

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

## **Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

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Remarks as prepared for delivery

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Portman, Members of the Committee, good morning. It is an honor to appear before you today to address the dire threat posed to this country by domestic terrorism and violent extremism.

For more than a century, ADL has worked to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all. To deliver on that mission, we've done many things including assemble a world-class team investigating extremist threats from across the ideological spectrum.

And, unfortunately, those threats are on the rise.

At the top of the pyramid of hate are extreme incidents like what happened at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh almost three years ago, the massacre of Latinos in El Paso that took place two years ago this week, the murder of Heather Heyer at the Neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville four years ago next week, and the Pulse nightclub shooting against the LGBTQ+ community five years ago. Over the last 10 years, 429 people were killed at the hands of extremists.

But we also know that you don't have to be an official card-carrying extremist to cause harm. The problem we've been seeing is that violence motivated by hate and antisemitism has been normalized.

ADL research found that 2020 was the third-highest year on record for antisemitic incidents since we began tracking in 1979. Of these, known extremist groups or individuals inspired by extremist ideology were responsible for 16 percent of the total number of incidents. That is a lot but, as I said, antisemitism clearly is not the sole domain of extremists.

We saw this past May, as the violence between Israel and Hamas escalated, ADL tracked a drastic and disturbing rise in antisemitic activity in the United States, including 11 antisemitic assaults -- in Times Square in broad daylight, against people enjoying a sushi dinner in Los Angeles, and attacks on Jews just walking down the street. And this isn't Germany in 1931. This is America in 2021.

But this matters not just because of what's happening to the Jewish community. I have said it before, and I will say it again here: very often it starts with Jews, but it doesn't end there. Hate begets hate.

For example, between March 2020 and February 2021, the Asian American and Pacific Islander community experienced 3,795 incidents of hate, 11 percent of which were physical assaults. And in 2019, FBI data showed anti-Hispanic hate crimes rose nearly 9 percent.

Why is this threat on the rise?

To boil it down: We believe that this movement has been fueled by two catalysts. The first are leaders who have repeated extremists' rhetoric, co-opted their conspiracies, and knowingly or not have given them the green light. And, make no mistake, this is coming from people in positions of authority from across the ideological spectrum.

The second has been social media. It is a super spreader of intolerance. You can find hate with just a few clicks from your phone. Intolerance is

increased by algorithms that invisibly induce users farther down the rabbit hole of radicalism.

This is unacceptable. We've been urging the tech industry for years to take meaningful action, but they've failed to do so. That's why we've also called for policymakers to hold them accountable for their role in enabling the spread of extremism – real Section 230 reform is essential to this process.

The time for action against the extremist threat is now. We need a whole-of-government engagement and whole-of-society strategy to combating domestic terrorism and violent extremism.

That is why ADL has created a framework – the PROTECT plan – to mitigate these threats while safeguarding civil liberties. There are more details on this in my written testimony; you'll see that these steps can have an immediate and deeply significant impact in countering domestic terrorism – more so than any single action, policy, or law.

We were glad that the Biden-Harris Administration recently released the first-ever National Strategy to Counter Domestic Terrorism, which closely tracks with our PROTECT plan.

Today, I'm here to urge you to do your part in implementing these strategies...to meet the rising demands of the moment.

As part of this, you must rethink DHS for the modern era, making sure that it is best prepared and organized to address domestic terrorism. And I know it's somewhat beyond this committee's jurisdiction but I would implore you to strive for Congress to take serious action on the social media companies.

Members of the committee, as you work to address the concerns around domestic terrorism and violent extremism, we urge you to remember the

way these threats tear at the very fabric of our communities and our country.

For ultimately, this is not a Democratic problem...or a Republican problem. It is an American problem.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

JEWISHINSIDER