

10 March 2022

Ms. E. Tendayi Achiume  
UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism

Via email: [ohchr-racism@un.org](mailto:ohchr-racism@un.org)

Dear Ms. Achiume:

On behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center, one the largest US civil and human rights organizations, I write to provide the below responses to your recent call for input on combatting the glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fueling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

SPLC was founded in 1971. Since that time, SPLC's mission has been to stamp out racism, hate and extremism. Our Hate Watch and Intelligence Project divisions conduct the most comprehensive and up-to-date tracking and monitoring of active hate and extremist groups in the US.

- ***Information, including examples, academic work, and other accounts, on new trends and contemporary manifestations of extremist political parties, movements, ideologies and groups of a racist or xenophobic character, including neo-Nazis and skinhead groups.***

In 2021, SPLC tracked 733 hate and extremist groups, categorized by ideology as follows:

- [Anti-Immigrant](#): 18
- [Anti-LGBTQ](#): 65
- [Anti-Muslim](#): 50
- [Antisemitic](#): 61
- [Christian Identity](#): 9
- [General Hate](#): 274
- [Hate Music](#): 11
- [KKK](#): 18
- [Male Supremacy](#): 1
- [Neo-Confederate](#): 16

- [Neo-Nazi](#): 54
- [Neo-Volkisch](#): 32
- [Racist Skinhead](#): 17
- [Radical Traditional Catholic](#): 9
- [White Nationalist](#): 98

The links provided for each will lead to more detailed information on SPLC’s website about the groups in each category.

After reaching a historic high of 1,020 in 2018, the number of hate groups listed by the SPLC has fallen for the third year in a row, to 733 in 2021. Rather than demonstrating a decline in the power of these ideologies, however, the decreasing numbers of organized hate groups suggest that the extremist ideas that mobilize them now operate more openly in the political mainstream, leading adherents to feel less need to organize smaller and more clandestine groups amongst themselves.

The growth of a mainstream reactionary right-wing movement in 2021 is inextricably linked to the powerful racial justice movement that mobilized many Americans in 2020. The movement for Black lives forced the country to reckon with the realities of systemic anti-Black racism and police violence. Unfortunately, its widespread resonance also ignited fear in the hard right, which mounted counter-efforts to maintain and strengthen white supremacy. Former-President Trump and other reactionaries capitalized politically on demonizing the movement, and painted Black Lives Matter activists, Democrats and the left broadly as an existential threat to the country. “The left-wing cultural revolution,” Trump said in a [September 2020 speech](#), “is designed to overthrow the American Revolution.”

This backlash has historical precedent. During the Reconstruction era, whites who wanted to maintain their supremacy founded the Ku Klux Klan to intimidate newly emancipated Black people and violently perpetuate a system of racial subjugation that was rooted in slavery. In the Civil Rights Era, white citizens, politicians and law enforcement worked together to fight the freedom movement with violence and an organized campaign of “[massive resistance](#)” to school desegregation. Repressive right-wing movements like this continue to emerge during moments of social change and are, according to Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons, two prominent scholars of the far right, “motivated or defined centrally by backlash against liberation movements, social reform, or revolution.” Or, as the historian Carol Anderson put it, “The trigger for white rage, inevitably, is Black advancement.”

Fear of changes to the social status quo, in which white people hold a privileged place, has helped fuel the mainstreaming of the “great replacement” myth – a conspiracy theory in which white people are being systematically replaced by non-white immigrants at the hands of leftists, Democrats, “multiculturalists,” Jewish people and others. The myth is central to the white nationalist movement, which in 2021 included 98 hate groups. Since 2018, extremists inspired by the great replacement theory have committed terror attacks in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Christchurch, New Zealand; Poway, California; and El Paso, Texas. But as hard-right actors

weaponize America's demographic changes to instill fear and resentment, the myth has spread beyond terrorist manifestos and into American living rooms.

In 2021, Tucker Carlson, whose Fox News show is the most-viewed cable news program in the country, openly promoted the great replacement conspiracy. "In political terms, this policy is called the great replacement, the replacement of legacy Americans with more obedient people from faraway countries," he [said on air in September](#). His words opened space for others, including elected officials such as Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, who tweeted that Carlson was "CORRECT about Replacement Theory as he explains what is happening to America." Officials in border states, where white nationalist and antigovernment groups have "[intercepted](#)" and [interrogated migrants](#), have especially tried to ramp up fear of white replacement to undercut their political opposition. Republican Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick [said on Fox News](#) that Democrats are using immigration to "take over our country without firing a shot."

While the overall number of hate groups declined in 2021, some groups experienced rapid growth, as well as increased influence and access to the political mainstream. The most dramatic rise happened within the Proud Boys, a "Western chauvinist" men's organization with a long history of violence. In 2021, the SPLC documented 72 active [Proud Boys](#) chapters across the country, up from 43 the year before. The rise in Proud Boys chapters is especially remarkable considering that at least 40 members of the group have been charged in relation to their role in the Jan. 6 insurrection. Their growth suggests the country has become alarmingly fertile ground for their brand of authoritarian politics.

Even as the ideas that propel the white power movement gain more purchase among an increasingly authoritarian Republican Party, its constituent groups have faced organizational challenges, due, in part, to law enforcement pressure and civil suits.

After a series of deadly far-right attacks during the Trump presidency, the Department of Homeland Security recognized in a 2020 [threat assessment](#) that white supremacist extremists are, and will remain, "the most persistent and lethal threat to the Homeland." The report, along with [later statements](#) by the [Biden administration](#), marked a larger shift within law enforcement and intelligence agencies away from foreign terrorist groups, which became the single-minded focus of federal counter-extremism efforts following the 9/11 attacks.

Partially as an attempt to evade authorities and antifascist infiltrators, neo-Nazi groups, whose numbers dipped from 63 groups in 2020 to 54 in 2021, organized in more decentralized fashion. Prominent voices in the movement now encourage members of neo-Nazi online communities to maintain anonymity and congregate in diffuse online communities rather than join public-facing groups with names and membership vetting procedures. Extremists [not associated](#) with a defined group have still been arrested, showing the strategy has returned mixed results.

In addition to attracting attention from law enforcement, the energy of the white power movement was dampened by the outcome of the *Sines v. Kessler* trial, a civil suit brought by Integrity First for America against the organizers of the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

On Nov. 23, 2021, jurors found all the defendants liable on a number of charges, including civil conspiracy, under Virginia state law. Combined, they face \$25 million in damages.

Though the increased attention of civil authorities has created major challenges to the white power movement, it's clear that the criminal legal system, on its own, cannot adequately address the problem of far-right extremism. A large subset of the movement remains concentrated on influencing mainstream politics, and nearly every indicator suggests the political ground is fertile for their appeals unless diverse communities working together build resiliency through prevention, organizing and education.

Some white nationalist organizations, such as Nick Fuentes' America First Foundation, want to exert power over the GOP and convince its members to openly embrace white nationalism. Others are attempting to build infrastructure to challenge mainstream institutions, including the National Justice Party (NJP). Founded in 2020 by several longtime activists in the white power movement, NJP has become a hub for the movement. The group hosts meetings throughout the year where representatives from a number of white nationalist groups can come together and collectively organize. An October 2021 meeting gathered about 150 attendees.

One of those groups is [Patriot Front](#), which has 42 chapters nationwide. In 2021, Patriot Front held multiple "flash" demonstrations around the country and, according to [leaked internal communications](#), defaced George Floyd and Black Lives Matter murals. Patriot Front, like many extremist groups, at times uses mainstream social media to spread their propaganda. During a December demonstration in Washington, D.C., that included about 100 members marching through the National Mall, a Patriot Front member created a fake Twitter account to bring their action to mainstream attention: "HAPPENING NOW: About 500 men with riot shields are marching in #WashingtonDC," the account tweeted, gaining more than 1,000 retweets.

Extremists easily get around bans on social media platforms, often simply creating new usernames and continuing to post. They also find ways to make algorithms work to amplify their content, like including using specific words or hashtags repeatedly to make them appear under the "Trending on Twitter" section. During the Jan. 6 insurrection, for instance, members of the far right used Twitter to spread the lie that antifa attacked the Capitol – a [conspiracy](#) later repeated on the House floor. More broadly, [platforms such as Twitter](#) and Facebook have failed for years to adequately enforce their own terms of service. Both companies operate under a libertarian ethos, allowing white supremacist and other hateful and dangerous content on their platforms. They have invested inadequate resources into meaningful content moderation despite repeated promises to do so, and they tend to only remove extremist content or individuals after heavy public pressure.

Hate groups and other extremists do not solely rely on mainstream social media platforms to spread their message – they are increasingly using "alt-tech" platforms that are often advertised as "free speech" alternatives to places like Twitter and Facebook. On these platforms, users don't have to worry about content moderation. These include video platforms like Bitchute and Odysee and social media sites like Gab. The startup [Chthonic Software](#) helped create a monetized streaming

site for Nick Fuentes and other extremist livestreamers after many were banned from other sites in the aftermath of Jan. 6.

Gab has for years been a haven for racist and anti-Semites. The man who is charged with killing 11 people at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 2018 was a user and posted on the site immediately before the attack. In the past year, Gab CEO Andrew Torba has expanded the services offered on the platform to create what he calls a “parallel society.” “At Gab when we recognize a problem in the world, like Big Tech censorship and the anti-White, anti-Christian, and anti-American woke economy, we don’t just sit around and complain about it like our useless politicians do,” Torba posted to Gab’s website in June. “We take action and start building.” The company recently launched an ad platform and says it will soon offer a payment processor. The services Gab, Chthonic and others offer suggest that the white power movement is building increasingly resilient online services, which can allow extremists to spread and monetize their content while remaining impervious to public pressure or government regulation.

More detailed information on all of the above is available in SPLC’s just-released [Year In Hate & Extremism](#) report. SPLC, other experts, and members of Congress discussed the findings in an online discussion that is available to view [here](#).

- *Measures adopted by Member States – in law and policy – with a view to countering extremist political parties, movements, ideologies and groups of a racist or xenophobic character, including neo-Nazis and skinhead groups and similar extremist ideological movements.*
- *Measures adopted by Member States aimed at preventing and countering hate speech, including on the internet.*

On March 8, 2022, the SPLC Action Fund submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee a [statement](#) detailing the rise in US hate crimes and outlining critical steps the US must take, including more comprehensive and complete hate crime data collection and reporting, vigorous implementation of the COVID-19 Hate Crime Act, more funding and support for victim assistance and building community resistance, and expanding rather than curtailing anti-racism education and prevention initiatives. State legislatures across the US are [adopting laws](#) that restrict teaching about racism in schools.

In recent months, the Biden administration has announced a number of actions directed at addressing hate and extremism:

- Following the arrests of several military veterans and at least one active duty service member for their roles in the 6 January violence at the US Capitol, the Secretary of Defense ordered a one day “stand down” across military branches to address extremism within their ranks, and the Pentagon undertook a review of the issue. The Pentagon later [published new regulations](#) intended to help prevent extremist activities by active duty military personnel. The new rules [don’t prohibit membership](#) in white supremacist or other extremist organizations, just “active

participation” in their activities. The rules also fail to address racially disparate treatment of service members in the military justice system and contain no explicit definitions or prohibitions of hate crimes, hindering investigations into such crimes.

- In April 2021, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas [ordered an internal review](#) to identify white supremacy and extremism within DHS. There do not appear to be any publicly available conclusions regarding that review at this time. In July 2021, SPLC notified DHS that SPLC had identified members of right-wing militia groups attempting to intercept migrants at the Southern US border. [They included participants in the 6 January attack](#) on the US Capitol, QAnon followers, and members of an antigovernment militia group made up of military veterans. Recordings revealed that Customs and Border Patrol officers either acquiesced in or actively welcomed these vigilante activities.
- In June 2021, the Biden administration published its [National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism](#). The document focuses on racial and ethnic hatred as substantial underlying causes of domestic extremism and broadly outlines approaches to addressing the threat of domestic terrorism.

I hope that this submission will prove useful to you as you prepare your report. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or if there is any further information we can provide.

With best regards,



LISA W. BORDEN

Senior Policy Counsel, International Advocacy