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May 15, 2023

The Honorable Dan Bishop  
Chair  
House Committee on Homeland Security  
Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Accountability  
Washington, DC 20015

The Honorable Glenn F. Ivey  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Homeland Security  
Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Accountability  
Washington, DC 20015

Dear Chair Bishop and Ranking Member Ivey,

On behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), we write to provide our insights for the Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Accountability's hearings entitled "Mostly Peaceful!: Countering Left-Wing Organized Violence." We appreciate the opportunity to share our expertise documenting the true threat of ideologically motivated extremism and violence, to offer critical perspective on the history and recent trends of hard-right extremism and violence, and to offer several practical policy recommendations, including the need to address this threat from a public health and prevention approach. We respectfully request this statement be included as part of the official hearing record.

SPLC has been closely tracking the uptick in hate-fueled activity which is part of a larger hard-right movement that stokes the fires of antisemitism, promoting racism, fear, and extremist violence. In the last year, we have seen hard-right extremists unleash horrific acts of violence – particularly directed at Black, Brown and LGBTQ persons – from Buffalo, New York to Allen, Texas. This hearing is just days after the one-year anniversary of the murder of ten Black people at a supermarket in Buffalo.<sup>1</sup> And the country is still reeling from the latest in this series of white

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<sup>1</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Caleb Kieffer, *Buffalo Massacre: A Year Later, White Supremacist Propaganda Continues to Spur Violence, May 14, 2023*  
<https://www.splcenter.org/news/2023/05/11/buffalo-massacre-year-later>



supremacist motivated attacks.<sup>2</sup> A man shot and killed eight people and injured seven others in a shooting spree at an outlet mall in Allen, Texas on May 6. The killer, who was shot and killed by police at the scene, had posted neo-Nazi and deeply misogynistic content to a Russian website and to YouTube.

Established in 1971, the SPLC has been tireless in identifying and rooting out extremist groups to create a fair, inclusive, and unified nation. We are a nonprofit advocacy organization serving as a catalyst for racial justice throughout the South. We work in partnership with communities of color to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements through transformative policies and initiatives, and advance human rights of all people. We have deep expertise in monitoring the activities of domestic hate groups and other extremists – including the Ku Klux Klan, the neo-Nazi movement, racist skinheads, anti-LGBTQ groups, anti-Muslim groups, antigovernment militias, and others. We currently track and expose hundreds of extremist groups operating across the country and publish investigative reports, share key intelligence, and offer expert analysis to the media and public to help prevent and counter the impact of hate.

### **Broad Consensus on the Most Lethal Domestic Extremist Threat Now**

The SPLC condemns violence in all its forms. In recent years, intelligence community reports,<sup>3</sup> assessments,<sup>4</sup> congressional testimony,<sup>5</sup> and the White House National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism<sup>6</sup> have all emphasized that the two most lethal elements of today's domestic terrorism threat are (1) racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists who advocate for the superiority of the white race and (2) anti-government or anti-authority violent extremists, such as militia violent extremists.

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<sup>2</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Hannah Gais, Michael Edison Hayden, Rachel Janik and Megan Squire, *Allen, Texas Killer Posted Neo-Nazi, Incel Content Online*, <https://www.splc.org/hatewatch/2023/05/08/allen-texas-killer-posted-neo-nazi-incele-content-online>

<sup>3</sup> *Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021*, Office of the Director of National Intelligence (March, 2021), <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/UnclassSummaryofDVEAssessment-17MAR21.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism*, Federal Bureau of Investigation & Department of Homeland Security (October, 2022), [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/22\\_1025\\_strategic-intelligence-assessment-data-domestic-terrorism.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/22_1025_strategic-intelligence-assessment-data-domestic-terrorism.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Christopher A. Wray, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Senate Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, *Federal Bureau of Investigation Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2024*, May 10, 2023.

[https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/FBI\\_FY2024\\_Budget\\_SFR\\_Senate\\_Approps\\_CJS\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/FBI_FY2024_Budget_SFR_Senate_Approps_CJS_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> "Among that wide range of animating ideologies, racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (principally those who promote the superiority of the white race) and militia violent extremists are assessed as presenting the most persistent and lethal threats." White House, *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism*, June, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/National-Strategy-for-Countering-Domestic-Terrorism.pdf>



SPLC's own deep longitudinal ethnographic research aligns with the overwhelming evidence of expert researchers, the intelligence community, DHS, and FBI assessments: the most significant source of targeted violence and the greatest threat to democracy and the security of our nation is coming from hard-right extremism, animated by white supremacist ideology which sees America's diversity as a threat.

In this statement, our focus is on the ideologies which are infecting and galvanizing violence, the organized groups and individual actors who are using and promoting violence, and the deadly harms inflicted on our democracy.

### **White Nationalist Organizations**

Neo-Nazis and white nationalists are becoming increasingly emboldened and aggressive as the larger far-right movement embraces their ideas. Over the course of the last year, neo-Nazi and white nationalist groups have descended into public space, often to protest LGBTQ-inclusive events. The most active groups performing public displays of hatred in 2022-2023 include white nationalist Patriot Front<sup>7</sup>, neo-Nazi National Socialist Club<sup>8</sup>, antisemitic Goyim Defense League, and general hate group the Proud Boys<sup>9</sup>. In public, these groups antagonize participants, shout slurs and obscenities, chant hate slogans, and wave hate symbols including the Nazi swastika. The events are meant to up-the-ante and inspire further violence. In particular, SPLC's timeline on the activities and history of Patriot Front, is the most active white nationalist group in the U.S., documents over 10,000 pieces of racist propaganda flying incidents since 2018.<sup>10</sup> Patriot Front members regularly engage in intimidation and vandalism in public. In private, Patriot Front members use racial slurs, idolize Adolf Hitler and share violent imagery about Black people, migrants, LGBTQ people, and Jews.

These incidents are racist and often are indicative of the broad scope of hard-right beliefs that rejects equality and pluralism and is instead exclusion-seeking to limit the rights of many people through force. These violent trends show a movement that is authoritarian, reactionary, conspiratorial, and nationalistic. In addition to white supremacist ideas, many of the actors and groups responsible express misogyny, anti-LBTQ bigotry, and antisemitic sentiment.

For example, the Proud Boys have led a coordinated attack on gender equity and bodily autonomy, protesting or threatening reproductive justice and LGBTQ events around the

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<sup>7</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *Patriot Front*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/patriot-front>

<sup>8</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *National Social Club (NSC-131)*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/nationalist-social-club-nsc-131>

<sup>9</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Cassie Miller, *SPLC Statement for the Jan. 6 Select Committee on Proud Boys* (June 10, 2022), <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2022/06/10/splc-statement-jan-6-select-committee-proud-boys>

<sup>10</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Jeff Tischauser, *Patriot Front Timeline* (April 11, 2023), <https://www.splcenter.org/patriot-front-timeline>



country.<sup>11</sup> Altogether the Proud Boys participated in at least 58 LGBTQ and reproductive justice demonstrations of counter protests throughout 2022. So far in 2023, that number stands at 27 – putting them on track to surpass last year’s level of activism.

### **Record Levels of Hate Violence**

The FBI has been collecting hate crime data from the nation’s 18,000 federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies since 1991. The most recent data, from 2021, documented the highest number of reported hate crimes ever – the highest number of race-based crimes, the highest number of anti-AAPI communities hate crimes, the highest number of anti-Hispanic hate crimes, and the highest number of crimes directed at individuals on the basis of their gender identity.<sup>12</sup> Crimes and murders of transgender people have increased significantly in the United States in recent years. A recent study found that transgender women and men were over four times more likely than cisgender people to be victims of violent crime.<sup>13</sup> Black trans women accounted for nearly three-quarters of the known victims.<sup>14</sup> In recognition of the need to highlight prevention of hate violence, the FBI recently designated civil rights and hate crime as a Level 1 National Threat, its highest threat priority.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Impact of Anti-LGBTQ Extremists**

These deadly statistics are coupled with a documented prevalence of anti-LGBTQ hard-right extremist organizing in the country. A political atmosphere of anti-LGBTQ sentiment has dominated the media landscape and microphones of sympathetic politicians. In March 2023, the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) featured anti-trans speakers who referenced a hard-right trend of falsely portraying LGBTQ people as a threat to children.<sup>16</sup> Michael J. Knowles, a Daily Wire host, said “transgenderism” must be removed from public life.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Cassie Miller, *Proud Boys Aid the Right-Wing Assault on the LGBTQ Community and Reproductive Justice* (July 13, 2022), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2022/07/13/proud-boys-aid-right-wing-assault-lgbtq-community-and-reproductive-justice>

<sup>12</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021 Hate Crime Statistics Act Supplemental Report (March, 2023), <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/hate-crime>

<sup>13</sup> *American Journal of Public Health*, Andrew R. Flores, Ph.D., Ilan Meyer, Ph.D., Lynn L. Langton, Ph.D., and Jody L. Herman, Ph.D. “Gender Identity Disparities in Criminal Victimization: National Crime Victimization Survey, 2017–2018” <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/ncvs-trans-press-release/>

<sup>14</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety, *How does gun violence impact the communities you care about?* <https://everystat.org/#transhomicide>

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Justice: *Combatting Hate Crime*, Department of Justice, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1428666/download>.

<sup>16</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Cassie Miller, *Proud Boys Aid the Right-Wing Assault on the LGBTQ Community and Reproductive Justice* (July 13, 2022), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2022/07/13/proud-boys-aid-right-wing-assault-lgbtq-community-and-reproductive-justice>

<sup>17</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Creede Newton, *CPAC Hosted Convicted Sex Offender Amid Calls to Protect Children* (March 7, 2023), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2023/03/07/cpac-hosted-convicted-sex-offender-amid-calls-protect-children>



Moreover, in the past two years, an unprecedented amount of anti-LGBTQ legislation has been introduced and adopted<sup>18</sup> at the state level targeting LGBTQ families and children for harassment by the state,<sup>19</sup> depriving fundamental rights to speech and assembly,<sup>20</sup> and even limiting participation in America's democratic institutions by restricting voting access.<sup>21</sup> Along with these legislative attacks on LGBTQ freedoms and the violent attacks on LGBTQ spaces like nightclubs and Pride events, extremist groups like the Proud Boys and Patriot Front – some of whom were instrumental in the deadly January 6 insurrection – are also targeting the institutions of American civil society like schools, libraries, and children's hospitals in an effort to drive LGBTQ people out of American society.<sup>22</sup> SPLC continues to monitor a significant number of anti-LGBTQ hate groups and their activities each year.<sup>23</sup>

Institutionalized leadership organizations in the hard-right anti-LGBTQ movement have created an 'us' vs. 'them' understanding of the world that wrongly blames LGBTQ and insinuates religious divisions. These groups also minimize violence against LGBTQ and further amplify the ideas that underpin the bigotry that motivates violent actors – like pseudoscience about transgender people.

### **The “Great Replacement” Conspiracy Theory**

Social and political movement research and analysis by SPLC's Intelligence Project subject matter experts have long documented that the motivations and ideological underpinnings of the hard right movement's violent actors are often predictable. The great replacement narrative provides the central framework for the global white supremacist movement. This racist conspiracy says there is a systematic, global effort to replace white, European people with nonwhite, foreign populations.<sup>24</sup> The purported ultimate goal of those responsible — Democrats, leftists, “multiculturalists,” and Jews — is to reduce white political power and, ultimately, to eradicate the white race.

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<sup>18</sup> American Civil Liberties Union, “Legislation Affecting LGBTQ Rights Across the Country,” (December 2, 2022). <https://www.aclu.org/legislation-affecting-lgbtq-rights-across-country>.

<sup>19</sup> Sneha Dey and Karen Brooks Harper, *Transgender Texas Kids are Terrified after Governor orders that Parents be Investigated for Child Abuse*, (February 28, 2022), *The Texas Tribune*, <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/02/28/texas-transgender-child-abuse/>

<sup>20</sup> Jaclyn Diaz. *Florida's Governor Signs Controversial Law Opponents Dubbed 'Don't Say Gay'*, (March 28, 2022). NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/28/1089221657/dont-say-gay-florida-desantis>

<sup>21</sup> Kathryn K. O'Neill, Nathan Cisneros, Will Tentindo, and Jody L. Herman, *The Potential Impact of Voter Identification Laws on Transgender Voters in the 2022 General Election*, (September 2022), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/trans-voter-id-impact/>

<sup>22</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Cassie Miller, *Proud Boys Aid the Right-Wing Assault on the LGBTQ Community and Reproductive Justice*, (July 13, 2022), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2022/07/13/proud-boys-aid-right-wing-assault-lgbtq-community-and-reproductive-justice>

<sup>23</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, R.G. Cravens and Susan Corke, Statement submitted for the record, House Committee on Oversight and Reform Hearings on *The Rise of Anti-LGBTQI+ Extremism and Violence in the United States (December 14, 2022)* <https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/statement-house-oversight-hearings-rise-anti-lgbtqi-extremism-violence-us.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Jason Wilson and Aaron Flanagan, *The Racist 'Great Replacement' Conspiracy Theory Explained* (May 17, 2022), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2022/05/17/racist-great-replacement-conspiracy-theory-explained>



Once a fringe idea propagated by hate groups and other extremists – frequently in online message boards – the “great replacement” theory and ideas akin to it have been normalized and dragged into the mainstream, in part, with the help of conservative political figures, media personalities, lawmakers, and anti-immigrant lobbying groups.

This month, the accused murderer of 11 Jewish people at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh On October 27, 2018, is facing the legal consequences of ideologically inspired violence.<sup>25</sup> The details of this act of mass-violence are chilling. He allegedly yelled, “all Jews must die” allegedly due to his fixation on the Jewish community’s humanitarian refugee efforts. He believed in the so-called “great replacement” conspiracy theory, which falsely posits that elites – or sometimes, as the accused murderer believed, explicitly Jewish people – are conspiring to bring non-white people into Western countries as a way of breeding white people out of existence.

The Tree of Life murders – the most deadly antisemitic attack in U.S. history – were not alone as domestic extremist incidents inspired by hard-right hate and the false “great replacement theory.”

- The man accused of murdering 49 worshippers and injuring dozens of others in two Christchurch, New Zealand mosques on March 15, 2019, had posted a manifesto steeped in white supremacist propaganda and references to “white genocide,” underlining his belief that white people are being systematically replaced across the world by non-whites. The alleged killer also espoused a belief in “accelerationism,” the idea that violence should be used to push Western countries into becoming failed states. Adherents hope the collapse will give rise to radical, presently unthinkable changes in our society.<sup>26</sup>
- On the last day of Passover in 2019, a gunman entered the Chabad of Poway synagogue in Poway, California, and opened fire. The April 27 attack claimed the life of a woman and left three others injured – including the rabbi. Before the attack, the 19-year-old alleged murderer posted what he described as an “open letter” on the white supremacist-friendly forum 8chan, according to NBC News.<sup>27</sup> Like the alleged New Zealand murderer, the alleged Poway synagogue murderer’s statement also included the hallmarks common among radicalized white supremacists, such as adulation of suspected or convicted mass murderers and propagation of the false claims of a global plan to replace white people. He praised the carnage in Christchurch, citing that live-streamed act of

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<sup>25</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Michael Edison Hayden, *Antisemitic Mass Shooting Suspect Faces Death Penalty in Trial* (April 21, 2023), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2023/04/21/antisemitic-mass-shooting-suspect-faces-death-penalty-trial>

<sup>26</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Michael Edison Hayden, *New Zealand Terrorist Manifesto Influence by Far-Right Online Ecosystem, Hatewatch Finds* (March 15, 2019), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2019/03/15/new-zealand-terrorist-manifesto-influenced-far-right-online-ecosystem-hatewatch-finds>

<sup>27</sup> NBC News, Ben Collins and Andrew Blankstein, “Anti-Semitic open letter posted online under name of Chabad synagogue shooting suspect” (April 27, 2019), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/anti-semitic-open-letter-posted-online-under-name-chabad-synagogue-n999211>



violence as an influence on his own attack. He also referenced the alleged perpetrator of the murderous Tree of Life synagogue attack.

- The accused mass shooter of over 20 people at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, on August 3, 2019 allegedly said in a manifesto left behind that the “attack is a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas.”<sup>28</sup> The shooter reportedly drove more than 9 hours to target a heavily Hispanic shopping center that he believed would be full of Mexican nationals.
- And on May 14, 2022, a gunman carried out a horrific, racially motivated attack, killing 10 Black people and wounding three others at a Tops Friendly Markets grocery store in east Buffalo, New York. The gunman left behind an online screed suggesting the attack was motivated by the same racist conspiracy theory that had previously inspired other white supremacist acts of terror in El Paso Texas and Poway, California.<sup>29</sup> The Buffalo suspect also cited immigration as a key driver of alleged white displacement in the U.S. in a document circulated online.<sup>30</sup> He allegedly chose his target location because the ZIP code that includes the store, 14208, is 78% Black – the highest percentage of Black population of any ZIP code in upstate New York, according to the Census Bureau’s 2020 American Community Survey.<sup>31</sup>

On March 6, Representative Jamie Raskin, Ranking Member of the House Oversight and Accountability Committee, sent a letter signed by all committee Democrats to Representative James Comer, the committee chairman, asking him and his Republican colleagues to denounce the white nationalist “great replacement” conspiracy theory.<sup>32</sup> The letter said that during one hearing, on February 7, Republicans “invoked dangerous and conspiratorial rhetoric echoing the racist and nativist tropes peddled by white supremacists and right-wing extremists.”<sup>33</sup> This included warnings about “invasion” and accusing the Biden administration of implementing a plan “to deliberately open our border” for purposes of “changing our culture.” Rep. Comer and all the other Republicans refused to sign, calling it an attempt to “distract” from issues about the border.

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<sup>28</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *Hate is Alive in America – El Paso Shooting* (August 5, 2023), <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2019/08/05/hate-alive-america-el-paso-shooting>

<sup>29</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Caleb Kieffer, *Buffalo Massacre: A Year Later, White Supremacist Propaganda Continues to Spur Violence* (May 14, 2023), <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2023/05/11/buffalo-massacre-year-later>

<sup>30</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Caleb Kieffer, *Cadre of Nativist Groups, Figures Have Long Pushed Replacement-By-Immigration Ideas Into the Mainstream* (July 14, 2022), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2022/07/14/cadre-nativist-groups-figures-have-long-pushed-replacement-immigration-ideas-mainstream>

<sup>31</sup> CNN, Shimon Prokupez, Christina Maxouris, Dakin Andone, Samantha Beech, and Amir Vera, *What we know about Buffalo supermarket shooting suspect Payton Gendron* (June 2, 2022), <https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/15/us/payton-gendron-buffalo-shooting-suspect-what-we-know/index.html>

<sup>32</sup> <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2023-03-05%20JBR%20to%20Comer%20re%20GRT%20FINAL%20Version.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, *On The Front Lines of the Border Crisis: A Hearing with Chief Patrol Agents* (February 7, 2023) <https://oversight.house.gov/hearing/on-the-front-lines-of-the-border-crisis-a-hearing-with-chief-patrol-agents/>



Tucker Carlson, the now-former Fox News commentator, was one of the biggest media purveyors of “great replacement” ideas. He used his prime-time spot to stoke fear about immigration at the southern border and falling birthrates as existential threats to white people. While Carlson was careful to avoid using the more overt terms favored by avowed white nationalists, these extremists have praised him for mainstreaming their ideas.<sup>34</sup>

Yet, behind right-wing media influencers like Carlson, according to an April 2022 poll conducted by SPLC and Tulchin Research, there is disturbing, unnerving support for the conspiracy theories and ideologies that motivated these murderous acts.<sup>35</sup> The poll found that the ideas underpinning the white nationalist “great replacement” narrative have become thoroughly mainstream on the political right. Nearly 7 in 10 Republicans surveyed agree to at least some extent that demographic changes in the United States are deliberately driven by liberal and progressive politicians attempting to gain political power by “replacing more conservative white voters.” Across the political spectrum, the poll documented substantial support for threatening or acting violently against perceived political opponents.

### **Anti-Government Movement**

For decades, the antigovernment movement has formed militias and engaged in paramilitary training, using their expertise to target and terrorize federal, state, and local government officials, agencies, and facilities.<sup>36</sup> As we documented in our extensive statement for May 26, 2021 House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties hearings, “Confronting Violent White Supremacy (Part V): Examining the Rise of Militia Extremism,” these groups have regularly cited what they perceive as government tyranny as their motive – including, but not limited to, what they believe is an intent by government officials, to create a one world government.<sup>37</sup>

The Oklahoma City bombing remains the deadliest act of domestic extremist violence in the U.S. history. The bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on April 19, 1995, killed 168 people – including nineteen children – and injured more than 650 others. The bombing is the hallmark event cauterizing the extreme risk of violence and death that is posed by the antigovernment movement.

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<sup>34</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Caleb Kieffer, *Buffalo Massacre: A Year Later, White Supremacist Propaganda Continues to Spur Violence, May 14, 2023*

<https://www.splcenter.org/news/2023/05/11/buffalo-massacre-year-later>

<sup>35</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Cassie Miller, *SPLC Poll Finds Substantial Support for ‘Great Replacement’ Theory and Other Hard-Right Ideas* (June 1, 2022),

<https://www.splcenter.org/news/2022/06/01/poll-finds-support-great-replacement-hard-right-ideas>

<sup>36</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *Antigovernment General*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/antigovernment-general>

<sup>37</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Susan Corke and Rachel Goldwasser, House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, “Confronting Violent White Supremacy (Part V): Examining the Rise of Militia Extremism” (May 26, 2023)

<https://www.splactionfund.org/sites/default/files/final%20SPLC%20Action%20Fund%20statement%20House%20Oversight%20Civil%20Rights%20and%20Civil%20Liberties%20Rise%20of%20Militia%20Extremism.pdf>





In recent years, militias and antigovernment adherents have openly promoted and emphasized the prospect of an impending second civil war. Over the course of 2020 and during January 2021, movement members, many of them armed with guns or explosives, conspired to commit insurrection against the United States government (Washington, D.C.), kidnap a sitting governor (Michigan), bomb a federal building (Nevada), murder law enforcement and security personnel (California), and intimidate civilians and government employees in the streets, at their homes, and at their places of employment California, Washington, DC, Idaho, Michigan, New Mexico, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington.

Here are some of the leading hard-right antigovernment extremist groups and driving ideologies:

### The Oath Keepers

Now with leaders convicted of seditious conspiracy for their January 6<sup>th</sup> associated activities, the Oath Keepers has steeped itself in conspiracy theories and trained for a revolution against the state.<sup>38</sup> Like the rest of the antigovernment militia movement, Oath Keepers use fear of gun confiscation, globalization, and other antigovernment conspiracy theories (often rooted in coded antisemitism) to organize outside legitimate channels. The group uses a military-style hierarchical structure, arms training, and emergency response events to engage members.<sup>39</sup>

### The Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers (CSPOA)

This group of sheriffs believe in the false notion of county supremacy, which submits that county authority supersedes federal authority.<sup>40</sup> This belief has animated portions of the antigovernment movement since the 1970s. Adherents believe counties are entitled to control land that is currently owned and preserved by the federal government. This assertion by members of the antigovernment movement, chiefly militias, has led them to conduct various skirmishes and standoffs against federal agencies and agents, particularly in the West where Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff are habitually villainized by the antigovernment movement. According to a 2017 report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), from 2013 to 2017 at least 360 threats and assaults were directed towards federal land management employees.<sup>41</sup>

### Sovereign Citizen Movement

One of the most violent factions of the antigovernment movement is the sovereign citizen movement, whom has a documented history of inflicting violence against law enforcement. Some sovereign citizens have turned to violence. When a sovereign feels particularly desperate, angry, battle-weary, and cornered, his next government contact, no matter how minor, can be his

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<sup>38</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *Oath Keepers*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/oath-keepers>

<sup>39</sup> Testimony of Susan Corke, Director, Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Project before the House Committee on Homeland Security “Countering Violent Extremism, Terrorism, and Antisemitic Threats in New Jersey” (October 3, 2022), [https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/corke\\_countering-violent-extremism-terrorism-antisemitic-threats-jersey.pdf](https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/corke_countering-violent-extremism-terrorism-antisemitic-threats-jersey.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *Constitutional Sheriffs*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/constitutional-sheriffs>

<sup>41</sup> United States Government Accountability Office, *Countering Violent Extremism: Actions Needed to Define Strategy and Assess Progress of Federal Efforts* (April 2017). <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-17-300.pdf>



final straw – and the resulting rage can be lethal. Research indicates a new and growing adherence to the movement.<sup>42</sup>

### Anti-Immigrant Groups and Border Vigilantes

Anti-immigrant hate groups are the most extreme of the hundreds of nativist and vigilante groups that have proliferated since the late 1990s, when anti-immigrant xenophobia began to rise to levels not seen in the U.S. since the 1920s.<sup>43</sup> As militias on the border have become more brazen in recent months, SPLC and others have raised concerns about apparent coordination and cooperation with some Border Patrol agents.<sup>44</sup> SPLC has also documented that some border vigilantes have reportedly adopted the widespread practice of collecting the personal details of intercepted migrants – as well as the details of their U.S.-based relatives – in a move to reinforce their savior fantasies of tracking pedophiles and identifying drug trafficking rings,<sup>45</sup> drawing on conspiracies that are rooted in the early days of the QAnon movement.<sup>46</sup>

### The January 6 Deadly Insurrection at the U.S. Capitol

The antigovernment movements coalesced with the white nationalist hate movement to bring about the deadly January 6 insurrection. The events were like no other in U.S. history and represent the clear and present threat of these hard right movements to our democracy, the U.S. government, and the rights of people in the U.S. A toxic soup of ideas from racism to antigovernment sentiment to white Christian nationalism sought on January 6<sup>th</sup> to manipulate people into acting in opposition to a free democratic election.<sup>47</sup>

Over the 18 months of its tenure, the bipartisan House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol conducted ten public hearings, interviewed over 1,000 witnesses, and reviewed more than one million pages of background information.<sup>48</sup> This was the most important congressional investigation since the 9/11 Commission. The final report,

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<sup>42</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *Sovereign Citizen Movement*. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement>

<sup>43</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *Anti-Immigrant*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/anti-immigrant>

<sup>44</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Freddy Cruz, *In Plain Sight: Uncovering Border Patrol's Relationship with Far-Right Militias at the Southern Border* (July 29, 2021), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2021/07/29/plain-sight-uncovering-border-patrols-relationship-far-right-militias-southern-border>

<sup>45</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Freddy Cruz, *How Antigovernment Extremists and QAnon Took Over the Southern Border* (August 8, 2022), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2022/08/08/how-antigovernment-extremists-and-qanon-took-over-southern-border>

<sup>46</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *What You Need to Know about QAnon* (October 27, 2020), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/10/27/what-you-need-know-about-qanon>

<sup>47</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Joseph Wiinikka-Lydon, *Dangerous Devotion: Congressional Hearing Examines Threat of White Christian Nationalism*, (December 28, 2022), <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2022/12/28/dangerous-devotion-congressional-hearing-examines-threat-white-christian-nationalism>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.govinfo.gov/committee/house-january6th?path=/browsecommittee/chamber/house/committee/january6th/collection/CRPT>



issued late last year, established essential facts about the deadly attack – and provided us with a road map for this important national reckoning.<sup>49</sup>

The violence on January 6 was planned and was never meant to be the end goal. The committee report documented in great detail how former President Trump called for his supporters to come to Washington on that fateful day and then knowingly inspired an armed mob of his followers to go to the Capitol to prevent the peaceful transfer of power.

SPLC has documented how far-right antigovernment extremists – and former President Trump himself – had laid the foundation for the violent insurrection in the years before.<sup>50</sup> The lies of a stolen election and the extremist ideologies and conspiracy theories that fueled the attack were the culmination of a months-long, coordinated strategy by Trump and his allies to overturn the 2020 election and steal the presidency.

The committee report also documented that Trump and his allies used racism as a principal driver in immediate post-election efforts to disenfranchise voters in major urban areas in Michigan, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and other states. Over the next months, the false allegation of a stolen election led many state legislatures with Republican majorities (including in Deep South states where the SPLC operates) to enact discriminatory anti-voter laws and create new, racially gerrymandered congressional districts. These new districts disproportionately disenfranchise voters of color and are designed to undermine elections and control election outcomes in 2024 and beyond.<sup>51</sup>

Beyond the essential historical record, the true measure of the committee’s work will be whether the planners, perpetrators, funders, and those who inspired the insurrection – including former President Donald Trump, his allies and other politicians who sought to forcibly uphold white supremacy and overturn the 2020 election – are held accountable, with serious consequences. The committee’s report and accompanying materials have provided a blueprint toward these objectives for Congress and the U.S. Department of Justice. The committee’s investigation, final report, and accompanying criminal referrals are essential steps toward transparency and accountability.

### **Promoting Male Supremacy**

In the past, in both SPLC and the field of extremism research as a whole, analyses of the far right have often neglected to fully account for the innumerable ways gender, misogyny, and gender-based violence manifest within and operate alongside other forms of racially and

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<sup>49</sup> <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-REPORT/pdf/GPO-J6-REPORT.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *The Road to Jan. 6: A Year of Extremist Mobilization*, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2021/12/30/road-jan-6-year-extremist-mobilization>

<sup>51</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Michael Lieberman, *Jan. 6 Anniversary: Two Years Later, We Must Hold Capitol Insurrectionists Accountable* (January 6, 2023), <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2023/01/06/jan-6-anniversary-two-years-later>



religiously motivated hate.<sup>52</sup> It is now impossible to ignore the centrality of male supremacy in the hard-right movement.<sup>53</sup> Our research has documented that many in the hard right want to revive an older social order, before the Civil Rights Movement, women’s and gay liberation movements, and other social and political transformations that have upset what was a thoroughly white-dominated, patriarchal society. In this worldview, Christianity should hold a preeminent place in our society and even form the basis for our laws. White people, they (often implicitly) suggest, deserve to hold a dominant position in society because of their supposed innate superiority.

White supremacy is central to the hard right, but so is a desire to maintain a patriarchal society where people adhere to strictly defined gender roles and men act from a position of dominance.

This has been made clear by the right’s campaign to strip people of their reproductive autonomy, to demonize LGBTQ people, and to deny trans people every opportunity to express their gender identity. This is a campaign imposed through legislation, but also through violence, including increasing protests, threats, and violence aimed at LGBTQ people (including the November 2022 mass shooting that left five people dead at a queer club in Colorado<sup>54</sup>), reproductive rights advocates, and abortion providers.

### **Antisemitism**

Antisemitism serves as a connective tissue between hate groups that are otherwise seemingly unconnected. Particularly among white supremacist groups, antisemitism is often the entry point into the hate movement and is the fuel the feeds white nationalism. We saw this in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017 (“Jews will not replace us”) and in Washington, D.C., on January 6 (many breaching the Capitol flaunted antisemitic imagery).<sup>55</sup> In recent congressional testimony, Eric Ward, now Executive Vice President for Race Forward, poignantly said, “...antisemitism is the loom on which other hatreds are woven, so essential that it is easy to ignore. If we seek to counter domestic extremism, we must recognize that antisemitism remains the energizing principle behind white nationalism.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Lydia Bates, *Patriarchal Violence: Misogyny from the Far-Right to the Mainstream* (February 1, 2021), <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2021/02/01/patriarchal-violence-misogyny-far-right-mainstream>

<sup>53</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Cassie Miller, *Male Supremacy is at the Core of the Hard Right’s Agenda*, (April 18, 2023), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2023/04/18/male-supremacy-core-hard-rights-agenda>

<sup>54</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Jason Wilson, *Colorado Springs: Far-Right Influencers Made LGBTQ People Into Targets* (November 22, 2022), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2022/11/22/colorado-springs-far-right-influencers-made-lgbtq-people-targets>

<sup>55</sup> Susan Corke and Michael Lieberman, *Antisemitism: An Engine for Anti-Black Racism*, National Urban League, 2023 *State of Black America*, <https://soba.iamempowered.com/antisemitism-engine-anti-black-racism>

<sup>56</sup> Eric K. Ward, Executive Director, Western States Center, U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Domestic Extremism in America: Examining White Supremacist Violence in the Wake of Recent Attacks* (June 9, 2022), <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/imo/media/doc/Testimony-Ward-2022-06-09.pdf>



Throughout 2022, celebrities, politicians, and other public figures promoted and embraced antisemitic rhetoric. This mainstreaming and normalization of antisemitism has boosted the profile of many extremist groups and has resulted in direct threats to the Jewish community. The antisemitic tirades and online threats from Ye – formerly known as Kanye West – for example, appear to have had real-world consequences.<sup>57</sup> Another example of the normalization of antisemitism; in the 2022 election cycle, no name was invoked more in association with dirty money, control of media and politics, or the existence of a “deep state,” than George Soros, the Hungarian American Jewish financier and philanthropist. Right-wing media and politicians have consistently positioned Soros as a boogeyman whose influence and ideas will destroy American democracy.

As SPLC has relayed to Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff and other members of the White House interagency working group on antisemitism, Jews are not responsible for antisemitism – and Jews cannot end it by themselves. The recognition that anti-Jewish hatred is a core facet of other bigoted ideologies reinforces the need for a more robust interracial and intersectional approach to combating antisemitism in America. To advance the goal of a multi-racial, inclusive democracy, fighting antisemitism is at the heart of the fight against structural racism.

### **Policy Recommendations**

We offer these policy recommendations which we hope will promote long-term investments and initiatives that will move our nation closer to fulfilling its highest ideals and promise of equality.

### **Expand Anti-Racism Education and Upstream Prevention Initiatives**

To bolster community well-being and ensure that all individuals are prepared to inoculate young people against radicalization, funding for prevention and education initiatives is imperative. We applaud the White House’s recent announcement of \$1 billion in new funding through the Safer Communities Act “to support safer and healthier learning environments,” as well as new funding through the Department of Commerce to improve digital literacy and for the Department of Health and Human Services to “support student wellbeing and resilience in the face of hate and trauma.”<sup>58</sup> The SPLC has partnered with American University’s Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL) to produce resources for adults caring for and/or working with youth to assist them in helping to steer young people away from extremist propaganda and the supremacist narratives they encounter online and off through the building of resilient communities of inclusion.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Anti-Defamation League, Center on Extremism, “*Ye is Right*” Antisemitic Campaign Continues, (February 12, 2023), <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/ye-right-antisemitic-campaign-continues>

<sup>58</sup> White House, FACT SHEET: New Actions from the Biden-Harris Administration and the Public and Private Sectors to Foster Unity and Prevent Hate-Motivated Violence, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/09/15/fact-sheet-new-actions-from-the-biden-harris-administration-and-the-public-and-private-sectors-to-foster-unity-and-prevent-hate-motivated-violence/>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.splcenter.org/peril> & <https://www.splcenter.org/peril-community-guide>



- The White House must follow through on the wide array of government initiatives and public-private partnerships against hate and extremism announced last September at the United We Stand Summit.<sup>60</sup>
- The Department of Education and the Department of Justice should fund programs aimed at preventing extremism and promoting deradicalization respectively – and move from punishment models to restorative justice initiatives that repair harms, restore trust, and help communities build resilience and reduce the likelihood of future harms. Especially in these divided and polarized times, every elementary and secondary school should promote an inclusive school climate and activities that celebrate our nation's diversity.<sup>61</sup>
- Congress and the Department of Education should fund programs to develop and promote civics education and develop curricula addressing structural racism, as well as funding for states to implement their own related initiatives.
- Congress and the Biden administration should fiercely oppose efforts to ban books, to impose educational gag orders on teaching truth and hard history, and other efforts to place restrictions on inclusive education.

### **Speak Out Against Hate, Political Violence, and Extremism**

Words matter, especially from our leaders. It is impossible to overstate the importance of elected officials, business leaders, and community officials using their public platforms to condemn antisemitism, hate crimes, vandalism and violence of all kinds, and false ideas like the “great replacement” theory. A year after the Tops supermarket shooting, far too many political figures and pundits continue to perpetuate this dangerous rhetoric.

### **Enforce Hate Crime Laws**

Enforcement of existing federal and state hate crime laws – and training for judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement officials charged with enforcement – is critical, but insufficient. The law is a blunt instrument against hate and racism. We cannot legislate, regulate, tabulate, or prosecute racism, hatred, or extremism out of existence.

### **Improve Hate Crime Data Collection Efforts**

- After 30 years of incomplete data and consistent FBI HCSA underreporting, Congress and the Biden administration should support mandatory hate crime reporting. Until legislation to require reporting can be enacted, expanded incentives are needed – more carrots and more sticks – toward making hate crime prevention initiatives and credible hate crime reporting by all law enforcement agencies a condition precedent to receiving

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<sup>60</sup> <https://unitedwestand.gov/>

<sup>61</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Lydia Bates, *Prevention and Resilience: Supporting Young People through Polarizing Times* (Fall 2022), <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/fall-2022/prevention-and-resilience-supporting-young-people-through-polarizing-times>



federal funds. Special attention should be devoted to large underreporting law enforcement agencies that either have not participated in the HCSA program at all or have incorrectly reported zero hate crimes.

### **Improve Government Response to Domestic Extremism**

- Though most hate crimes are not committed by individuals affiliated with an organized hate group, the Biden administration and Congress should continue to closely track the nature and magnitude of the problem of domestic extremism and should fund resilience and digital literacy initiatives<sup>62</sup> as well as government and academic research on the best evidenced-based prevention programs.<sup>63</sup>
- Every state prohibits private militias, and many states have laws prohibiting political violence, restricting firearms in the state capital/government buildings and near polling places, and banning paramilitary training for civil disorder.<sup>64</sup> Federal and state authorities should raise awareness about these laws – and enforce them.

### **Defend and Promote Inclusive, Truthful Education**

As many states push new laws to restrict inclusive education and restrict teaching about difficult history in the U.S., more needs to be done to ensure young people are presented the unvarnished facts about this country's history – both good and bad – to shape a better future.<sup>65</sup>

### **Promote Online Safety and Hold Tech and Social Media Companies Accountable**

Social media companies should not enable the funding or amplifying of white supremacist ideas or provide a safe haven for extremists. Consistent with the First Amendment and privacy considerations, federal and state government officials should implement rules and regulations to ensure that tech companies comply with civil rights laws prohibiting discrimination. Law enforcement should scrutinize platforms and ensure they are enforcing prohibitions on activities that endanger the public or conspire against the rights of others.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement. For more information about SPLC's work to address right-wing hate and extremism, please contact R.G. Cravens, Senior Research Analyst, Lead, Intelligence Project [royal.cravens@splcenter.org](mailto:royal.cravens@splcenter.org) or Michael Lieberman, Senior Policy Counsel, Hate & Extremism [michael.lieberman@splcenter.org](mailto:michael.lieberman@splcenter.org). We stand ready to work with subcommittee members to address these critical issues.

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<sup>62</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *Parents & Caregivers Guide to Online Radicalization: Assessments and Impact*, <https://www.splcenter.org/peril-assessments-impact>

<sup>63</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Lydia Bates, *Conversations about Gun Violence, Disinformation and Extremism* (February 27, 2023), <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/conversations-about-gun-violence-disinformation-and-extremism>

<sup>64</sup> Georgetown Law, Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, *Addressing Political Violence, Unlawful Paramilitaries, and Threats to Democracy*, <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/icap/our-work/addressing-the-rise-of-unlawful-private-militias/>

<sup>65</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, Learning for Justice, *Freedom to Learn*, <https://www.learningforjustice.org/freedom-to-learn>