+ related issues in schools, removing LGBTQ+ books from schools and public libraries and, especially, to ostracize, defame, and harass transgender people. This narrative has also been propagated by the popular anti-LGBTQ+ Twitter account Libs of TikTok, which shares videos to generate outrage.

Some white supremacists, meanwhile, link antisemitic and racist conspiracy theories like [the Great Replacement](#) with the LGBTQ+ community, alleging that LGBTQ+ culture and pedophilia are

promoted by elites to encourage lower white birthrates with the ultimate goal of “replacing” the white population with Black and Brown people.

The result of this widespread hateful rhetoric has been a spike in harassment, threats, and violence targeting the LGBTQ+ community. This dangerous development increases the risks facing an already marginalized group by falsely accusing them of one of the vilest behaviors imaginable, in a way that implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) condones violence. Politicians, extremists, and pundits alike are fanning the flames of this hateful campaign, which not infrequently includes elements of antisemitism alongside its core anti-gay and anti-transgender hate.

Misogyny

White supremacists generally subscribe to profoundly regressive gender roles, demanding that women submit to their fathers and later, husbands, while producing white babies and keeping their homes immaculate. Women who deviate from this prescribed path are viewed with suspicion and sometimes targeted with violence. This ideology sets up [easy cross-pollination between white supremacist men and misogynists, including incels and so-called Men’s Rights Activists \(MRAs\).](#)

Incels, or involuntary celibates, are heterosexual men who believe women should be punished for having too much power in the “sexual marketplace.” Adherents have committed deadly attacks against women – [at a Tallahassee yoga studio, near a college campus in Santa Cruz, and in Toronto,](#) among many others.

Men’s Rights Activists believe women’s efforts to achieve professional parity have gone too far and are now actively harming men by allowing women to “steal” opportunities and legal rights. Like incels, MRAs are largely relegated to angry online spaces, but occasionally a particularly violent believer will launch an attack against a high-prestige woman, as in the case of Judge Esther Salas. [Her would-be attacker, a longtime “men’s rights attorney”](#) and self-described “anti-feminist” who harbored a deep hatred for women, murdered Salas’s son and left her husband with serious injuries.

In [December 2021](#), Lyndon McLeod went on a multi-location shooting spree, killing five people and wounding a police officer, who was able to kill McLeod. He had harbored revenge fantasies against most of the victims and was involved in the toxic masculinity subculture of the “manosphere;” specifically as an advocate of hypermasculinity, claiming that “alpha” and “sigma” males should be the only males allowed to lead others and to procreate, while “beta” males and women should hold lower places and be deferential. He self-published a long three-volume novel that expounded upon these views and detailed his revenge fantasies.

Many violent misogynists test the waters before plunging into violence, starting out with stalking or harassment before moving on to attacks. This underscores the critical role of lawmakers and law enforcement officers, who need to understand and recognize this escalating behavior – and take steps to contain it.

Oath Keepers/Anti-government Extremism

Far right anti-government extremism is not motivated by white supremacist ideology but by conspiracy-fueled opposition to the federal government. However, anti-government extremists can show up for events or causes at which other right-wing extremists, including white supremacists, are present, such as the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Today, [the Oath Keepers](#) are the country's most active anti-government extremist group. Founded in April 2009 by Stewart Rhodes, from its inception the Oath Keepers have displayed an extremist anti-government ideology. Much like the rest of the anti-government militia movement, the group's members believe that a shadowy conspiracy – often referred to as the New World Order – has co-opted the federal government to strip Americans of their rights and ultimately enslave them.

However, the Oath Keepers differentiate themselves from other groups in the militia movement by explicitly targeting current and former members of the military, law enforcement, and emergency services personnel with their recruitment and messaging. Oath Keepers explain that if the federal government issues an unconstitutional order – often illustrated by extreme hypotheticals such as mass gun confiscation or illegally mass detaining Americans in concentration camps – it is up to the military and law enforcement to enforce these edicts. For this reason, the group tries to reach service members first, so they are prepared to refuse and resist such orders. Though Oath Keepers frame their objections in the language of constitutionality, these interpretations are typically not grounded in any legal basis and are warped by conspiratorial thinking; as a result, their objections typically boil down to simple opposition to specific laws or regulations.

A 2022 [investigation by ADL Center on Extremism researchers found](#) that thousands of public officials – including elected officials, members of law enforcement, government employees and others – had signed up and paid membership dues to the Oath Keepers. Though there is no evidence that the Oath Keepers pursued any plans to “infiltrate” public offices or institutions, the fact that they succeeded in recruiting numerous individuals within these domains to join or support their organization means their extremist ideology has a foothold in mainstream seats of power.

Members of the Oath Keepers have 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. The Oath Keepers first garnered national attention in 2014 and 2015 for their armed participation in disputes between ranchers or miners and federal agencies, most famously in Nevada where they joined the 2014 Bundy Ranch armed standoff against the Bureau of Land Management. Armed Oath Keepers also participated in a 2015 standoff in Lincoln, Montana, between the White Hope Mine and the U.S. Forest Service, as well as a 2015 armed confrontation in Josephine County, Oregon, between the Sugar Pine Mine and the Bureau of Land Management.

Most recently and notably, at least 26 Oath Keepers have been arrested in connection with the January 6 Capitol attack. Of these, 12 – including founder Stewart Rhodes – have been charged with seditious conspiracy against the United States for their role in the insurrection, based on indictments alleging the men conspired with co-defendants and others to oppose, by force, the execution of the laws enabling the transfer of presidential power. On November 29, 2022, a jury found Rhodes and Oath Keepers member Kelly Meggs guilty of seditious conspiracy for their role

in plotting the January 6th attack. The charge carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. Three additional defendants, Kenneth Harrelson, Jessica Watkins, and Thomas Caldwell were found guilty of related felony charges. A second seditious conspiracy trial against other Oath Keepers members is underway, and a seditious conspiracy trial against certain Proud Boys members is expected to start later this month.

All five of the Oath Keepers who were found guilty last month in the criminal trial are also defendants in a [federal civil lawsuit](#) in which ADL is co-counsel, representing the District of Columbia in an action against the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers arising out of the January 6 insurrection.

Antisemitism

Antisemitism is an ongoing threat to the American Jewish community. There were 683 reported hate crimes against Jews in 2020, 963 in 2019, and 847 in 2018. The FBI's data is based on voluntary reporting by local law enforcement and appropriate characterization of crimes as also being hate crimes. For a variety of reasons, dozens of large cities either underreport or do not report hate crime data at all. For that reason, experts, including at ADL, know that the real figure for crimes targeting Jews, as well as other minorities, is even higher than the FBI reporting indicates.

The year began with a violent attack on the Jewish community in Colleyville, Texas. On January 15th, a gunman entered Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, 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 – one that continues to grow as we move towards the end of the year.

Rising Antisemitism

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

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

Each year, ADL's Center on Extremism tracks incidents of antisemitic harassment, vandalism and assault in the United States. Since 1979, we have published this information in an annual [Audit of Antisemitic Incidents](#). In 2021, ADL tabulated 2,717 antisemitic incidents throughout the United States. This is a 34% increase from the [2,026 incidents tabulated in 2020](#) and the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979.

Of the 2,717 incidents recorded in 2021, 1,776 were cases of harassment, a 43% increase from 1,242 in 2020, and 853 incidents were cases of vandalism, a 14% increase from 751 in 2020. The 88 incidents of antisemitic assault (a 167% increase from 33 in 2020), involved 131 victims; none of the assaults were deadly. Approximately 18% of these incidents were attributable to known extremist groups, including the virulently antisemitic, Florida-based GDL.

QAnon

[QAnon is a decentralized, far-right political movement](#) rooted in a baseless conspiracy theory that the world is controlled by the “Deep State,” a cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles, and that former President Donald Trump is the only person who can defeat it.

While the QAnon movement is not white supremacist in nature, there are antisemitic, anti-LGBTQ+, and anti-immigrant elements within QAnon that may appeal to white supremacists and may in turn bring Q adherents into white supremacist spaces. Many QAnon influencers spout antisemitic beliefs; the core tenets of “Pizzagate” and “Save the Children,” both of which are QAnon-adjacent beliefs, play into antisemitic conspiracy theories like Blood Libel.

The conspiracy first emerged on 4chan in 2017, when an anonymous poster known as “Q,” believed by QAnon followers to be a team of U.S. government and military insiders, began posting cryptic messages online about Trump's alleged efforts to takedown the Deep State online.

Since the 2020 presidential election, QAnon has become increasingly mainstream, a growing force within U.S. politics. Across the United States, QAnon adherents – animated by false claims that the 2020 election was “rigged” or “stolen” – are running for political office, signing up to become poll workers, filing frivolous election-related lawsuits, and harassing election officials.

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 via the through-line of white supremacist ideology.

Such content is enmeshed in conspiracy theories and explodes on platforms that seem designed to spread disinformation.

The January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, was planned and promoted on mainstream platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, as well as fringe platforms like Parler, Gab, 4Chan, and Telegram. Today, thanks to underinvestment in content moderation by mainstream platforms and lack of action by fringe platforms, there is little doubt

that both types of platforms have helped radicalize users and normalize extremists' actions online and offline.

Fringe Social Media Platforms

Gab

Gab serves as a forum where white supremacists and extremists publish manifestos or gather to plan and organize hateful acts. [Founder Andrew Torba](#) is a virulent antisemite who promotes white supremacists and espouses much of the same hateful and extremist rhetoric that his platform is known for. In November 2022, he made an antisemitic post on Telegram, using a verified Gab account, saying the GOP needed to be destroyed before another “Zionist bootlicker” was voted into office (note: ADL can say with high confidence that the verified Gab telegram channel is run by Torba, as he has written in the first person on this channel numerous times.)

Torba routinely promotes elected U.S. politicians who create accounts on his platform. In early 2022, Torba shared that more than 50 U.S. officials had already created Gab accounts, including figures such as [Paul Gosar](#), [Marjorie Taylor-Greene](#), [Lauren Boebert](#), [Matt Gaetz](#), and [Wendy Rogers](#). These elected officials have all either been connected to other extremist movements, involved in spreading election conspiracies or COVID-19 mis/disinformation, or, in the case of Gosar, [promoting violence against political opponents](#). Torba has repeatedly described these individuals, among other politicians, as being part of the “Gab Caucus,” with several of these officials continuing to share misinformation and rhetoric on the platform.

Torba has acknowledged that these connections are part of a concerted effort to shift the “Overton Window” — or what is considered “acceptable” in politics and society — towards a broad embrace of Christian nationalism. In 2022, Torba wrote that he measures success by “how well we are influencing the influencer,” noting that multiple members of Congress are now publicly embracing Christian nationalism, and that phrases and ideologies like the Great Replacement that were previously considered extreme are now part of [mainstream television shows](#) and political conversations.

The platform has a long history of hosting extremists. In October 2018, white supremacist [Robert Bowers killed 11 people](#) at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh after posting antisemitic, anti-immigrant rants on Gab. Two years later, the social media site gained traction among right-wing extremists, including white supremacists. In fact, 60 percent of the 47 right-wing extremist groups [ADL has identified](#) on Gab were created in 2020.

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

Parler

Notwithstanding Ye's short-lived 2022 [bid to purchase Parler](#), the site remains firmly on the fringe.

Shortly after the Capitol insurrection, [Amazon Web Services](#) (AWS) announced that Parler had violated AWS's terms of service and removed the platform from its hosting service, taking it

offline. [Apple and Google similarly](#) suspended Parler's app from their app stores. [Parler returned online](#) in February 2021, after securing an alternative hosting service. [Proud Boys](#), [QAnon](#) adherents, anti-government extremists ([Oath Keepers](#), [Three Percenters](#) and [militia](#)), and white supremacists (from members of the [alt right](#) to [accelerationists](#)) continue to openly promote their ideologies on Parler. Additionally, [Holocaust denial](#), antisemitism, racism and other forms of bigotry are easy to find. Today, Parler claims to have around [16 million active users](#).

4Chan, 8Chan and 8Kun

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

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

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

4Chan, 8Chan, and 8Kun users are typically anonymous, with no screen names. That anonymity allows people to post outrageous, disgusting, or hateful photos and messages, ranging from hate speech to posts about pedophilia.

Telegram

Telegram, an online social networking app that claims [more than 700 million monthly active users](#), [continues to gain popularity](#), and remains a favorite online gathering place for the international, overtly white supremacist community and other extremist groups who have been [displaced or banned](#) from more popular platforms. The platform, which is a cloud-based chat and group messaging app, was created in 2013 by the same two Russian brothers who founded the Russian-based social networking site [VKontakte](#), or VK. VK is also known for its lack of moderation of white supremacist content. At present, the various platforms' leadership teams appear to be uninterested in addressing this issue.

Mainstream Social Media Platforms

Fringe platforms, despite having relatively small user bases, leverage bigger social media platforms, like Twitter and Facebook, to increase their reach and influence. But these mainstream social media platforms are not merely unwitting accomplices to hate and extremism. In the case of the bigger social media platforms, white supremacist propaganda has found a clear pathway to virality. 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 these large social media platforms which depend on increasing user engagement to surveil them and collect copious amounts of data about them — and their associates and activities — all to help

serve up content that will keep them scrolling and clicking as often and for as long as possible. This data-collection cycle enables ad-supported mainstream social media platforms to sell as many hyper-targeted advertisements as possible.

Mainstream social media platforms' profit incentive demands engagement. The algorithms, recommendation engines, and user interfaces are designed, deployed, maintained, and tweaked to deliver more and deeper engagement. Unfortunately, hate and extremism often deliver a high volume of engagement, which is exactly what platforms need to make money. So, the self-feeding loop repeats itself, and more hate and extremist content is amplified to generate more engagement and more profit.

This hate-for-profit cycle continues even where, as we now know from whistleblowers and the companies' own researchers, the platforms are keenly aware of the societal cost. Toxic content is thus given reach and impact unparalleled in human history as hate and extremism go viral and specifically target those most susceptible. 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.

Mainstream platforms have been unable, or unwilling, to address their role in the spread of white supremacist hatred. Most recently, even though the [deadly May 14, 2022, attack at a Buffalo supermarket](#) was livestreamed and available briefly via Twitch, the footage spread quickly across large and highly popular social media platforms. For too long, it remained online for public consumption.

Five full days after the Buffalo shooting rampage, the ADL Center on Extremism (COE) was able to find the footage on platforms as diverse as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Telegram, Bitchute, and Gab. Framing and characterization of the videos varied widely between platforms and users, and although many posters did not use the footage to explicitly promote or applaud extremist beliefs, the proliferation of this extremist violent content creates a dangerous online environment. It normalizes extremist and hate-motivated violence and has the potential to inspire future violence.

Meta

Meta (the company that owns Facebook and Instagram—as well as other technology platforms) claims that it is addressing hate. ADL and others, however, continue to expose egregious examples of online hate, misinformation, and extremism across the company's products.

[In 2022, COE researchers examined the presence of white supremacist prison gangs on Facebook](#) and found that gang members use the platform freely to network with fellow gang members as well as members of other gangs.

These expansive "friend" networks are formed without using Facebook's group feature. Gang members instead use other available Facebook features to promote their gangs, signal their gang affiliation, and share their white supremacist viewpoints, including gang symbols, acronyms and images in their profile picture, "intros" and screen names.

Additionally, white supremacist gang members exploit Facebook features to promote their gangs, broadcast their gang affiliation and share their white supremacist views. This includes the blatant

use of gang symbols and phrases as well as less obvious signals, including gang specific acronyms, phraseology, numeric references and hand signs.

The widespread use of gang references on Facebook makes it easy for gang members to connect and reconnect with each other as they move in and out of the prison system, allowing them to share phone numbers and ask their Facebook friends to call them or to inquire if they are out of prison yet.

The very distinct subculture of white supremacist prison gangs permeates these Facebook “friend” networks. Strong emphasis is placed on gang loyalty and pride, with particular attention paid to concepts such as trust, honor, loyalty, brotherhood, respect and love. Gang members often show their gang affiliation in their profile image by including a photo or graphic of their gang’s name, “patch” or hand sign. They also often make gang references in their screen names, Facebook “intros” and customized URLs.

In June 2020, Facebook [announced](#) that it took down hundreds of groups and pages on its platform associated with the violent anti-government [boogaloo movement](#). Despite efforts by the boogaloo movement to [camouflage](#) itself to retain a Facebook foothold, the social media company’s efforts were largely effective, and after the de-platforming, it became difficult to find large and active boogaloo spaces on Facebook.

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

TikTok

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

In the short time since Elon Musk took over [Twitter in late October 2022](#), the platform has taken several steps that have empowered extremists. Chief among them: the decision to sell the “[verified](#)” [blue check mark](#) and grant “[amnesty](#)” to suspended Twitter accounts.

In the first few weeks after the acquisition, ADL noted both an [increase](#) in antisemitic content on the platform and a [decrease](#) in the moderation of antisemitic posts, a troubling situation that will likely get worse, given the [reported](#) cuts to Twitter’s content moderation staff. These layoffs have already affected the proliferation of hate on Twitter, and the return of extremists of all kinds to the platform has the potential to supercharge the spread of extremist content and disinformation. This may also lead to increased harassment of users.

These issues predate Musk’s takeover: On October 12, a 19-year-old man [opened fire](#) in front of an LGBTQ+ bar in Bratislava, Slovakia, killing two people and injuring a third before he was found dead the following morning. A review of a screed shared on Twitter by the shooter a few hours before the attack, as well as his broader social media presence, makes it clear that he harbored anti-LGBTQ+ and antisemitic beliefs, and subscribed to an accelerationist, white supremacist worldview.

[The ADL Center on Extremism’s investigation](#) also revealed that for over a year the shooter had been posting violent and hateful content publicly on Twitter, an act that raises questions about the effectiveness of Twitter’s content moderation and the platform’s role in spreading white supremacist content (even before Musk’s takeover). At this time, the shooter does not appear to be part of a formal white supremacist group, making this the latest incident involving an individual who self-radicalized via the internet and used the hate they consumed as fuel to launch an attack on perceived enemies.

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

Spotify

A 2022 report from the ADL Center on Extremism [identified 40 white supremacist artists](#) with a presence on Spotify, one of the world’s largest music-streaming and audio-content platforms. Music has long been an effective way to radicalize extremists, allowing artists to both entertain and indoctrinate vulnerable listeners. At a time of increasing hate-motivated extremist violence, Spotify is not only allowing racism and incitement of white supremacist music, but also actively promoting that content on its own playlists.

In February 2022, ADL’s Center on Technology and Society (CTS) published a [report](#) analyzing the Spotify platform rules. The report found these rules to be loosely defined and that they did not live up to Spotify’s responsibility as a streaming platform.

Although Spotify updated its [rules](#) following the CTS report, adding a much more explicit anti-extremism policy, these rules do not appear to be strictly enforced. Users who want to proactively report problematic content are only able to do so on the Spotify desktop app and not on the mobile app, which constitutes a major roadblock to flagging problematic content.

YouTube

Compared to Facebook and Twitter, YouTube has remained largely under the radar for its role in spreading disinformation and misinformation. This should not be the case: the platform waited more than a month after the 2020 presidential election to remove videos claiming electoral fraud—by then, millions of people had been exposed to false information that eroded trust in our democracy. Furthermore, [ADL research](#) shows YouTube continues to push people into extremist content despite the company’s claim that it has overhauled its recommendation algorithms. In 2022, the extremist (virulently antisemitic and anti-LGBTQ+) New IFB church began using YouTube “shorts” [to reach a broader audience and improve engagement](#).

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

Online Gaming

[ADL’s annual report](#) from the Center on Technology & Society (CTS) on experiences in online multiplayer games shows that the spread of hate, harassment, and extremism in online multiplayer games continues to grow and remains unchecked. The report explores the social interactions, experiences, attitudes and behaviors of online multiplayer gamers ages 10 and older nationwide.

Overall, more than 4 out of 5 adults (86%), ages 18-45, experienced harassment in online multiplayer games, representing over 67 million adult gamers. More than 3 out of 5 young people (66% of teens and 70% of pre-teens) experienced harassment in these same spaces, representing over 17 million young gamers.

For the fourth year in a row, gender was the most frequently cited reason for identity-based abuse. For example, 47% of respondents who identify as women experienced identity-based harassment as a result of their gender. Additionally, the largest increases in identity-based harassment occurred for adults who identified as Jewish (34% in 2022 vs. 22% in 2021), Latino (31% in 2022 vs. 25% in 2021), and Muslim (30% in 2022 vs. 26% in 2021).

[The December 2022 report](#) also found an alarming rise in the exposure to white supremacist ideology among gamers. For instance, adult exposure to white supremacy in online games has more than doubled in 2022 to 20% of gamers, up from eight percent in 2021. Among young gamers ages 10-17, 15% have been exposed to white supremacist ideologies and themes in online games. Our results and [other research](#) suggest that the inability of the games industry to build safe, respectful spaces for their users has made communities within online game platforms so rife with hate that they rival the worst places on the internet, such as the notorious forum [4chan](#).

Although the connection between video games and violence has been [repeatedly disproven](#), there is a [growing body of research](#) examining the connection between the industry's negligence in moderating hate within online games and the normalization of extremist ideologies. In October 2021, the [Extremism and Gaming Research Network](#) was launched, bringing together various efforts to study radicalization and online games, as a result of increased interest in this arena.

Unfortunately, there is plenty of grist for this research.

On May 14, 2022, a white supremacist extremist committed a mass murder at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, killing 10 Black shoppers and injuring three others. In the logs of his messages on the social platform Discord, the shooter wrote that a game on Roblox was a key vector in his radicalization.

The government of New Zealand released a report on the anti-Muslim attack in Christchurch that clearly showed how the [shooter's path to radicalization started in online multiplayer games](#), where he was able to "openly express racist and far right views" without pushback from the community or the platform. Researchers used [anonymized German police case files](#) to investigate the influence of online gaming spaces such as Roblox and gaming-adjacent social platforms like Discord in radicalizing two children under 14. One of the children was drawn to World War II recreations on Roblox, where he befriended someone who eventually invited him to join a far-right Discord server with users who wanted to "liberate the country of all Jews and fags." The study echoed [Wired's reporting on extremist activity in Roblox](#), which found the platform was a fertile environment for fascism, hosting recreations of mass murders and games with slavery.

The games industry cannot claim ignorance of disturbing findings related to extremism and online gaming. At the Game Developers Conference (GDC), a major industry event, two researchers, Dr. Rachel Kowert and Alex Newhouse, discussed worrying signs of extremist normalization in the popular game *Call of Duty* (COD), including the appearance of "[RAHOWA](#)," an acronym for "Racial Holy War" that is used as a rallying cry for white supremacists in usernames on COD's leaderboards. The researchers also talked about interconnected, openly extremist networks of users on Roblox and Steam, an online games store and forum. They showed the presence of far-right individuals on gaming platforms, including members of the white supremacist group [Patriot Front](#) on Roblox and a former leader of the neo-Nazi group [Feuerkrieg Division](#) on Steam.

The games industry's progress is slow even when compared to that of social media companies, which are hardly exemplars of user safety or accountability. Only one major games company, Roblox Corporation, has an [explicit, public-facing policy against extremism](#). Earlier this year, Wildlife Studios, a mobile-games company headquartered in Brazil, produced [the first gaming transparency report](#) that shares data on how a company acted against hate and harassment in its

online games, followed by [Xbox in November 2022](#). Transparency reports and policies banning the expression of extremist ideologies are the bare minimum required to fight hate in online games.

Additional Extremist Groups of Concern

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.

The Proud Boys often overstate the diversity of their membership to deflect allegations of racism and antisemitism, but their rhetoric and actions frequently belie this notion. There are several Proud Boys offshoot channels on Telegram run by self-described high-ranking members or former members of the group that share explicitly white supremacist and antisemitic content. While these channels may not represent the views of all group members, they have some of the highest subscribership of any Proud Boys-related channels and official Proud Boys chapters share their content in their own channels.

This can also be seen on the ground. For example, on two occasions in 2022 members of the Proud Boys participated in activities with the White Lives Matter Network, a network of white supremacists who participate in monthly days of action. Former National Chairman Enrique Tarrio pleaded guilty to charges surrounding the burning of a Black Lives Matter Banner outside of a historic Black church in Washington, D.C. after a “StopTheSteal” rally in December 2020. Photos from the incident show a large group of Proud Boys partaking in the banner burning in addition to a separate group who destroyed another Black Lives Matter banner at a separate church, breaking it in half. At this same rally, a member of the Proud Boys attacked a counter-protester while someone simultaneously screamed, “Fucking Jew.” The incident was captured on video, which ADL has reviewed.

The Proud Boys was formed in 2016 by VICE Media co-founder Gavin McInnes. In an [op-ed in the far-right outlet Taki’s Magazine](#)—notorious for its regular contributors, who included white supremacist Jared Taylor—McInnes announced the foundation of the group. He described its members as “Western chauvinists who refuse to apologize for creating the modern world” and who “long for the days when ‘girls were girls and men were men.’” In McInnes’ own words, the Proud Boys are a “pro-western fraternity,” essentially a drinking club dedicated to male bonding, socializing and the celebration all things related to western culture.

In reality, the Proud Boys bear many of the hallmarks of a gang and its members have taken part in multiple acts of brutal violence and intimidation. While the Proud Boys insist that they only act in self-defense, there have been several incidents contradicting that, including one in which two members of the group were convicted of attempted gang assault, attempted assault and riot. The Proud Boys were also the extremist group with one of the highest number of arrests related to their participation in the January 6th insurrection. Many members have criminal records for violent behavior and the organization actively pursues violence against their perceived enemies. McInnes officially left the group in early 2019 before two members of the group were convicted for their role in the 2018 fight outside of the Metropolitan Republican Club. McInnes maintains

relationships with some group members and chapters and still has some degree of influence, though not formally.

Leadership was assumed briefly by disgraced Texas attorney, Jason van Dyke, before he was replaced by Enrique Tarrio, a Cuban-American from Miami. Tarrio stepped down from leadership in February 2021 and no new national leader has been formally instated for the group. After the January 6, 2021 insurrection, Proud Boys national leadership, including the chairmanship and elders chapter, effectively dissolved following the incarceration the group's most influential members due to their participation in the insurrection.

These extensive insurrection-related arrests may seem catastrophic for the Proud Boys as a group, but they quickly rebounded and rallied around incarcerated members who they have branded as wrongly persecuted "political prisoners." The encrypted social media messaging platform Telegram was integral to the group's transition from relatively robust national oversight to a collection of geographically disparate chapters. In late 2021, the Proud Boys publicly released for the first time in the organization's history a list of active Proud Boys chapters.

The release of chapter names on Telegram facilitated recruitment efforts, ushering more chapters to the platform to create chapter-specific channels and content. It also allowed individuals still aligned with the national group's vision to try and retain some control over who can and cannot use the Proud Boys name. Throughout 2021 and 2022, the Proud Boys have been plagued by infighting and disputes over which chapters are "legitimate" and which are "rogue." Releasing chapter names on Telegram allowed them to put forth a specific list of "official chapters" and encourage the formation of new chapters with the promise of free publicity for those chapters that stayed in line.

The focus on chapters is also emblematic of the shift within the group towards more localized engagement. In the aftermath of January 6th, individual Proud Boys chapters now have more autonomy and have proved a willingness to engage in on-the-ground activity in their own communities. We have seen this especially with the Proud Boys targeting of school board meetings where they have rallied against COVID-19 mandates, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and LGBTQ+ literature in schools. In 2022, the Proud Boys have consistently targeted local LGBTQ+ events, with a particular focus on drag queen-related events. In showing up to these events, Proud Boys seek to intimidate participants into accepting their extremist viewpoints, something members of their Cape Fear chapter [told press directly](#) when questioned about their presence at a 2021 school board meeting.

The Proud Boys want to have a common cause with the mainstream, and to that end, often glom onto fraught current debates to determine their activities. The Proud Boys have rallied around election denial, as evidenced by their strong participation in "StopTheSteal" events in 2020 and their participation in the January 6, 2021, insurrection. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they rallied around the anti-mandate cause, protesting mask and vaccine requirements. Their participation in anti-mandate activity led to school closures on more than one occasion.

In 2022, the Proud Boys continued to play a significant role at many anti-LGBTQ+ protests, including in [December, 2022](#), when members from across at least three states joined white supremacists in Columbus, Ohio, to protest a (cancelled) drag story-time event. Despite the cancellation, at least 50 Proud Boys were on the scene, representing the largest number of

protesters present, alongside members of Patriot Front, White Lives Matter and unaffiliated protesters. The extremists do not appear to have coordinated their efforts, and Proud Boys shouted insults at other groups throughout the protest.

Between 2017 and 2020, the Proud Boys established themselves as a dominant force within what has been referred to as [the alt lite](#). Often easily recognizable thanks to their black and yellow Fred Perry polo shirts and other black and yellow clothing, members were regulars at far-right demonstrations and Trump rallies. After several years of forging alliances with members of the Republican political establishment, the Proud Boys carved out a niche for themselves as both a right-wing fight club and a [volunteer security force for the GOP](#).

During this period, despite their associations with mainstream politicians, Proud Boys' actions and statements repeatedly landed them in the company of white supremacists and right-wing extremists. Jason Kessler, the primary organizer of the deadly 2017 [Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville](#), is a former Proud Boy. Several members attended the violent August 12, 2017, demonstration that ended in the death of counter-protester Heather Heyer. (ADL provided expert and financial support in the federal civil rights case ([Sines v. Kessler](#)) brought against the neo-Nazis who organized that rally. Plaintiffs secured a historic win in this case in November 2021.)

During an [October 2018](#) brawl [outside the Metropolitan Republican Club in Manhattan](#), (for which two Proud Boys members were convicted and sentenced to substantial prison terms, and seven others pleaded guilty), the Proud Boys were joined by 211 Bootboys, an ultra-nationalist and violent skinhead gang based in New York City. In October 2019, members of the Denver chapter of the Proud Boys marched with members of [Patriot Front](#) and former members of the now-defunct neo-Nazi group [Traditionalist Worker Party](#). These relationships show the Proud Boys to be less a pro-western drinking club and instead an extremist, right-wing gang. In 2020, the Proud Boys solidified their status as the most visible and most active right-wing extremist group in the country. As the nation grappled with the pandemic, members of the Proud Boys became a [regular sight](#) at anti-lockdown protests, using the demonstrations not only to raise their profile, but as recruitment opportunities. The group is not unique in this sense – [Boogaloo bois](#) and [militia members](#) were also frequent participants at these rallies. Another key factor in the Proud Boys' 2020 activity was [their embrace of the #Saveourchildren campaign](#), alongside [QAnon](#) adherents. The new links with QAnon allowed the Proud Boys access to untapped segments of the pro-Trump extremist movement.

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

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

[14, 2020](#) and the second on [December 12, 2020](#), with the second rally ending with four members of the [Proud Boys suffering stab wounds](#) from a brawl.

During that second rally, Proud Boys members allegedly set fire to a BLM banner they stole from Asbury United Methodist Church, a historically Black church. Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio took responsibility for the incident and was later charged with destruction of property. He was arrested, carrying two extended gun magazines, just before the January 4, 2021 attack. Tarrio ultimately [pleaded guilty](#) to destruction of property and attempting to possess a high-capacity gun magazine, both misdemeanors. A civil case brought by the Metropolitan AME Church against the Proud Boys and Tarrio arising from a separate incident involving the destruction of a BLM banner resulted in a [default judgment against the Proud Boys](#).

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

The Department of Justice is also criminally prosecuting a number of Proud Boys, having charged them with seditious conspiracy against the United States, and other related felonies. That trial is set to begin shortly, and the criminal defendants also include many of the defendants in the civil lawsuit filed by the District of Columbia.

Groypers/Groyper Army

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

Like the alt right and other white supremacists, Groypers believe they are working to defend against demographic and cultural changes that are destroying the “true America” – a white,

Christian nation. However, Groypers differ in a number of ways from the alt right. They identify themselves as “American nationalists” who are part of the “America First” movement. To the Groypers, “America First” means that the U.S. should close its borders, bar immigrants, oppose globalism and promote “traditional” values like Christianity, and oppose “liberal” values such as feminism and LGBTQ+ rights. They claim not to be racist or antisemitic and see their bigoted views as “normal” and necessary to preserve white, European-American identity and culture.

However, some members have expressed racist and antisemitic views on multiple occasions. They believe their views are shared by the majority of white people.

Long Term Trends: The Growing Threat of Domestic Terrorism

While it is impossible to say with absolute certainty what lies ahead, we know that white supremacists and some other extremists, including anti-Muslim extremists, anti-immigrant

extremists and antisemites, are driven by conspiracy theories as well as manufactured fears around demographic change which some extremists fear will only accelerate as they perceive the Biden Administration to be enacting more humane policies towards immigrants and refugees who are people of color. Extremists equate those policies to “white genocide.”

Anti-LGBTQ+ bigotry appears to be gaining momentum, with [more frequent attacks](#) and protests against drag events. Violent misogyny remains a [crisis worldwide](#).

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. The Biden Administration 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. The recent antisemitic outbursts [from Ye](#) and [Kyrie Irving](#), among others, only show how ubiquitous and mainstream antisemitism has become.

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 is not just bigotry directed toward Jews; it uses that hatred and bigotry against the Jewish community to undermine democratic practices by framing democracy as a conspiracy, as Eric Ward of the Western States Center notes, “rather than as a tool of empowerment or a functional tool of governance. In other words, the more people buy into antisemitism and its understanding of the world, the more they lose faith in democracy.”

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

We need a whole-of-government approach to address the threat. ADL strongly recommends urgent action to prevent and counter domestic violent extremism. The framework that ADL has created — the [PROTECT plan](#) — is a comprehensive, seven-part plan to mitigate the threat posed by domestic extremism and domestic terrorism while protecting civil rights and civil liberties. Together, focusing on these seven categories can have an immediate and deeply significant impact in preventing and countering domestic terrorism — more so than any one action, policy, or law — and can do so while protecting civil rights and liberties and ensuring that government overreach does not harm the same vulnerable people and communities that these extremists target. Our suggestions come under these seven areas:

- P** Prioritize Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism
- R** Resource According to the Threat
- O** Oppose Extremists in Government Service
- T** Take Public Health and Other Domestic Terrorism Prevention Measures

- E** End the Complicity of Social Media in Facilitating Extremism
- C** Create an Independent Clearinghouse for Online Extremist Content
- T** Target Foreign White Supremacist Terrorist Groups for Sanctions

Prioritize Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism

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

- In mid-June 2021, the Biden-Harris Administration released the first-ever National Strategy to Counter Domestic Terrorism. The strategy is laudable and a step in the right direction. However, many critical details were left unaddressed. Congress must press for further details into how the plan will be implemented and the steps that will be taken to ensure protection for civil rights and civil liberties. Further, Departments and Agencies must create their own implementation plans for the Strategy.
- 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 and to ensure adequate oversight of these resources, including built-in administrative resources for Executive Branch administrators to adequately implement programs.
- We must prevent election-motivated violence and related threats to our democracy. The Electoral Count Reform and Presidential Transition Improvement Act, S.4573 would modernize the process for certifying and counting electoral votes in presidential elections. Common-sense reforms like these can mitigate conspiracies and other efforts to undermine our democracy: we urge Congress to pass S. 4573 and pursue efforts in the next Congress to address the nexus of democratic backsliding and political violence.

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 was unable to pass the bipartisan 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 are created, that they have the resources they need, and that they deploy those resources in a manner proportionate to existing threats. Further, the transparency that comes with regular reporting is crucial for civil society, Congress, and the public writ large to help oversee the national security process and hold leaders accountable. These principles can be enacted through re-introduction of the DTPA in the next Congress or otherwise, implementing these principles through other legislative vehicles.

- 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.
- Data drives policy, and as such, Congress must empower high-quality, comprehensive data to understand threats related to hate and democracy. For example, the annual FBI hate crimes statistics demonstrate a systematic gap in reporting by law enforcement agencies. This gap must be filled, including through support for hate crimes data collection resources and requirements for mandatory reporting by law enforcement agencies.

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. The House-passed version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) includes social media vetting authorities relevant to the domestic extremist threat. While these measures represent significant progress, the Department disbanded the working group addressing insider extremist threats, and far more must be done to find the problem within the military, train officials for how to address it, and scale efforts to fully ensure that members of our armed forces are not targeted for recruitment to extremist causes.
- Similarly, DHS announced that it reviewed internal extremist threats, though noted that there were no mechanisms for doing so systematically or comprehensively. DHS and law enforcement agencies must have these protocols in place.
- ADL has worked with law enforcement experts to provide tools for identifying and weeding out extremists in the recruitment process as well as within law enforcement ranks. While there is no evidence that white supremacist extremists have large numbers in our law enforcement agencies, we have seen that even a few can undermine the

effectiveness and trust that is so essential. We have provided resources to law enforcement agencies with guidance on approaches that do not violate First Amendment concerns.

Take Domestic Terrorism Prevention Measures

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

- Congress can provide funding to civil society and academic programs that have expertise in addressing recruitment to extremist causes and radicalization, whether online or offline. By providing funding for prevention activities, including education, counseling, and off-ramping, Congress can help empower public health and civil society actors to prevent and intervene in the radicalization process and undermine extremist narratives, particularly those that spread rapidly on the internet.
- These initiatives must be accompanied by an assurance of careful oversight with civil rights and civil liberties safeguards. They must also meaningfully engage the communities that have been targeted by domestic terrorism and the civil society organizations already existing within those communities, and with sensitivity toward communities that 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. Congress should significantly scale the Center for Prevention Programming and Partnerships within DHS, such as through \$150 million per year in grants and a proportionate increase in program evaluations, the results of which should be published for public view. Further, there have been [reports that](#) research and innovation related to domestic violent extremist radicalization has been halted at DHS, which would be troubling; we urge the Committee to review such press reporting and ensure adequate implementation of research and innovation.

End the Complicity of Social Media in Facilitating Extremism

Congress must prioritize countering online extremism and ensuring that perpetrators who engage in unlawful activity online can be held accountable. Online platforms often lack adequate policies to mitigate extremism and hate equitably and at scale. Federal and state laws and policies require significant updating to hold online platforms and individual perpetrators accountable for enabling hate, racism, and extremist violence across the internet. In March 2021, ADL announced [the REPAIR Plan](#), which offers a comprehensive framework for platforms and policymakers to take meaningful action to decrease online hate and extremism. Like ADL's PROTECT Plan, REPAIR focuses on domestic extremism and terrorism but goes beyond these issues to address other manifestations and harms of online hate, including online harassment, antisemitism, racism, and disinformation.

- Congress has an important role in reducing online hate and extremism. Officials must use their bully pulpits to call for better enforcement of technology companies' policies.
- To adequately address the threat, the government must direct its resources to understand and mitigate the consequences of hate online. To do so, Congress should consider appropriating funding to research online hate, harassment, and extremism. Congress should also ensure that law enforcement personnel are trained to recognize and to effectively investigate criminal online incidents and have the necessary capacity to do that work. Furthermore, legislative efforts that prioritize transparency should be prioritized.
- Congress must carefully reform, but not eliminate, Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act to make tech companies legally accountable for their role when they enable stalking, facilitate violence and civil rights violations, or incite domestic terrorism. Self-regulation simply has failed on this score. The platforms have been far too laissez-faire for decades, hiding behind Section 230 which immunizes them from legal accountability for even egregious and otherwise unlawful content and actions. They have failed to abide by the basic behaviors that govern nearly all other businesses in every other sector of our economy.

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.
- In FY2022 appropriations, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) was provided with \$500,000 to investigate the feasibility of this concept. NIJ should be empowered to complete its review, and Congress should quickly follow up to ensure that a clearinghouse can be authorized.

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 by the FY2021 NDAA 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 in question. However, the strategy has not been released publicly, making it impossible to evaluate. We urge more transparency from State in this process and for Congress to seek accountability for any gaps in the strategy, and to provide resources to implement it.
- The Department of State must mobilize a multilateral effort to address the threat of white supremacy globally. Multilateral best-practice institutions, such as the Global Counterterrorism Forum, the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, and the International Institute for Justice and Rule of Law, may be helpful mechanisms through which to channel some efforts. Moreover, the Global Engagement Center should be charged with undermining the propaganda of violent extremist groups – not just designated terrorist organizations, but overseas white supremacist violent extremists as well. DHS should participate in these efforts, supporting overseas exchanges, partnerships, and best practices sharing to engage in learning from other countries and sharing U.S. best practices, where applicable.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for the opportunity to testify 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 to vulnerable individuals, communities, and democratic institutions and processes. It is long past time to acknowledge that, for many years, these threats overwhelmingly come from right-wing extremists, especially white supremacists, and allocate our resources to address the threat accordingly. We must also address these threats holistically rather than piecemeal. This is precisely what ADL's PROTECT plan does, applying a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to the fight against hate and extremism. Together, our PROTECT, REPAIR, and [COMBAT](#) Plans – our comprehensive plan to address antisemitism – comprise a blueprint for the next Congress to address these threats to democracy and the security of our communities. On behalf of ADL, we look forward to working with you as you continue to devote your attention to this critical issue.