

Congressional Testimony

Domestic Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Examining the Threat of Racially, Ethnically, Religiously, and Politically Motivated Attacks, Part II

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

INTRODUCTION TO ADL

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

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

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

But the insurrectionists at the Capitol are by no means our nation’s only concern when it comes to domestic extremism. Without a doubt, **rightwing extremist violence is currently the greatest threat to everyone in this country.** From Charleston to Charlottesville to Pittsburgh, to Poway and El Paso, we have seen the deadly consequences of white supremacist extremism play out all over this country. 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

January 6, 2021

On Wednesday, January 6, 2021, pro-Trump extremists, including a broad coalition of right-wing extremists, descended on Washington, D.C. and a number of state capitals. Ostensibly gathered to hear [President Trump and his family speak](#), and to dispute the result of the 2020 presidential election, which was scheduled to be certified in Congress that day, protesters stoked violence against law enforcement officers [before storming the U.S. Capitol](#) in an extraordinary display of political violence. That violence, aimed at overturning a valid and legitimate presidential election and explicitly targeting both Democratic and Republican officeholders with threats of physical violence as they performed their duties that day and left 150 officers injured, often severely, and also resulted in 5 deaths. That Wednesday afternoon, the Capitol was under siege by those who had taken over the building, photographing themselves in the House chamber

and trapping members of Congress and staffers. The President's tweets and those of many of his supporters incited this violence, which included the death of a pro-Trump extremist, who was shot inside the Capitol.

As the chaos unfolded, President Trump tweeted his support for the rioters: "These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long. Go home with love & in peace. Remember this day forever!" The tweet was later deleted by Twitter, and the President's account was permanently suspended.

Earlier in the day, D.C. Metropolitan Police discovered and successfully detonated [two homemade](#) bombs, which were placed near the buildings housing the offices of the Democratic and Republican National Committees.

Following weeks of increasingly incendiary online commentary, the far right, violence-prone [Proud Boys](#) were in D.C. en masse Tuesday night and Wednesday, shouting obscenities directed at antifa, Black Lives Matter and the police. Multiple fights involving members have been captured on video. On Wednesday afternoon, Proud Boys' "Uncensored" Telegram channel showed members breaching security at the U.S. Capitol and engaging in fistfights with Capitol Police.

Rising Tensions

One year before the [January 6, 2021 siege](#) on the U.S. Capitol building, more than 20,000 mostly armed people gathered 97 miles away outside the Virginia State Capitol in Richmond for the Virginia Citizen Defense League's (VCDL) [Lobby Day](#). The event, held on January 20, 2020, allowed protesters to express their anger over newly elected Virginia Democrats' reported plans to pursue stricter gun control legislation. Celebrated at the time for being a peaceful event, one year later, the 2020 Lobby Day is better understood as a harbinger of what was to come — including the January 6, 2021 assault on the U.S. Capitol.

[As ADL's Center On Extremists' analysts suggested at the time](#), the Richmond rally provided a prototype for a violent year, culminating in the ongoing efforts to intimidate lawmakers into overriding the results of an election. Like so many of the extremist-related events of 2020, Lobby Day was preceded by supporters spreading conspiracies designed to sow anger and expressing violent rhetoric against their perceived enemies. It was attended by armed protesters who referred to elected officials as tyrants and made threats against them. It created a space for extremists and non-extremists to mix and demonstrated the right's current playbook and response to violence: portraying themselves as victims.

Murder and Extremism: By the Numbers

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

- The main reason the number of extremist-related murders in 2020 is so low compared to most recent years is because of an absence of mass shooting sprees or other mass casualty attacks like the 2019 El Paso Walmart shooting or the 2018 synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh. COVID-19 restrictions meant fewer public gatherings, which may also have contributed to the decline.
- The relatively low number of murders does not mean that extremists were less active overall in 2020. For example, ADL statistics record 16 right-wing extremist-related terrorist plots and attacks in 2020, an increase from the 13 documented in 2019. Many of these plots were orchestrated, at least in part, on social media.
- As has been the case for most of the past 30 years, the domestic extremist-related murders of 2020 were overwhelmingly associated with right-wing extremists. All but one of the incidents documented (including 16 of the 17 murders) were tied to right-wing domestic extremism; over half were linked to white supremacists. The remaining death was at the hands of a left-wing extremist. This past year was the second year in a row that no murders linked to domestic Islamist extremism occurred.

White Supremacist Propaganda

The coronavirus did not keep white supremacists from attempting to disseminate their hateful message to the broader public. ADL’s [Center on Extremism \(COE\)](#) tracked a near-doubling of white supremacist propaganda efforts in 2020, which included the distribution of racist, antisemitic and anti-LGBTQ+ fliers, stickers, banners and posters. The 2020 data shows a huge increase of incidents from the previous year, with a total of 5,125 cases reported to ADL (averaging more than 14 incidents per day), compared to 2,724 in 2019. This is the highest number of white supremacist propaganda incidents ADL has ever recorded. The number of propaganda incidents on college campuses dropped by more than half, perhaps due to COVID restrictions.

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

Modern White Supremacy

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

Different variations and versions of extremist white supremacist ideology have evolved and expanded over time to include an emphasis on antisemitism and nativism. White supremacists themselves typically no longer use the term, as they once proudly did, but tend instead to prefer various euphemisms, ranging from “white nationalist” to “white separatist” to “race realist” or

“identitarian.” Even in the face of these complexities, it is still possible to arrive at a useful working definition of the concept of extremist white supremacy.

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

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

This twisted ideology was on display two years ago 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.

Rising Antisemitism

ADL has recorded a 60% increase of antisemitic incidents over the past five years. ADL has a comprehensive approach to addressing antisemitic incidents and behavior, including educating youth to prevent these incidents and working with law enforcement to apprehend the perpetrators. ADL advocates to enact laws to improve federal, state and local prevention tactics and responses to antisemitic hate crimes and all forms of hate violence.

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. 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.¹

¹ <https://www.adl.org/audit2020#executive-summary>

In 2020, ADL tabulated 2,024 reported antisemitic incidents throughout the United States. This is a 4% decrease from the 2,107 incidents recorded in 2019 but is still the third-highest year on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979.

Known extremist groups or individuals inspired by extremist ideology were responsible for 331 incidents in 2020, up from 270 incidents in 2019. This represents 16% of the total number of incidents in 2020.

More recently, analysis from ADL's Center on Extremism reveals that antisemitic incidents in the U.S. more than doubled during the May 2021 military conflict between Israel and Hamas and its immediate aftermath compared to the same time period in 2020. After peaking between May 20-22, 2021, incident levels have gradually returned to a baseline level. These numbers should still be considered preliminary and are likely to change as additional information becomes available.

Incidents began a steep upward climb on May 11 as military operations intensified between Israel and Hamas. ADL logged 251 incidents from May 11 — the official start of military action — through the end of the month, an increase of 115% over the same period in 2020, when 117 incidents were recorded. We tallied 305 incidents in the entire month of May 2021. And while the conflict between Israel and Hamas animated many of these incidents, it does not account for the full increase; when incidents that include explicit references to Israel or Zionism are excluded, the number still increased by 15% in the 20-day period of May 2021 compared to the same time period in May 2020.

Online Hate

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

Fringe Social Media Platforms

- *Parler*

The social media site Parler, which has gained popularity among conservatives, has also attracted a range of extremists. In the weeks following the 2020 presidential election, the site drew [millions of new users](#) frustrated with what they perceived to be “anti-conservative” bias exhibited by mainstream social media platforms.

While the site itself is not extremist, extremists have joined Parler in large numbers alongside millions of mainstream users, creating the potential for extensive and worrisome commingling of extremists and non-extremists.

Parler experienced exponential growth in 2020, following Election Day in November, as Twitter and Facebook limited posts by President Trump and other conservative influencers who violated terms of service prohibiting the spread of misinformation. Parler currently claims to have [around eight million active users](#).

On Sunday, Jan. 10, 2021, following the Jan. 6 siege, [Amazon Web Services](#) announced that Parler had violated its terms of service and removed the platform from its hosting service, taking it offline. [Apple and Google similarly](#) suspended the platform'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 far too easy to find.

- *Gab*

Gab has consistently served as a forum where white supremacists and extremists publish manifestos or gather to plan and organize hateful acts. In October 2018, white supremacist [Robert Bowers killed 11 people](#) at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh after posting antisemitic, anti-immigrant rants on Gab. Two years later, the social media site appeared to be gaining traction among right-wing extremists, including white supremacists. In fact, sixty percent of the 47 right-wing extremist groups ADL has identified on Gab were created in 2020.²

Gab is rife with white supremacist groups. As of October 2020, the white supremacist Gab user group "[14 words](#)" had over a thousand followers and the Gab group "White Protection League" had over 3,700 members. Well-known white supremacist [David Duke](#) had 4,800 followers while white supremacist groups [Patriot Front](#) and [American Renaissance](#) together had almost 14,000 followers.

But the most marked change on Gab in 2020 was the proliferation of [QAnon](#) groups. Membership in 12 different QAnon groups on Gab exceeded 125,000 whereas in 17 white supremacist Gab groups, membership numbers were just shy of 13,000. This reflects the broad reach of QAnon and its relatively mainstream appeal.

Neon Revolt, a hugely influential Q pundit who literally wrote the book on Q, has been a Gab member since February 2017. By 2020, Neon Revolt had 45,200 followers and had made more than 53,000 Gab posts. Neon Revolt's posts are often reposted by Gab founder and CEO Andrew Torba.

² <https://www.adl.org/blog/two-years-after-synagogue-massacre-gab-remains-extremists-online-destination-of-choice>

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.

In an [open letter](#) to the Justice Department, ADL provided a list of actions that ADL and other sources reported as having occurred on the platform before, during and after the Capitol violence that may have contributed to violations of federal criminal law. These included a message from the CEO to subscribers before the attack that encouraged them to use the platform to provide uncensored footage from events on January 6. According to at least one report, in the lead-up to the attack, directions for which streets to take to avoid the police, and which tools to bring to help pry open doors, were exchanged in comments on the platform.

Online radicalization can have deadly consequences. ADL's analysis of online behavior suggests similar ideological motivations and radicalization methods when comparing the perpetrators of the Pittsburgh and Christchurch massacres. Both killers announced in their preferred internet forums that they were about to commit violence and seemed to identify their fellow forum participants as community members who might share their propensity to commit violence. Both killers were consumed by the conspiracy of a "white genocide." Both Gab and 8kun— the go-to forums for Robert Bowers and Brenton Tarrant, respectively – are rife with white supremacist, hateful, antisemitic bigotry.

- *4Chan, 8Chan and 8Kun*

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

In March 2019, Brenton Tarrant, an Australian white supremacist, allegedly [posted a manifesto to 8chan](#) before [murdering 51 people](#) at two mosques in New Zealand.

A month later, in April 2019, white supremacist John Earnest [opened fire inside a Chabad synagogue](#) in Poway, California, killing one person and wounding three more before he surrendered. He, too, posted a manifesto to 8chan before his attack, which referred admiringly to Tarrant and to Robert Bowers, the [mass shooter at a Pittsburgh synagogue who murdered 11 people at a Pittsburgh synagogue](#) in October 2018.

Three white supremacist manifestos. Three killing sprees. One targeted Muslims, another targeting Jews, and the third targeting Latinos. All connected to 8chan.

8chan began as an offshoot of the imageboard 4chan. "Imageboards" are a type of online discussion forum centered around posting images. After 8chan shut down in August 2019--as a result of being deplatformed [by the web infrastructure and security company Cloudflare](#) following the extremist mass murder in El Paso, Texas-- many users migrated over to 8kun. These users are typically anonymous, with no screen names. That anonymity allows people to

post outrageous, disgusting or hateful photos and messages, ranging from hate speech to posts about pedophilia.

But because 4chan had an informal set of “rules” for posters, and insisted on occasionally enforcing them, two men, Fredrick Brennan and Jim Watkins, [created](#) an even less restrictive alternative. 8chan, which began operation in 2013, [was designed](#) to allow any sort of speech short of content considered illegal in the United States. The site’s policy reads: “Do not post, request, or link to any content illegal in the United States of America. Do not create boards with the sole purpose of posting or spreading such content.” These restrictions attempt to offer legal cover to the site but do very little to hamper posters’ ability to share and promote the worst imaginable subject matter.

Like 4chan, 8chan [had its /pol/ section](#), which quickly became the ultimate haven for offensive and incendiary speech. Small at first, 8chan grew considerably during “[Gamergate](#),” a coordinated harassment campaign that began in the summer of 2014 and targeted women in the gaming industry and also targeted individuals belonging to a wide cross section of marginalized groups who called for and were working toward games becoming more inclusive.

When 4chan began cracking down on message threads that doxed (exposed personal information about) women in the video game world who were critical of the gaming environment, Gamergate harassers discovered that 8chan had no similar compunctions. Indeed, 8chan had few compunctions about anything, and even [allowed pedophilia forums](#) to flourish.

- *Telegram*

Telegram, an online social networking app with well over 200 million users, may not be a household name just yet, but it has a significant audience. [And it is gaining popularity](#). Telegram has become a very popular online gathering place for the international overtly white supremacist community and other extremist groups who have been [displaced or banned](#) from more popular sites.

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, which 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.

Telegram currently hosts more than 221,000 channels and groups. Many channels are publicly accessible, but some channels and groups (within the channels) are private and require a “digital key” (link) to gain admission. Channel topics range from knitting to videos of mass murders (which are readily available to the public). And while most of Telegram’s 200 million-plus users have nothing to do with extremism, extremists of all types, from Islamist extremists to right wing extremists, have found Telegram to be a hospitable and safe space to congregate online. In our research over the last five years, we have seen thousands of Islamist extremist channels and more recently, hundreds of white supremacist channels. We believe this is just the tip of the iceberg.

- [Omegle](#)

Extremists are constantly adapting and finding ways to reach new audiences, spread and spew their hate and create online content. Their latest tactic involves the use of Omegle, a free online chat service that randomly pairs anonymous users for one-on-one video chat sessions. Launched in 2009, the platform's popularity lagged behind other social media options, but pandemic-related boredom and social isolation have apparently increased Omegle's appeal; according to the platform's estimates, [more than 35,000 users](#) are online at any given moment.³

Omegle has no registration requirements. Users simply go to the website and start chatting with the click of a button. Omegle's terms and conditions state users must be 18 and older or 13 and older with parental permission, but these conditions are easily ignored.

The premise of Omegle is simple: users log on with a webcam and microphone and are randomly matched with another user with whom they can chat or reject. White supremacists and racists use these roulette-style chat opportunities to "troll" and harass women and minorities, and to attempt to recruit others to their extreme ideologies. The perpetrators post these interactions across additional social media platforms, providing grotesque entertainment for their followers.

This tactic, referred to by practitioners as "Omegle Redpilling," involves saying something offensive in the introductory moment of the chat in an effort to elicit outrage, shock or debate. Perpetrators may shout "white power" and give a Hitler Salute, make fun of someone's appearance, yell a racist slur or ask, "are you a Jew?"

Mainstream Social Media Platforms

Fringe platforms, despite having relatively small userbases, leverage Big Tech platforms like Twitter and Facebook to increase their reach and influence. But Big Tech platforms are no longer unwitting accomplices. On the contrary, they play a significant role in amplifying white supremacist content. Algorithms operate with stunning speed, scope and impact. Last fall a single "Stop the Steal" Facebook group gained more than 300,000 members within 24 hours. Thousands of new members a minute joined this group and some of them openly advocated civil war.

- *Facebook*

Facebook has been claiming that it is effectively addressing hate on its platforms. ADL and others, however, have continued to expose egregious examples of online hate, misinformation and extremism across the company's products, particularly on Facebook and Instagram.

In June 2020, Facebook [announced](#) that it had taken down hundreds of groups and pages on its platform associated with the violent anti-government [boogaloo movement](#), one of several major purges of extremist material by Facebook that year to address extremists' use of its platform. 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 deplatforming, it became difficult to find large and active boogaloo spaces on Facebook.

<https://www.adl.org/blog/extremist-trolls-are-targeting-omegle-users-with-virulent-racism-antisemitism>

However, in recent months, several new boogaloo pages have emerged on Facebook, hiding among libertarian groups and pages that also share memes advocating for violence. One of the ways they have been able to do this is by using unconventional naming structures for their pages (such as “Char Broil Tru infrared grilling”) that requires users to recognize the group’s intent via its content. Though these new Facebook boogaloo groups typically are far smaller and produce less content than their predecessors did in 2019-2020, the emergence of such pages highlights the need for Facebook to take a proactive stance to ensure that boogalooers do not successfully reestablish themselves on the platform.

Perhaps most concerning, Facebook algorithms appear to be recommending these boogaloo pages to like-minded users, despite the company’s [assertion](#) last June 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”. A recent review found that among groups sharing violent memes and a group simply named “Let’s Overthrow the Government,” Facebook was recommending groups with names like “The Hawaiian Hootenanny,” “Boogagoonia,” and “The Chaplain of the Redacted.” In addition, after one boogaloo page was “liked,” our investigation’s user was suggested other pages with similar content, creating opportunities for users to get further steeped in the ideology. Clearly, Facebook’s recommendation algorithms, filters and other detection methods for boogaloo content need upgrading. The public agrees: according to 2021 ADL data, 77 percent of Americans think laws need to be made to hold social media platforms accountable for recommending users join extremist groups.

- *TikTok*

Over the last few years, TikTok — the social media app that allows users to create and share short videos — has gained immense popularity. With hundreds of millions of users, the platform is particularly popular among younger individuals. As COE [documented in August 2020](#), while much of the content on TikTok is lighthearted and fun, extremists have exploited the platform to share hateful content and recruit new adherents. A recent review of the platform found that antisemitism continues to percolate across the app, including content from known antisemitic figures as well as posts perpetuating age-old antisemitic tropes and conspiracy theories. It should be noted that when alerted to the content that ADL COE found, TikTok took down the specific content, but they are still woefully inadequate when handling reports from ordinary users. While we appreciate their removing the specific content and their stated commitment to a zero-tolerance policy on antisemitism and hate, we are concerned that it took our notification to do so and encourage them to address this systematically. ADL’s Center for Technology and Society (CTS) just released a [report](#) that showed TikTok is still far too slow in taking down antisemitism reported by ordinary users and it still has plenty of work to do to ensure that hate is adequately remediated.

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*

While Twitter has taken significant steps to decrease extremist conspiracy theory content on their platform, we have seen an alarming lack of consistency with both policy enactment and enforcement. In July 2020, for example, [Twitter announced](#) it would permanently suspend QAnon accounts. The company subsequently claimed that QAnon-related content and accounts dropped by more than 50% as a result, and the platform also [announced additions](#) to its [coordinated harmful activity policy](#). A drop of more than 50% sounded good, but this doesn’t consider the exceptions to the rule. There were prominent accounts with significant reach left untouched. Twitter did not enforce its QAnon policy with fidelity; the [data in the lead-up to the attack](#) on the Capitol provides evidence that Twitter’s actions fell far short.

It is one thing for tech companies to enforce policies in response to a crisis, but it is another to enforce policies over time once the emergency subsides. The attack on January 6 and other extremist actions are the predictable result of the longstanding spread of extremist conspiracy theories and incitement to violence. To be effective at content moderation, platforms need to enforce their policies consistently and at scale, and not sporadically in reaction to crises.

Twitter and other social media platforms must not wait until a dangerous conspiracy becomes widespread, not to mention bursts into violence, to take action. When a platform announces a policy, the company must be prepared to follow through with it and to be held accountable. By the time Twitter finally started removing QAnon-supporting accounts on January 8, 2021 the consequences of misinformation had already become frighteningly real as we watched a lethal assault on the Capitol.

- *YouTube*

YouTube, like Twitter, Facebook, and other major social media platforms, has undertaken some efforts to curtail extremist and hateful content. As our 2021 Belfer report indicates, however, exposure to videos from extremist or white supremacist channels on YouTube remains disturbingly common. Though some high-profile channels were taken down by YouTube prior to February 2020, approximately one in ten participants involved in the study 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, when participants watch these videos, they are more likely to see and follow recommendations to similar videos. 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.

In addition, participants often received and sometimes followed recommendations for videos from alternative and extremist channels, especially on videos from those channels. Though YouTube says it made “over 30 different changes to reduce recommendations” of potentially harmful content, 37.6% of recommendations on videos from alternative channels and 29.3% of recommendations on videos from extremist channels were to other videos of the same type. As a result, 6.6% of participants followed at least one recommendation to a video from an alternative channel and 2.1% followed at least one to a video from an extremist channel. (We cannot say why YouTube’s algorithm opts to surface these videos; according to YouTube, some may be selected because users subscribe to the channels in question.)

Consumption of this potentially harmful content is instead concentrated among Americans who are already high in racial resentment, the group that is seemingly most vulnerable to its influence. Moreover, despite recent changes to the YouTube algorithm, the site still frequently recommends videos from alternative or extremist channels when people watch a video from those channels. As a result, many racially resentful people are not only watching large numbers of videos from alternative or extremist channels, but also are shown recommendations for more such videos when they do so, further increasing exposure to potentially harmful content.

Gaming

According to the Entertainment Software Association, there are approximately 227 million gamers in the United States. Gaming analytics firm NewZoo’s [global market report](#) put the gaming industry’s revenue at approximately \$176 billion globally. With those figures in mind, the importance of addressing hate and extremism in gaming is critical. [ADL’s 2020 study of hate, harassment and positive social experiences](#) in online games explored players’ in-game exposure to controversial topics, such as extremism and disinformation. Alarming, nearly one in ten adult gamers between 18-45 (9%) witnessed discussions on white supremacist ideology in online multiplayer games. Seventeen percent saw hateful messaging linking the COVID-19 pandemic to the Asian community, and 12 percent observe disinformation surrounding Antifa and the Black Lives Matter protests related to the murder of George Floyd. The survey also showed that one in ten online multiplayer gamers (10%) come across Holocaust denial discussions while playing.

Extremists at the Capitol Insurrection

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

As of August 2, 2021, ADL’s Center on Extremism (COE) has identified 544 of the roughly 800 individuals who are believed to have breached the U.S. Capitol building on January 6. The emerging snapshot of the insurrectionists shows a [range of right-wing extremists](#) united by their fury with the perceived large-scale betrayal by “unprincipled” Republican legislators.

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

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

Oath Keepers

The Oath Keepers are a large but loosely organized collection of right-wing anti-government extremists who are part of the [militia movement](#), which believes that the federal government has been coopted by a shadowy conspiracy that is trying to strip American citizens of their rights.

Though the Oath Keepers will accept anyone as members, what differentiates them from other anti-government extremist groups is their explicit focus on recruiting current and former military, law enforcement and first responder personnel.

While there is a formal national leadership, on the local level many Oath Keepers are essentially self-organized and form official, semi-official or informal groupings of Oath Keepers.

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

The Proud Boys

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

In McInnes’ own words, the Proud Boys are a “pro-western fraternity,” essentially a drinking club dedicated to male bonding, socializing and the celebration all things related to western culture. In reality, the Proud Boys is an extremist group that bears many of the hallmarks of a [gang](#), and its members have taken part in multiple acts of brutal [violence and intimidation](#). While the Proud Boys insist that they only act in self-defense, several incidents — including one in

which two members of the group were [convicted](#) of attempted gang assault, attempted assault and riot — belie their self-professed peaceful nature. Indeed, many members have criminal records for violent behavior and the organization [actively pursues violence](#) against their perceived enemies.

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

During an [October 2018](#) brawl [outside the Metropolitan Republican Club in Manhattan](#), for which two Proud Boys members were convicted and sentenced to substantial prison terms, and seven others pled guilty, the Proud Boys were joined by the 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. Ideologically, members subscribe to a scattershot array of libertarian and nationalist tropes, referring to themselves as anti-communist and anti-political correctness, but in favor of free speech and free markets.

Proud Boys: Recent Activity and Ongoing Violence

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

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

Groypers/Groyper Army

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

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

QAnon and Other Conspiracy Theories

QAnon is a global, wide-reaching and remarkably elaborate conspiracy theory that has taken root within some parts of the pro-Trump movement. It is an amalgam of both novel and well-established theories, with marked undertones of antisemitism and xenophobia.

Fundamentally, the theory claims that almost every president in recent U.S. history up until Donald Trump has been a puppet put in place by a global elite of power brokers hell bent on enriching themselves and maintaining their Satanic child-murdering sex cult. Q is a reference to “Q clearance” or “Q access authorization,” terms used to describe a top-secret clearance level within the Department of Energy.

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

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

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

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

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

In 2021, disparate groups of [QAnon](#) adherents, [election fraud promoters](#) and [anti-vaccine](#) activists have 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 the following lies:

- The 2020 presidential election was stolen by the Democrats (touted at the Health and Freedom events, organized by right-wing entrepreneur Clay Clark)
- 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)
- 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
- The coronavirus vaccine contains dangerous ingredients that change your DNA and make vaccinated people “shed” dangerous toxins
- Satanic socialists are attempting to take over the country, and
- 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

At ADL, we were deeply shocked but not surprised by the January 6 attack — it was the unfortunate and predictable result of years of escalating hate and extremism in our country. After years of manifestos and mass killings, these attacks should no longer come as a surprise to anyone.

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

Militia and other antigovernment groups may also be very active in the next few years. The militia movement has historically derived much of its energy and vitality from its rage towards the federal government. However, the movement’s support of President Trump over the past few years dulled that anger. A Biden Administration will allow militias to return to their foundational grievances — the belief that a tyrannical government in league with a globalist conspiracy is coming to enslave them by first taking their guns and then the remainder of their rights.

Finally, antisemitism will likely continue to be a central part of the conspiratorial views that fuel right-wing violence.

Lawmakers, law enforcement and the public need to recognize the grave and dangerous threat posed by right-wing extremism. We cannot begin to defeat this deadly form of hatred if we fail to recognize it.

POLICY RECCOMENDATIONS

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 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 protections for civil rights and civil liberties. Further, Departments and Agencies must create their own implementation plans for the Strategy. DHS can illuminate many of the implementation details of the Strategy by releasing its own plan. While we welcome the reinstatement of the domestic terrorism team within the Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) unit, additional initiatives and further details are needed.
- The Select Committee investigating the events of January 6th must be allowed to operate in good faith, absent politicization of its important work. The American public needs a careful review of the brazen and lethal attack on the very seat of our democracy. We urge Congress to search for answers, publicly release information whenever possible, and to issue bipartisan recommendations to ensure that no attack like that on January 6th can take place again.

- As Congress considers appropriations bills, resources to prevent and counter domestic terrorism are critical to mitigating the threat. ADL urges Committee Members to consider significant appropriations in the Commerce, Justice, and Science; Homeland Security; Defense; State and Foreign Operations; Interior; and Labor, Health, and Human Services appropriations processes.
- The Department of Homeland Security rightfully prioritized domestic violent extremism as a National Priority Area for the FY2021 Homeland Security Grant Program. We urge Congress to carefully oversee the effectiveness of these grants and continue the prioritization of the issue. Based on what is the most effective from this tranche of grants, the program should build in the future proportionate to the domestic extremist threat.

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 lethality of those threats. In other words, allocation of resources must never be politicized, but rather transparently based on objective security concerns.

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

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.
- DHS announced that it will be vetting employees for extremist sympathies. ADL applauds this effort and welcomes any details on how the implementation of this vetting will take place, as well as any findings from the review.

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.
 - o These initiatives must be accompanied by an assurance of careful oversight and safeguards. They must also meaningfully engage communities who have been targeted by domestic terrorism and the civil society organizations embedded within them, and who have been unfairly targeted when prior anti-terrorism authorities have been misused and/or abused. They must be 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.
 - o While Congress has funded a small grant program for prevention measures domestically, the program is too small to have an impact at scale and, in some cases, DHS' implementation of the program has lost the confidence of communities. Now that the Administration has launched the Center for Prevention Programming and Partnerships, Congress should significantly scale its grant program; ADL has recommended a \$150 million annual grant level.

End the Complicity of Social Media in Facilitating Extremism

Congress must prioritize countering online extremism and ensuring that perpetrators who engage in unlawful activity online can be held accountable. Online platforms often lack adequate policies to mitigate extremism and hate equitably and at scale. Federal and state laws and policies require significant updating to hold online platforms and individual perpetrators accountable for enabling hate, racism and extremist violence across the internet. In March 2021,

ADL announced [the REPAIR Plan](#), which offers a comprehensive framework for platforms and policymakers to take meaningful action to decrease online hate and extremism. Like ADL's PROTECT Plan, REPAIR focuses on domestic extremism and terrorism, but goes beyond these issues to address other manifestations and harms of online hate, including online harassment, antisemitism, racism and disinformation.

Congress has an important role in reducing online hate and extremism. Further, officials at all levels of government can use their bully pulpits to call for better enforcement of technology companies' policies.

- Congress can work with independent extremism experts to protect vulnerable targets from becoming either victims of abuse or perpetrators of violence. Legislation like the National Commission on Online Platforms and Homeland Security Act, for example, would establish a commission to investigate how online content implicates certain national security threats, such as targeted violence.
- We also need to provide better recourse for victims and targets of online hate and harassment. According to [CTS' 2021 Online Hate and Harassment Survey](#),⁴ a majority of respondents agree that laws should be strengthened to hold perpetrators of online hate accountable for their conduct (81%). In the 115th Congress, Representative Katherine Clark (D-MA) introduced and led H.R. 3067, the Online Safety Modernization Act, which, among other things, would have provided federal protections against doxing and swatting. It is time to pass laws that cover these types of harms. It is crucial that such legislation provide private rights of action.
- To adequately address the threat, the government must direct its resources to understanding and mitigating the consequences of hate online. To do so, all levels of government should consider designating funding, if they do not already do so, to ensure that law enforcement personnel are trained to recognize and to effectively investigate criminal online incidents and have the necessary capacity to do that work. Eighty percent of Americans agree there should be more police training and resources to help people with online hate and harassment.
- Additionally, the federal government has yet to invest meaningfully in examining the connections between online hate speech and hate crimes. Congress should task relevant federal agencies, including the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice, with funding civil society organizations to conduct research, and to catalog and share data with authorities, about those cases in which hateful statements in digital spaces precede and precipitate hate crime. Only then can we fully understand the extent of the problem.
- Beyond the federal government, business has a critical role to play. We need to compel the social media companies to enforce their own terms of service specifically around hate and misinformation – or face repercussions for failing to do so. These companies have enormous means and extraordinary capabilities – they have built some of the most innovative products of our time. And so we should push them to solve the problem on their end.

⁴ ADL. "Online Hate and Harassment: The American Experience 2021." <https://www.adl.org/online-hate-2021>

- o This starts with committing to take down the most offensive material, especially when it is flagged by users or otherwise brought to their attention by outside organizations with expertise. Nonprofits like ADL and the Center for Combating Digital Hate and noted how nearly all the major companies fail at this most basic task. There is no excuse for such unforced errors.
- o Beyond this, the companies must dedicate resources to improving their AI that should filter these toxins in the first place. It has been done for copyright enforcement. It can happen here, too. Tech isn't perfect and can make mistakes, so augment it with a human review: the companies have more than enough resources to employ legions of reviewers to perform this task. Such people should be given adequate training to do the work including support.
- o The firms should go further and fix the algorithms that amplify this noxious content to drive clicks and increase engagement. There is no moral reason to lift up content that brings people down. The companies themselves should commit to ending algorithmic amplification of hate, full stop.
- o The Administration and Congress should ring this bell again and again. Reputational pressure can go a long way and there is widespread public support for change from people on both sides of the aisle. But ultimately if the companies fail to act – and unfortunately that seems like a safe bet based on prior performance – Congress should be prepared to intervene and regulate the industry, and that starts with Section 230 reform. More on that momentarily.
- We need to increase and standardize platforms' transparency reports. Platforms play an active role by providing the means for transmitting hateful content and, more passively, enabling the incitement of violence, political polarization, spreading of conspiracies, and facilitation of discrimination and harassment. Current “transparency” reports lack the consistency, data and metrics needed to adequately understand how consumers are—or are not—protected. Without transparency, social media companies can publish reports whenever they wish (or not), and they can employ different methods of measuring between reporting, which can paint an editorialized picture, rather than a factual one. While some platforms share limited information about their efforts, the current lack of transparency has deprived policymakers and the general public of critical data regarding the scope and scale of online hate and disinformation.
- Finally, Congress must carefully but considerably amend Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act to make tech companies legally accountable for their role when they enable stalking, facilitate violence and civil rights violations, or incite domestic terrorism. Self-regulation simply has failed on this score. The platforms have been far too laissez-faire for decades, hiding behind Section 230 which exempts them from accountability. They have failed to abide by the basic behaviors that govern nearly all other businesses in every other sector of our economy. We need a drastic reconsideration of Section 230 that enables a free flow of user-generated content but disables the kind of extremism and hate that has festered across social media platforms.
 - o To be clear, we don't support the wholesale elimination of Section 230 altogether. Complete elimination of Section 230 could have the unintended consequence of

allowing more hate online. But we believe that the courts have interpreted Section 230 immunity far beyond what was intended and what is necessary to safeguard speech and innovation, to the point where the harms of leaving Section 230 untouched now outweigh the benefits.

- o Any 230 reform must be careful insofar as it does not cement Big Tech's monopolistic power by making it too costly for all but the largest platforms to ward off frivolous lawsuits and trolls. And there is real reason to consider the current dilemma as the result of the monopolistic indifference of certain players in the industry. Antitrust may be the right remedy for this situation and we are encouraged that there are serious people in the Administration – at the White House, at the Justice Department and the FTC considering this issue.
- o [Reform must prioritize both civil rights and civil liberties and the speech of those who are silenced by hate.](#) We must be concerned with the speech and association rights of those who are targeted by online hate and harassment and threats. ADL and others have found that many users from marginalized groups — particularly women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and users from other minority groups – frequently are targeted on account of their identities are [silenced and marginalized](#) by those attacks. We therefore urge lawmakers to seriously consider Section 230 reform proposals that prioritize equity and justice for users and bar immunity when platforms place profit over people. This could include enacting measures such as the Protecting Americans from Dangerous Algorithms Act, which would address the previously mentioned issue of algorithmic amplification of discriminatory content or to aid and abet terrorism.
- Regulation and reform to increase platform accountability must balance innovation and openness on the internet with a commitment to fighting hate online. No one has a right to global reach for their hate because Big Tech's business model and financial interests depend upon the greater engagement that divisive and hateful content promotes.

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. The current draft of the House Commerce, Justice, and Science appropriations bill allocates \$500,000 toward a feasibility study for the Center; this appropriation is an excellent first step.

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

CONCLUSION

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