

Congressional Testimony

Extremist Movements and the January 6, 2021 Insurrection

ADL (Anti-Defamation League)
Center on Extremism

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SELECT COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE THE JANUARY 6TH ATTACK ON THE
UNITED STATES CAPITOL**

Washington, D.C.
April 5, 2022



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

INTRODUCTION

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, anti-government and other violent extremists, producing research to inform the public of the scope of the threat, and working with law enforcement, educators, the tech industry and elected leaders to promote best practices that can effectively address and counter 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 6 was in some ways the most predictable outbreak of political violence in American history. And, certainly in terms of extremist activity, this was a coordinated act of domestic terrorism.

But the insurrectionists at the Capitol are by no means our nation’s only concern when it comes to domestic extremism. Without a doubt, **right-wing extremist violence and the traction it has gained among all too many Americans is currently the greatest threat to everyone in this country and to our democracy itself.** 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.

This statement for the record, provided to the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol (*hereafter Select Committee*), is based on ADL’s own publicly available resources and other publicly-available information regarding the violent insurrection at the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021. It will document pre-insurrection trends, describe the extremist groups and ideologies that helped fuel the insurrection, and explore what lies ahead.

No doubt, the disinformation, conspiracies, and perceived grievances that animated the crowd on that day persist nationwide, and until they are addressed the U.S. remains at risk for another insurrection-style event, or perhaps an even bloodier attack. To this end, ADL commends the Select Committee on its leadership to investigate and document the attack and urges Congress to take significant action to mitigate future threats.

PRE-INSURRECTION TRENDS

ADL was deeply shocked but not surprised by the January 6 attack — it was the unfortunate and predictable result of years of escalating extremism, political polarization, and anti-government conspiracy theories in our country. Unfortunately, these trends show no signs of abating, and the lessons of the January 6 insurrection are being swept away by historical revisionism within right-wing media and some in the Republican Party.

Plots Against Election Officials

In the months leading up to the January 6 attack, ADL noted a series of threats and plots levelled against election officials nationwide. Targets included officials who verified and stood by their state's election results and those who implemented new pandemic-related restrictions. These officials received death threats, visits to their private residences, and harassment online and by phone. Extremist and mainstream voices alike called for violence, making baseless claims about "election fraud," spreading pandemic conspiracies and escalating the potential for violent action. These claims amplified then President Trump's "Big Lie," or false claims that the 2020 election was stolen from him.

Specific examples of harassment of public officials include:

- Idaho, December 2020: On December 8, a protest organized by People's Rights—a network of right-wing activists founded by anti-government extremist [Ammon Bundy](#)—interrupted Idaho's Central District Health Board's [virtual meeting](#), where members were to vote on a local mask mandate. Citing safety concerns, the Board canceled the meeting as protesters gathered outside the homes and offices of staff and Board members. One person was arrested for trespassing and other arrests may follow.
- Michigan, December 2020: In the late evening of December 5, roughly two dozen protesters, some carrying weapons, gathered [at the home of Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson](#). Shouting [obscenities](#) into megaphones, the group protested the certification of the election and demanded a forensic audit.
- Michigan, December 2020: [Cynthia Johnson](#), a Black, Democratic Michigan state Representative, received dozens of racist and threatening voicemails after a December 2 U.S. House Oversight Committee hearing featuring Rudy Giuliani and others who argued without evidence that the state's election results were fraudulent.
- Pennsylvania, December 2020: Philadelphia City Commissioner [Al Schmidt](#) (whom former President Trump had targeted as a "RINO") and his staff received multiple death threats and other forms of harassment since he defended the results of the Philadelphia vote count. The threats and other forms of harassment began after Trump and some of his campaign surrogates publicly identified Schmidt and other members of his staff.
- Colorado, December 2020: Security director for Dominion Voting Systems [Eric Coomer](#) went into hiding after receiving death threats. The harassment of Coomer and his family has included phone calls, text messages, handwritten letters and the posting of their personal information online.
- Georgia, December 2020: Following his certification of Georgia's election results, horn-honking Trump supporters have repeatedly driven past Republican Secretary of State [Brad Raffensperger's home](#), intruders have been [found on his property](#) and his wife has received obscene threats on her cellphone.

- Georgia, December 2020: An [elections technician was doxed, received death threats](#) and his [family was reportedly harassed](#) after a video circulated that falsely claimed he manipulated election data.
- Arizona, November 2020: Secretary of State [Katie Hobbs](#), one of Arizona’s top election officials, has reported multiple threats of violence against her home, family and office. In November, [12News](#) reported that law enforcement officials were investigating a threat to kill Hobbs and her family. The threat and Hobbs’ home address and other personal information were posted on the social media site [Parler](#). On one occasion, protesters gathered outside Hobbs’ home chanting “[We are watching you.](#)”
- Washington D.C., November 2020: Republican Christopher Krebs, who had served under former President Trump’s the first head of the new Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), was “[bombarded](#)” with threats after [Joe diGenova](#), an attorney for the Trump campaign, stated that Krebs “should be drawn and quartered” and “taken out at dawn and shot” during a November 30 appearance on Newsmax TV’s Howie Carr Show.
- Ohio, October 2020: A [Piqua man reportedly told police](#) that Renea Turner, a 2018 write-in candidate for Ohio Governor, asked him to participate in a plot to arrest Ohio Governor Mike DeWine at his home in Cedarville and place him on trial for “tyranny.” Turner, who [claimed](#) in late October to have taken over DeWine’s role as governor, denies the plot and any desire to harm DeWine. Federal officials have since confirmed that there was a plot to kidnap DeWine.

These threats appear to be the byproduct, at least in part, of the inflammatory rhetoric espoused by a wide array of Trump supporters. Some have openly called for violence.

Specific examples of inflammatory rhetoric include:

- [Ron Watkins](#), the former administrator of [8kun](#), fueled false voter fraud conspiracy theories, particularly those related to Dominion Voting Systems. He has not only been instrumental in shaping and promoting the unfounded allegations of election fraud in Georgia that have taken root within the QAnon community, but also actively organized monitoring of election facilities.
- On December 7, 2020, the Arizona Republican Party (ARP) [retweeted](#) a post from right-wing activist and Stop the Steal organizer Ali Alexander that read, “I’m willing to give my life for this fight.” The ARP added to the tweet: “He is. Are you?”



- During a December 2020 episode of the “The Dilley Show,” MAGA supporter [Brenden Dilley](#) declared that Trump is not going anywhere because those that voted for Trump “are more than prepared to do everything, and I mean fucking everything, to preserve our constitutional republic and to protect our president.”
- In a November 28, 2020 tweet, [Lin Wood](#), a pro-Trump lawyer, encouraged the harassment of Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger by posting a video of Trump caravans honking their horns outside Raffensperger’s home. He also wrote, “Brad Raffensperger needs to come out of his basement to explain Dominion voting machine purchase and backroom deal with Hillary’s law firm on absentee ballots. Keep blowing those horns!”
- On the November 18, 2020 edition of InfoWars’ Alex Jones Show, guest host [Owen Shroyer](#) stated that Democrats and mainstream media “deserve” mass violence if Trump is not allowed to continue as president.
- During a November 5, 2020 podcast, former senior White House advisor [Steve Bannon](#) called for the beheading of chief medical advisor Dr. Anthony Fauci and FBI Director Christopher Wray.

Extremist and mainstream voices both called for violence, increasing the potential for dangerous activity. These plots illustrate that threat:

- New York, November 2020: Federal agents with New York’s Joint Terrorism Task Force arrested [Brian Maiorana](#) of Staten Island charging him with making threatening interstate communications. According to the criminal complaint, Maiorana used social media accounts to threaten violence against Democratic politicians, law enforcement officers and social justice protestors.
- Pennsylvania, November 2020: Philadelphia police [arrested two men](#), Antonio Lamotta and Joshua Macias, both from Virginia, thwarting a possible attack targeting the vote-counting operation at the Pennsylvania Convention Center.
- Michigan, October 2020: Federal and state authorities in Michigan arrested [14 men](#) associated with a militia cell called the Wolverine Watchmen on charges related to an

alleged plot to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, specifically based on pandemic-related restrictions. Six face federal charges stemming from the case while the remaining eight face state charges. [According to an FBI agent's testimony](#), the militia also discussed kidnapping Virginia Governor Ralph Northam during a June meeting in Ohio.

Blueprint for Violence

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 Extremism 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.

This victimization approach was key to the right-wing protests against COVID restrictions, which took place throughout 2020. Starting with the April 30, 2020, protest in [Lansing, Michigan](#), a wave of protests against coronavirus restrictions swept across the country, with attendees calling for stay-at-home orders to be lifted and state economies to be "reopened." While the earliest protests in March were [largely organized by extremists](#), more recent events were planned primarily by conservative activists, and have drawn extremists and non-extremists alike.

These events drew conservative activists and citizens expressing a range of concerns and fears about the economy and their livelihoods, but also attracted members of extremist organizations, some heavily armed, and featured signs and flags referencing extremist ideologies and conspiracies.

There is ample evidence of extremists using these rallies to broadcast their beliefs. Members of the [Three Percenters](#), a wing of the anti-government movement, attended events in Michigan, Oregon, Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois and California, while the violence-prone [Proud Boys](#) were on hand in Nevada, Oregon and California and a group of [armed "boogaloo" activists](#), carrying firearms in defiance of state law, showed up in Raleigh, North Carolina.

While extremists may be in the minority among actual attendees, these rallies are important opportunities for extremists to connect and develop new networks and to lay the groundwork for

future extremist activity. In certain parts of the country, such as the Pacific Northwest, these networks are already fairly robust – as evidenced by the April 19, 2020, protest in Olympia, Washington which featured Three Percenters, Proud Boys, members of [Patriot Prayer](#), and was advertised by the [Oath Keepers](#) – while elsewhere, these events are fertile ground for networking. For example, on April 25, 2020 the Proud Boys hosted a protest in Orlando that drew just two dozen people, including (according to a Gab post by the group) members of the white supremacist [New Jersey European Heritage Association](#), as well as members of the Three Percenters.

Pre-January 6 Planning and Violent Rhetoric

The tension and heightened rhetoric surrounding the election results were evident from Election Day onward, as “Protect the Vote” and “Stop the Steal” pro-Trump rallies popped up nationwide, with particular attention being paid to [Las Vegas](#), Detroit, Philadelphia, [Phoenix](#) and Atlanta – all cities in states where results were close, or where the Trump campaign contested the count.

- More than 100 “Protect the Vote” and “Stop the Steal” [protests](#) took place across the country in the days following the election. The very nature of these activities is problematic, calling into question the democratic process and agitating people to the point of action. Most protests progressed without incident, but some were characterized by violent clashes with police and multiple arrests. The National Guard was called into Portland after [reports](#) of “widespread violence” there, including [reports](#) that police confiscated a loaded AR-15-style weapon with a sticker associated with the [Boogaloo Movement](#). More than 50 arrests and multiple weapons confiscations were [reported](#) in New York.
- These rallies were organized by [non-extremist groups](#) but have been amplified by online extremist channels and individual extremists. Some extremists may show up at these events: a [Proud Boy](#) and a [Neo-Nazi](#) were allegedly [spotted](#) at a Philadelphia protest. [QAnon](#) gear [reportedly was seen](#) at a protest in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.
- On Facebook, support for the “Stop the Steal” campaign grew rapidly among mainstream Trump supporters. One “Stop the Steal” Facebook group, which included posts promoting disinformation and violence, [reportedly](#) gained more than 300,000 members between Wednesday and Thursday November 4 and 5, 2020, when Facebook finally shut it down. While the group was still live, members were invited to join a similar group on MeWe, which is marketed as a private alternative to Facebook.
- Extremists across less mainstream social media platforms, including Parler, Telegram and militia forums, continue to promote the false “Democratic election theft” narrative. Many have endorsed the idea that violence and civil war are a reasonable and necessary response. Some are celebrating this moment as a victory for [accelerationism](#) because “faith in the system has been shattered.” Again, the potential violence is terrifyingly high and such charges only increase the odds.

- On Telegram, white supremacist users made racist and antisemitic claims blaming “black cities controlled by Democrats,” “Democratic-controlled” (b-l-a-c-k) inner cities,” and “Jews Voting Fraud” for the ongoing vote counting and alleged election stealing.
- On and immediately following Election Day, posts across [militia](#) message boards focused on conspiracies about voting totals.
- Meanwhile, [QAnon](#) believers echoed fears that Democrats would perpetrate massive voter fraud to steal the election. Conspiracy theorist Alex Jones urged followers to “stake out polling places, saying, “We need people to stake out these key polling places and key areas and follow folks around. This is coming down to just us doing it.” In November, [Jones showed up](#) at a pro-Trump protest in Maricopa County where he made wild, unsubstantiated claims of Democrats of stealing the election and echoed common antisemitic conspiracies, saying Trump’s eventual victory would be a [defeat for “globalists” and “George Soros.”](#)
- Trump ally and former White House adviser Sebastian Gorka appeared to advocate violence in response to Democrats’ alleged fraud, [telling listeners of his November 5 “America First” radio show](#), “We need the judges to enforce the rule of law, and if the local bureaucrats prevent us from seeing the evidence, from seeing the legitimate votes, we need the U.S. Marshals to deploy and they need to break down the doors of those polling stations and stop the crimes being committed. It is that simple.” Gorka added, “Now, now, now, get out on the streets, protest and show them who you are and that they can’t get away with it.”

ADL’s Center on Extremism article, [“Extremists and Mainstream Trump Supporters Plan to Protest Congressional Certification of Biden’s Victory,”](#) released two days prior to the attack on the Capitol, on January 4, 2021, highlighted findings which flagged extremists’ calls for action and/or violence days and even months prior, as a lead-up to January 6th. The Center on Extremism also provided intelligence around potential political violence in the weeks following the November 2020 presidential election.

Extremist and mainstream Trump supporters framed the so-called “Stop the Steal” rallies as a last stand to protest a “stolen election” and prevent Biden from being sworn in as the next President. Some chatter indicated a desire to engage in violent tactics to ensure that the election was not “stolen” from President Trump.

[ADL documented calls for action and/or violence](#) shared on public and private social media platforms, some being posted well in advance of January 6, 2021, from a variety of different right-wing (extremist) groups including the organizers of the “Stop the Steal/Wild Protest,” Proud Boys, QAnon adherents, Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, and conspiracy theorists.

Specific examples of language that called for action and/or violence ahead of the January 6 insurrection:

- [Ali Alexander](#) is a right-wing provocateur who organized the “Stop the Steal/Wild Protest” on the Capitol lawn on January 6, 2021. Far in advance of January 6th, he organized and promoted a series of “Stop the Steal” protests and encouraged followers on his since removed Twitter account to “resist tyranny by any means necessary.” In a video he tweeted in November 2020, he stated “I will bring the system to a halt. You’re fucking with the wrong set of based negroes and hillbillies.” Alexander warned in video posted on Twitter on December 27, 2020, that he would follow whatever instructions were given by President Trump.
- On November 14, 2020, [Proud Boys](#) leader Enrique Tarrio said during his speech at the “[Million MAGA March](#)” in Washington, D.C., “The fucking motto has been resist...the truth is we need to revolt. We need to change things. Our fucking election system is fucking rigged.” By December 11, 2020, Tarrio was identifying himself as a “war time” leader and changed his Parler display name to “Wartime Tarrio.” And on December 11, Tarrio shouted into a megaphone to a large group of Proud Boys, “To the parasites both in Congress and in that stolen White House – you want a war, well you got one!”
- On January 5, [Alex Jones](#), an influential right-wing conspiracy theorist and InfoWars radio host, shared a video on January 5, 2021 entitled “Alex Jones Show: Americans Flood DC to Fight Communist Chinese Takeover of America.” During the video, Jones said the following: “...As long as we never accept the fraudulent results, as long as we don’t let them gaslight us into submission as long as we point out that this is a foreign globalist take-over of our country, and all of the depression and all of the collapse that’s coming is because of the [New World Order](#), this will end up fully destroying them in the future if we don’t submit. If we submit, they will normalize the communism, they will normalize putting us into a depression, they will normalize taking our families, taking our guns. We can’t let that happen. InfoWars is more important than ever.... so please Paul Reveres, I salute you for your past actions...come to the big D.C. marches on the fifth and sixth of January. I’ll see you there. God bless!”
- [Nick Fuentes](#), a white supremacist America First podcaster and leader of the [Groyper Army](#) attended the [Million MAGA March](#) in November in D.C. alongside fellow Groyper, where he addressed a crowd, [stating](#), “We are not going to live as captives. This is our Republican Party. This is our country. USA!” In the days leading up to January 6th, Fuentes continued to promote the myth of election fraud. On January 4, Fuentes [posted a video](#) on DLive tacitly urging followers to kill state legislators, before he seemed to backpedal: “What can you and I do to state legislators besides kill them? Although, I’m not advising that, but I mean, what else are you going to do?”

CAPITOL INSURRECTION

On January 6, 2021, pro-Trump extremists, including a broad coalition of right-wing and anti-government extremists, descended on Washington, D.C. and after hearing [President Trump, his family, and supporters speak](#), [stormed 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, left 150 officers injured, often severely, and also resulted in five deaths.

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.

Extremists at the Capitol Insurrection

ADL’s Center on Extremism (COE) is aware of more than 800 individuals facing criminal charges related to their activities that day. 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.

In addition, many who were roused to violence that day are broadly 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 influencers, the former President and his enablers, and many others.

This section will discuss the following extremist groups or movements: the Proud Boys; anti-government extremists like the Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, and Boogaloo movement; conspiracy theorist extremists like QAnon followers; and white supremacist extremists like Groypers, New Jersey European Heritage Association and the Nationalist Social Club.

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 in 2019 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 its perceived enemies.

In recent years the Proud Boys have established themselves as a dominant force within what was once 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 other right-wing extremists. For example, 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 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](#). In addition, Jason Kessler, the primary organizer of the deadly 2017 [Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville](#), is a former Proud Boy.

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.

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. Accusations of satanic pedophilia cabals are an animating conspiracy theory of QAnon, and its believers and fellow travelers have increasingly advanced baseless claims of Democratic or “global elitist” child sexual exploitation rings as they seek new recruits and to justify their incitement and violence. 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, 2020 presidential 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.

After the December 12th rally, Proud Boys members tore down and destroyed multiple Black Lives Matter signs, including Black Lives Matter signs hung on the property of historically Black churches. Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio took responsibility for one of these incidents on social media and was later charged with destruction of property. He was arrested, carrying two extended gun magazines, on January 4, 2021, and ordered to leave the District. Tarrio 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 one of the churches impacted, the Metropolitan AME church, against the Proud Boys and Tarrio that, last April, resulted in a [default judgment against the Proud Boys](#).

The Proud Boys were the most visible and most active right-wing extremist group at the Capitol on January 6, 2021 and many members and affiliates are now facing criminal charges in connection with attack.

During the insurrection, Proud Boys members allegedly intentionally disguised themselves as “antifa” adherents (by wearing black) to avoid detection. On December 29, 2020, in a Parler post describing the Proud Boys’ strategy for the upcoming events at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th, Proud Boys Chairman Enrique Tarrio, posted: “We will not be wearing our traditional Black and Yellow. We will be incognito and will spread across downtown DC in smaller teams,” adding that “who knows...we might dress in all BLACK for the occasion.” On January 6, 2021, this strategy was employed as members of the Proud Boys appeared not in their usual black and yellow uniforms but wearing mostly black as they prepared to storm the Capitol. Tarrio has [been charged with](#) conspiracy related to the January 6 attack.

Anti-Government Extremists

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 self-organize and form official, semi-official or informal groupings.

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.

Just days after the January 6th insurrection, three members of the Oath Keepers – Jessica Watkins, Donovan Crowl, and Thomas Caldwell – were indicted on conspiracy charges for their actions during the attack, making them the first insurrectionists facing such charges. Since then, the conspiracy case has grown to include Oath Keepers from across the country. According to the Department of Justice, the co-conspirators “prepared themselves for battle...by equipping themselves with communication devices and donning reinforced vests, helmets, and goggles.” The group also reportedly discussed ways to maintain operational security and then used encrypted messaging to communicate and form plans.

The Oath Keepers are led by Stewart Rhodes, who is now facing charges for seditious conspiracy for his role in the January 6th attack. Rhodes previously appeared in D.C. on December 12, 2020 for a violent [pro-Trump demonstration](#), where he called for then-President Trump to invoke the Insurrection Act to help him remain in power, adding that if he did not do so, groups such as the Oath Keepers would have to mount a “much more desperate [and] much more bloody war” to ensure that outcome.

According to court documents, Rhodes was in [direct contact](#) before, during, and immediately after the Capitol breach, and he reportedly created the invitation-only encrypted Signal chat called “DC OP: Jan 6 21” that was used by the group to coordinate their plans.

Not only did Oath Keepers members breach the Capitol on January 6th, but they also reportedly established Quick Reaction Forces outside of Washington, D.C. that consisted of Oath Keepers waiting on standby with guns in a hotel across the river in the event of a “worst case scenario.”

Several Oath Keepers have since pleaded guilty to the charges against them.

Three Percenters

[Three Percenters](#) (also known as 3%ers, III%ers, and Threepers) are anti-government extremists who are part of the militia movement. They compare their hostility to the federal government with the opposition of American patriots to the British during the American Revolution. The term itself is a reference to a false belief that the number of Americans who fought against the British during the Revolutionary War amounted to only three percent of the population at the time. In fact, historians estimate that roughly [13 percent](#) of the population served during the American Revolution.

Three Percenters believe that, just as a small revolutionary vanguard overthrew the tyrannical British rule in America, a dedicated group of modern patriots could rid the United States of today's alleged tyranny.

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

In contrast to the Oath Keepers, most of the January 6 cases involving the Three Percenters involve individuals. For example:

- Rasha Abual-Ragheb, who participated in group chats with the New Jersey chapter of the American Patriot 3%, was charged with entering and remaining in a restricted building, disorderly and disruptive conduct in a restricted building, violent entry and disorderly conduct in a Capitol Building, and parading, demonstrating, or picketing in a Capitol Building. She will [reportedly](#) plead guilty on August 23, though it is unclear what charges she will admit to.
- Anthony Antonio, who wore a tactical bulletproof vest with a Three Percenters patch on it, was [charged](#) with unlawful and violent entry of the Capitol, police obstruction, and destruction of government property.
- Guy Wesley Reffitt, who allegedly tried to recruit members to a Texas Three percenters group, was the first Insurrectionist [charged](#) with violating a federal law that makes it illegal to transport a gun or explosive device for unlawful use in a riot. He previously pleaded not guilty to three charges of obstructing the election certification, trespassing on restricted Capitol grounds, and witness tampering. On March 8, 2022, a federal jury found Reffitt [guilty](#) of all five felony charges he faced, in the first January 6 criminal trial.

The exception to this is the [American Phoenix Project](#), a group of six individuals accused of conspiring with each other and others known and unknown to corruptly obstruct, influence, and impede the Congressional proceeding at the Capitol. The organization was founded by Alan Hostetter, who used the platform to encourage people to attend Stop the Steal rallies, including the January 6 event. Though Hostetter referenced the Three Percent concept in an Instagram post, he has not overtly identified himself as part of the movement. However, of the six people arrested in connection with the American Phoenix Project, three of them – Derek Kinnison, Felipe Antonio Martinez, and Erik Scott Warner – identified as “so cal 3%”, and a fourth member – Ronald Mele – was seen in a photo with the other three flashing a hand gesture associated with the Three Percenter movement. Of these individuals, only Warner is believed to have entered the Capitol.

Boogaloo Movement

The [boogaloo movement](#) is an anti-government extremist movement that formed in 2019. In 2020, boogalooers increasingly engaged in real world activities as well as online activities, showing up at protests and rallies around gun rights, pandemic restrictions, and police-related killings.

Though the boogaloo movement largely did not support President Trump, the movement's support for a civil war spread to a wide variety of extremists and one follower of the boogaloo movement has been indicted in connection with his activity on January 6. Steven Thurlow was [charged](#) with knowingly entering or remaining in a restricted building without lawful authority, disorderly and disruptive conduct in a restricted building without lawful authority, disorderly conduct in a Capitol building, and parading, demonstrating, or picketing in a Capitol building. Thurlow, who has been photographed wearing a boogaloo patch, [allegedly](#) broke into the Capitol, climbed on a conference table, and documented his participation in the riot on social media.

QAnon and Conspiracy Theorists

[QAnon](#) is a global, wide-reaching and elaborate conspiracy theory that has taken root especially within [some parts of the pro-Trump movement](#). It is an amalgam of both novel and well-established conspiracy theories, with marked undertones of antisemitism and xenophobia. There were at least 31 QAnon adherents among the extremists who have been arrested in connection with the January 6 attack on the Capitol.

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," controls 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.

For some right-wing extremist movements, conspiracy theories lie at the heart of their extreme worldviews. The modern white supremacist movement, for example, is centered in part around "The Great Replacement" -- the conspiratorial belief that the white race [is in danger of extinction](#) from growing numbers of people of color who are controlled and manipulated by nefarious Jewish forces.

Increasingly, aspects of this racist, antisemitic ideology are gaining traction [among right-wing pundits](#) and political leaders, inciting anti-immigrant fervor and opposition to “multiculturalism.” 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;
- Roger Stone, the conspiracy-driven former political operative whose prison sentence for giving false statements in the Mueller investigation was commuted by Trump in July 2020, has promoted election fraud conspiracies, saying at one point that [North Korea had delivered ballots via ports in the state of Maine](#);
- Mike Lindell (My Pillow CEO) and Patrick Byrne (former CEO of Overstock.com) have loudly proclaimed that the 2020 election was “stolen” [in appearances at a series of right-wing conferences](#); and

- Sidney Powell, a lawyer who represented President Trump in his lawsuits contesting the election, tweeted demonstrably false claims about the election being stolen to her million-plus followers. She also blamed the events of January 6 on antifa and Black Lives Matter. Ms. Powell uses #Kraken in her Twitter handle. The Kraken, a sea monster from Scandinavian folklore that emerges from the ocean to eat its enemies, has become an internet meme resulting from its use in the film *Clash of the Titans* and a rallying cry for QAnon conspiracy theorists alleging widespread election fraud. Using the hashtag #ReleasetheKraken, they claim that the Kraken is a trove of documents proving the alleged election fraud. These claims have been rejected repeatedly in court. Nevertheless, Ms. Powell tweeted, “We’ve now seen the true colors of all our elected officials. This was a setup [sic]. It’s an excuse for them to cram down an illegal election.”

These narratives go well beyond the mainstream into extreme territory.

The White Supremacist Movement

Compared to the huge number of radicalized Trump supporters, the array of anti-government extremists, and the large number of Proud Boys and QAnon supporters; the white supremacist movement was not well represented during the January 6 attack on the Capitol. While [testimony by officers who defended the Capitol](#) revealed multiple incidents of racism by rioters, only a dozen individuals facing criminal charges for their actions appear to hold white supremacist views. For the most part, their attendance was not organized as part of the broader movement or as members of a particular group.

Though they did not attend in great number, at least three individuals associated with the Groyper Army, a loose collection of young men who support Nick Fuentes and his white supremacist America First agenda are facing insurrection charges, including Tim Gionet, a white supremacist troll known as Baked Alaska who is facing federal charges after he [allegedly streamed live video from inside the Capitol](#).

Members of the neo-Nazi New Jersey European Heritage Association and the Nationalist Social Club also attended the January 6 event but there is no evidence that they entered the Capitol. More below on these groups.

Nick Fuentes and his America First Groyper Army

[Nick Fuentes](#), a prominent white supremacist pundit and America First podcaster who leads the [Groyper Army](#), seeks to forge a white nationalist alternative to the mainstream Republican Party. Fuentes served as an organizer and speaker at many “Stop the Steal” protests leading up to the January 6 attack on the Capitol including protests in Michigan, Georgia, Wisconsin, Arizona and Washington, D.C. Fuentes attended the January 6 event but did not enter the Capitol.

The so-called “Groyper army” is a white supremacist group 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. They believe their views are shared by the majority of white people.

New Jersey European Heritage Association

Created in early 2018, the [New Jersey European Heritage Association \(NJEHA\)](#) is a small white supremacist group whose members see themselves as defenders of white European people and white culture. Members hold the white supremacist worldview that unless immediate action is taken, the white race is doomed to extinction by a “rising tide of color” purportedly controlled and manipulated by Jews.

A member of the New Jersey European Heritage Association forwarded an article on Telegram about President Trump calling for a protest on January 6 with the caption: “Trump calls for protest in DC on Jan 6., says ‘be there, will be wild.’” Members of his group attended both previous events.

On January 6th, at least one member of the group distributed white supremacist propaganda on the National Mall and moved through the crowd carrying the group’s signature black flag which features a white spartan wielding a shield and spear.

Nationalist Social Club

The [Nationalist Social Club \(NSC\)](#) or 131 Crew (131 is alphanumeric code for ACA, Anti Communist Action) is a neo-Nazi group with chapters in the states of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode, Island, Maine, Connecticut and Vermont. NSC members consider themselves soldiers fighting a war against a hostile, Jewish-controlled system that is deliberately plotting the extinction of the white race. Their goal is to form an underground network of white men who are willing to fight against their perceived enemies through localized direct actions.

On January 6th, a member of the NSC posted images outside the Capitol claiming, “The US Capitol is now a 131 Zone.” Another image posted on the group’s Telegram channel included an image of a U.S. Capitol police helmet with an NSC sticker affixed. It was captioned with a trophy emoji and “#DC #FuckThePolice.”

Online Platforms as Planning Vehicles for Attack

Parler

The social media site Parler, which had become increasingly popular among conservatives, also attracted a range of extremists. In the weeks leading up to January 6, 2021, the platform drew [millions of new users](#) frustrated with what they perceive to be “anti-conservative” bias exhibited by mainstream social media platforms. Parler experienced exponential growth in late 2020 and early 2021, as Twitter and Facebook limited posts by President Trump and other conservative influencers that violated terms of service prohibiting the spread of misinformation. Less than two weeks after the election in November 2020, membership on the Parler app swelled to [around eight million active users](#).

Parler has attracted a range of right-wing extremists. [Proud Boys](#), [QAnon adherents](#), anti-government extremists ([Oath Keepers](#), [Three Percenters](#), and [militia](#)) and white supremacists (from members of the [Groypers](#) to [accelerationists](#)) openly promote their ideologies on the site, while [Holocaust denial](#), antisemitism, racism and other forms of bigotry are also easy to find. While the site itself is not extremist, extremists joined Parler in large numbers alongside millions of mainstream users, creating the potential for extensive and worrying comingling of extremists and non-extremists. Parler is the just latest in a [long line](#) of platforms, including Telegram and [Gab](#), that have attempted to lure right-wing users away from mainstream social media platforms.

In the days following the election, extremists and mainstream conservatives alike used Parler to organize and recruit for pro-Trump (Million MAGA March and #StoptheSteal) events in Washington, DC, and elsewhere.

Gab

Parler was not the only platform that played a significant role in the January 6 insurrection. ADL closely tracked developments on [Gab](#), a right-wing social media platform [known for its lack of content moderation](#).

For instance, according to [at least one report](#), directions for which streets to take to avoid the police and which tools to bring to help pry open doors were exchanged in comments on Gab leading up to the attack. Additionally, the report said that multiple people posted about carrying guns into the halls of Congress.

[ADL’s Center on Extremism is aware that](#) Gab CEO and founder Andrew Torba sent a message to “Gab News” subscribers the day before the attack saying:

“If you are heading to DC tomorrow remember to record video footage in landscape mode while filming. Document as much as you can and please know that your content is safe on Gab and Gab TV. Big Tech will undoubtedly [sic] be censoring any and all footage to downplay the massive turnout and hide any communist violence that arises. If you are unable to attend, Gab is the one place on the internet where you know you can find the real story of what is happening throughout the day uncensored and ‘fact check’ free.”

On the day of the attack, Torba posted on Gab: “In a system with rigged elections there are no longer any viable political solutions.” The phrase “there is no political solution” is used in online accelerationist white supremacist circles to further the idea that the US government system is rotten, democratic processes for change are futile, and therefore the system should be destroyed. The phrase embraces political violence as the only valid response.

And before hundreds of rioters broke into the Capitol building, Torba reportedly posted on his platform: “would be a real shame if the people outside stormed the Senate.”

On January 13, 2021, ADL wrote an open letter to the [U.S. Department of Justice](#) requesting an investigation into Gab based on this information.

Financing the January 6 Attack and Related Activities

GiveSendGo

[GiveSendGo](#), a Christian-oriented crowdfunding website, played a not insignificant role in facilitating the participation of some individuals and groups in the events of January 6. During the lead up to January 6th, individuals and groups looking to travel to Washington, D.C. raised funds on the platform for buses, gas, and other transportation expenses. [According to CNN’s reporting](#) in the weeks following the riot, some fundraising campaigns connected to the Proud Boys stated they were raising funds for “protective gear.”

In the aftermath of January 6th, participants facing legal repercussions have taken to GiveSendGo to raise funds for bail, legal representation, and other legal fees. These campaigns were often framed as aid for “political prisoners.” Perpetrators have also sought financial aid for medical expenses. [According to reporting from The Guardian](#), “following the Capitol riots, a fundraiser in the name of ‘Medical Assistance to DC Proud Boy victims’ made \$106,107 on just [January 6th and 7th].”

More recently, [ADL investigators found significant overlap](#) between those who contributed via GiveSendGo to Canada’s “Freedom Convoy” protest and the January 6 insurrection. The same reporting also revealed overlapping donations to those planning the trucker convoy in the U.S.

DLive

[Nick Fuentes](#), leader of the [white supremacist Groyper movement](#), received substantial donations linked to his involvement in the January 6 attack while on DLive, a streaming platform that allows streamers to earn money from subscriptions and donations from viewers. Fuentes, prior to his deplatforming, streamed heavily on DLive. On January 4, 2021, Fuentes garnered \$2,323.23 in donations and on January 7, 2021, \$2,831.64 through DLive donations; both livestreams endorsed the insurrection.

On December 8, 2021, a donor sent 28.15 BTC – approximately \$522,000 at time of transfer – to 22 separate addresses, many of which belonged to far-right activists. Nick Fuentes received 13.5 BTC – approximately \$250,000 at time of transfer – making him the largest beneficiary of the

donation. This donation was by far the largest cryptocurrency donation that Fuentes ever received. [Previously, according to a](#) Chinalysis financial report, the most Fuentes ever received in a single month was \$2,707 worth of Bitcoin. The donation allegedly came from a French computer programmer and early investor [in Bitcoin](#).

LOOKING AHEAD: THE JANUARY 6 EFFECT ON DOMESTIC EXTREMISM

The January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol was an inflection point for extremism in America. Though the attack was in many ways [predictable](#) – extremists were [increasingly active and emboldened](#) across the United States in the years before the insurrection – the overt display of political violence and venom was nonetheless shocking. One year later, the ripple effects of that day continue to reverberate in the form of heightened displays of hate and extremism nationwide.

The events of January 6 – and the far-reaching aftermath – demonstrate the toxic and dangerous impact of coordinated engagement among extremists and non-extremists and illustrate the profound and far-reaching effects of ostensibly mainstream political leaders, media influencers and other high-profile figures who tolerate, flirt with, and outright promote extremist ideology and conspiracy theories. It is difficult to forecast exactly how the extremist landscape may change over the next several months and years, but it is clear that many of the elements that brought Americans to the Capitol on January 6 continue to animate segments of the population.

Politicians Espousing Violence

From former President Donald Trump’s call to “fight like hell” on January 6 to politicians publicly fantasizing about harming their ideological opponents, calls for political violence have grown exponentially since January 6. And as political leaders go, so go their followers; the [U.S. Capitol Police reported in May 2021](#) that threats against members of Congress were up 107% compared to 2020. When politicians use their reach to promote violent rhetoric without consequence, it inspires increasingly militant speech and action from fellow leaders and their supporters; it endangers the very Constitution these officials have sworn to support and defend.

Extremism Goes Mainstream

Extreme views have always existed in every society around the world. In healthy societies, these ideologies are relegated to the margins, with most people rejecting the hateful, conspiratorial or violent ideas and tactics promoted by extremists. Alarming, in the year since the attack on the U.S. Capitol, extremists have enjoyed the mainstreaming of their ideologies at rates unprecedented in modern times. National leaders in government and media have served as gateways and champions for radical ideologies, validating and promoting bigoted and militant views to millions more people than extremists could ever hope to reach on their own. It is no coincidence that the mainstreaming of extremism since January 6 has coincided with spikes in threats and acts of violence targeting essential institutions and communities across the nation.

Conspiracy Theories Gain New Ground

America has been [fertile ground for conspiracy theories](#) since its earliest days, but January 6 marked the start of a new “Age of Conspiracy” in the United States, in which increasingly dangerous falsehoods continue to gain unprecedented popular support. For instance, even before the debris had fully been cleared from the Capitol on January 6th, the insurrection itself became mired in conspiracy. [Republican Congressman Matt Gaetz took to the floor](#) to assert, without any evidence, that the insurrection was not an attempt by Trump supporters to stop the certification of the election results but was instead a false flag operation organized by left-wing [antifa](#).

The brazen embrace of falsehoods regarding January 6 foreshadowed an avalanche of conspiracy theories throughout 2021. More and more individuals across the right adopted increasingly outlandish and irrational beliefs about vaccines, public-school curricula, the 2020 election and other issues. While most of these theories did not cross into extremist territory, their proliferation made it easier for extremists to inject their own sinister conspiracies into the mainstream. Extremist views rooted in [white supremacy](#), [QAnon](#), and [antisemitism](#) gained traction last year, especially when they were aided and abetted by influential allies in government and the media.

While most conspiracy theories are not dangerous, [they can inspire people to engage in criminal activity or even violence](#). The more conspiracy theories are tolerated or even promoted by national and local American leaders, the more susceptible our society becomes to increasingly dangerous and extreme conspiracy theories that may drive more people to harm others.

Threats, Plots and Attacks Targeting Political Figures, Institutions and Symbols

When presented with a politician or policy that they do not like, Americans have numerous legitimate and effective means of expressing their discontent and promoting their political views. But beginning 2020, we began to see more examples of aggressive action, including storming of state capitol buildings, by people who [disagreed with public health measures](#) to combat the spread of coronavirus, as well as a [thwarted plot](#) to kidnap a sitting governor. In a country awash in guns, the fact that many protesters (often lawfully) bring weapons to protests raises the risk of significant injury should there be violence.

These events and January 6 seem to have opened the floodgates; in the last two years, an increasing number of Americans have used violence against their political and ideological opponents. These individuals often directed their ire at physical buildings and institutions that represent government or political entities. This interest in striking symbols of their perceived enemies echoes past acts of domestic terror, most famously the targeting of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building during the [1995 Oklahoma City bombing](#).

These efforts demonstrate a concerning and growing willingness on behalf of partisans to engage in extreme measures that threaten the safety of our institutions and communities. Indeed, several of the individuals who attacked political institutions in 2021 had assembled significant arsenals at the time of their arrest, indicating their intention and capability to do harm on a larger scale. Political violence undermines our democratic processes by signaling that anyone can become the target simply for their political beliefs.

Threats and Harassment Against Public School Officials and Medical Professionals

As influential figures mainstreamed extremist and hateful views in the months following January 6th, more and more of their supporters began promoting and acting on these ideologies. While much of this ire was directed towards national figures and institutions, conspiracies also spread about issues with local impact, particularly concerning public health and education.

Many of the radical ideas that gained traction over the course of 2021 put medical professionals and school officials directly in the crosshairs of far-right animosity from within their own communities. As a result, harassment, threats and acts of violence against health and educational professionals and institutions bubbled over, as people animated by extremist views took action against those who they believed were complicit in or responsible for nefarious conspiratorial plots.

From the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation about the virus circulated widely on social media. Elected officials and mainstream news channels promoted lies, including the theory that the vaccine was an effort by the government to “control” the population. As a result, conspiracy theorists, extremists and members of the public have targeted physicians, nurses, hospital and clinic staff members, public health officials and scientists with harassment and threats.

Similarly, in 2021, public schools and school board meetings encountered extraordinary vitriol around mask and vaccine policies, as well as disinformation and conspiracies around [Critical Race Theory \(CRT\)](#). Across the nation, school officials were targeted with threats, [doxing](#), white supremacist propaganda and other extremist tactics.

Targeting Journalists

A free press is essential to a healthy democracy, and Americans across the ideological spectrum were largely united on this point for most of American history. But former President Donald Trump’s [disdain for the press](#) – including maligning it as “fake news” and [glorifying violence against journalists](#) – sparked skyrocketing levels of mistrust and outright hostility towards news media by the right.

In the immediate aftermath of the January 6 attack, the phrase “MURDER THE MEDIA” was found carved into a door to the Capitol, leaving a violent message for journalists and setting the stage for a string of assaults against members of the media. Reflexive, unthinking distrust of the mainstream media is a legacy of the Trump presidency; in fact, the Nazi phrase “Lügenpresse,” or lying press, was [resurrected by Trump supporters](#) at his rallies. But this sentiment is not solely reserved for the right – left-wing extremists have also increasingly adopted and acted on anti-press views. This has led to real-world action: the U.S. Press Freedom Tracker reports that at least [135 journalists](#) were assaulted in 2021.

Today, that anger continues to simmer, and when it boils over, journalists find themselves in danger for simply doing their jobs. When journalists fear for their lives, we should fear for our country.

CONCLUSION

On January 6, 2021, we saw the terrible evidence of the power of incendiary and inciting rhetoric—the ramifications of the mainstreaming of the extreme. Trends among such far-right movements spelled out clear warning signs and indications of possible violence. Simultaneously, the amplification of the “Big Lie” served as a catalyst for Americans to be pushed toward violent action.

No doubt, the lies, conspiracies, and perceived grievances that animated the crowd on that day persist nationwide, and until they are addressed the U.S. remains at risk for another insurrection-style event, or perhaps even a bloodier attack. To this end, ADL commends the Select Committee on its leadership and urges Congress to adopt the Committee’s report into the historical record and take significant legislative action to mitigate future threats.