



A National Policy Blueprint To End White Supremacist Violence

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A joint project by the Center for American Progress
and the McCain Institute for International Leadership April 2021

Contents

1 Introduction and summary

3 Background

6 Current tactics of white supremacists

11 Recommendations

- 11 Leverage executive branch actions and authorities
- 14 Improve data collection, research, and reporting
- 17 Protect communities and prosecute crimes
- 22 Counter recruiting and infiltration in law enforcement, military, and veteran communities
- 29 Employ financial and technological tools and authorities

32 Conclusion

33 About the authors

34 Acknowledgments

35 Appendix A: Terms and definitions

37 Appendix B: Referenced groups and organizations

39 Endnotes

Introduction and summary

White supremacist violence is not new, but in recent years, it has become a primary national security threat in the United States.¹ Notions of racial superiority, hostility toward immigrants and minorities, and the myth of an embattled white majority defending its power have increasingly infiltrated mainstream American political and cultural discourse.² In October 2020, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published its annual threat assessment, identifying racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists, particularly white supremacist extremists, as “the most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland.”³

To address this issue, the Center for American Progress and the McCain Institute for International Leadership have developed a policy blueprint that outlines a comprehensive national strategy for tackling the complexity of white supremacist violence. Perpetrators of this violence employ a wide range of tactics; in turn, public officials must deploy a wide variety of policies to curb the violence and address its root causes.

Recommendations within this blueprint have been carefully vetted by a large, diverse group of stakeholders who share a common interest in preventing white supremacist violence. While lawmakers and affected communities agree that deliberate action is needed, disagreement regarding contentious solutions has in part hindered progress at the national level. This report intentionally sidesteps ideas that are the subjects of ongoing debate, such as a criminal domestic terrorism statute, and instead focuses on areas of consensus. The dozens of recommendations outlined in this blueprint are ones that Congress and a willing administration can pursue with the support of state, local, grassroots, and nongovernment partners.

This report begins with a brief background regarding the history and current state of white supremacist violence in the United States, followed by an overview of the tactics white supremacists employ to increase participation and perpetrate violence. The report then provides a wide range of recommendations, all of which comprise an important starting point for a whole-of-government response to white supremacist violence. Policy recommendations fall within five interconnected areas:

1. Leverage executive branch actions and responsibilities
2. Improve data collection, research, and reporting
3. Protect communities and prosecute crimes
4. Counter recruiting and infiltration in law enforcement, military, and veteran communities
5. Employ financial and technological tools and authorities

No single piece of legislation or executive action can effectively address all aspects of the long-standing and complex issue of white supremacist violence in the United States. Additionally, individual recommendations will require further steps to fully operationalize and implement. However, the comprehensive nature of this blueprint is intended to provide the multifaceted approach needed to root out white supremacist violence and secure a safer future for all citizens.

Process and method

Throughout the draft development process, the CAP and McCain teams sought to understand and elevate the ideas and insights of stakeholders most affected by white supremacist violence as well as those who have been working for years to diminish it. Via round-table discussions and individual interviews, more than 150 community leaders and experts shared their perspectives and recommendations. Communities, experts, and advocacy groups represented in these discussions included:

- Faith communities
- Immigration policy
- National security
- Counterterrorism
- Communities of color
- International anti-extremism
- Gun violence prevention
- State and local law enforcement
- Military and veterans
- Technology policy
- Civil rights and civil liberties
- Academia and research
- Current and former government officials
- Mental health and violence prevention

Community engagement was complemented by a review of research, reporting, and legislation to understand the evolution of the threat and proposed policy solutions. Stakeholders were also invited to provide feedback with an online survey and to review and comment on a draft of this report to ensure recommendations herein are indeed those that lawmakers and leaders can confidently champion.

Background

The following analysis is intended to establish a foundation for the recommendations in this policy blueprint. It connects the history of white supremacist violence to today's violent activity and summarizes common tactics used by white supremacists. Part of understanding and being able to discuss this issue is a common lexicon. The definitions and sources for key terms used throughout the report are provided in Appendix A: Terms and Definitions, and descriptions of the groups referenced throughout this report are provided in Appendix B: Referenced Groups and Organizations.

White supremacist violence and terrorism

As white supremacist violence is discussed throughout this report, the authors are referring to violence driven or motivated, at least in part, by white supremacist beliefs or ideology. This includes hate crimes and terrorism carried out by white supremacist extremists.

Part of the political and social discussion regarding white supremacist violence includes the case for referring to it as terrorism. Certainly, when the intent of the violence is to intimidate and coerce citizens and/or to influence government policies, it meets the statutory definition of terrorism, and labeling it as such is important. However, not all acts of white supremacist violence are acts of terrorism, and the authors of this report do not think this distinction should result in such violence being treated with any less impor-

tance or urgency. Ultimately, the authors take the position that something should not have to be called terrorism for the government to take it seriously.

As national security leaders review and reassess the apparatus of policies and practices that took shape around America's response to foreign terrorism, acknowledging that terrorism is a type of offense rather than a perpetrator or root cause of violence is important in generating effective policies. The United States must also reckon with the reality that the white supremacist violence discussed in this report is American in origin, and white supremacy is deeply intertwined in the country's societal structures and governing systems. Thus, it necessitates a different approach from strategies designed for threats that originate abroad.

How we got here

White supremacy in the United States has existed since before the nation's founding, and U.S. history is inextricably tied to violence against people of color. Violence against Native Americans, including forced removal and military occupations, was a core component of the United States' formation and territorial expansion. The enslavement

of Black people, an inherently violent white supremacist practice, was upheld by legal, societal, religious, and economic justifications. And throughout U.S. history, white supremacy has shaped the legal and normative notions of who could be an American citizen, with exclusionary immigration laws and restrictions on suffrage.⁴

However, the narratives and political violence that emerged during Reconstruction are the ones most closely connected with tenets of the current white supremacist movement. Introduced after the Civil War, the “race war” doctrine claimed that White Americans were in danger of genocide at the hands of Black Americans.⁵ Violence during and after Reconstruction was intended to maintain the structures of white supremacy and to undermine the democratic processes that would expand and uphold the newly granted rights of Black Americans.⁶ In the central and western United States, Native Americans and Asian immigrants were also subjected to white supremacist laws, rhetoric, and violence.⁷ Through the early 1900s, influential Americans, including presidents and lawmakers, embraced the notion of a white, racially pure country.⁸ Jim Crow laws disenfranchised and criminalized the actions of Black Americans, creating a system wherein law enforcement officers carried out white supremacist violence on behalf of state and local governments.⁹ Although the national tolerance for overt white supremacist violence decreased immediately after the Civil Rights movement, that violence has resurged periodically throughout the decades that followed.¹⁰

More recently, hate crimes and interest in white nationalist groups increased in response to the election of President Barack Obama.¹¹ Extremists “capitalized on the election of the first African American president” in their recruiting efforts and used the 2008 recession to engage with those who felt dissatisfied with the status quo.¹² Meanwhile, far-right movements in Europe exploited this same economic distress, and globally, these movements propagated a narrative that immigrants were to blame for economic hardship.¹³ The 2010s also saw the mainstreaming of racist disinformation, such as the baseless and disproven “birther” conspiracy that questioned Obama’s citizenship.¹⁴

Today’s wave of white supremacist violence

Today’s white supremacist movement is rooted in the “white genocide” conspiracy theory, which warns that the “white race” is endangered by a changing demographic landscape caused by immigration and interracial relationships.¹⁵ The movement includes white nationalists, neo-Nazis, Christian Identity adherents, the alt-right, and those who espouse anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and anti-Semitic beliefs.¹⁶ White supremacist ideologies and misogyny are closely connected, as white supremacy is primarily concerned with maintaining the elevated status of white men.¹⁷ Not all

misogynists are racists, nor vice versa, and women are part of the white supremacist movement; but efforts toward both gender and racial equality can produce similarly perceived threats to that status.¹⁸ White supremacist narratives have incorporated the anti-Semitic “Zionist Occupation Government” conspiracy about Jewish control of the U.S. government, as well as “accelerationism,” which encourages disorder to spark a coming race war.¹⁹ There is also overlap with the QAnon conspiracy, which is built on long-standing anti-Semitic tropes, and with self-organized militias, some of which hold anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim views.²⁰ The election in 2020 of two congressional representatives who have supported QAnon demonstrates the degree to which once-fringe ideas have permeated the mainstream.²¹

Although racist tropes and metaphors have long been employed by politicians, white supremacist narratives and champions more prominently returned to mainstream discourse during the presidential campaign and administration of Donald Trump.²² On the campaign trail, Trump disparaged Mexican immigrants as “drug dealers, criminals, [and] rapists,” encouraged violence against those who opposed him, and employed Steve Bannon, a publisher of the alt-right.²³ Researchers found the 2016 election was associated with a surge in reported hate crimes across the country, with counties that voted for Trump seeing the most significant increases by the largest margins.²⁴ While in office, the Trump administration pursued racist policies, such as the Muslim ban, and his administration gave a platform to people who espoused white nationalist beliefs, such as former White House senior policy adviser Stephen Miller.²⁵ Moreover, Trump failed to unequivocally condemn white supremacists, and as white supremacist attacks grew in number and lethality, his administration reportedly advocated against allocating more resources to the threat.²⁶

In October 2020, DHS identified domestic violent extremism as a priority threat, noting that white supremacist extremists have become “exceptionally lethal” in their attacks.²⁷ Today, white supremacists are the source of a majority of lethal attacks committed by extremists. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reports that “over the past 10 years, white supremacists have been responsible for 248 of the 429 extremist-related murders (58%),” and they remained the most lethal group in 2020.²⁸ Overall, Black and Hispanic populations are significantly more likely to be targeted by hate crimes, though hate crimes and harassment against Americans of Asian descent and origin surged in 2020 and have continued into 2021.²⁹ White supremacist violence also targets religious minorities, including Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh communities, with 2019 seeing a surge in anti-Semitic incidents.³⁰ This violence takes a physical and emotional toll on affected communities and is a threat to Americans’ security.

Current tactics of white supremacists

Perpetrators of white supremacist violence employ a wide range of tactics to recruit others into their movement and to coordinate, fund, and carry out their actions. Policy solutions must be calibrated to address these methods if they are to succeed.

The most prevalent tactics currently used in furtherance of white supremacist violence are:

- Online outreach, organizing, and fundraising
- Formation and support of transnational networks
- In-person engagement
- Recruiting and infiltration of military and veterans' communities
- Recruiting and infiltration of law enforcement communities
- Use of firearms and reliance on gun culture

Online outreach, organizing, and fundraising

White supremacists use internet-based platforms, websites, and social spaces to propagate their narratives, reach new members, organize, and fundraise. They use both mainstream online platforms, which reach a wider audience, and smaller, more niche platforms that allow for more overtly violent content and discussion.³¹ Social media posts and interactions have been used to connect with individuals and engage them in “light” white supremacy and misogyny under the veil of jokes and “normal” online activity.³² Further online community engagement, and even algorithm-driven recommendations, amplify increasingly white supremacist messages and push users to more extreme content, channels, and forums.³³ White supremacists are also using the internet to reach out to groups with shared grievances, engaging heavily with QAnon communities and capitalizing on anti-government views prompted by mask mandates during the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁴

Organizing and mobilization to violent action also takes place on both mainstream and niche platforms. Initial investigations into the January 6 insurrection show planning and discussion on public Facebook pages, while violent plans for the “Unite the Right”

rally were more limited to Discord, which was smaller and less moderated in 2017.³⁵ Online forums have even been used to keep score of the deaths in mass shootings, likening them to video games in which future murderers are encouraged to beat previous records.³⁶ Fundraising efforts have primarily leveraged crowd-funding via social media, online payment sites, peer-to-peer fund transfer technologies, and cryptocurrencies.³⁷

Formation and support of transnational networks

In its 2021 Annual Threat Assessment, the U.S. Intelligence Community noted the transnational nature of the white supremacist movement and highlighted the lethality of white supremacist violence in Europe and the United States.³⁸ The availability of online spaces for communication and coordination has allowed international networking in the global white supremacist movement.³⁹ A recent *New York Times* analysis found that at least a third of violent white supremacist extremists since 2011 were inspired by perpetrators of violence in other countries.⁴⁰ Most notably, the Christchurch massacre in New Zealand, which was live-streamed on Facebook for 17 minutes, was inspired by the manifesto of Anders Breivik, who killed 77 victims in Oslo, Norway.⁴¹ The white supremacist movement is an avenue for foreign state actors to facilitate violence in the United States as well. The leader of a neo-Nazi group called “The Base” and the founder of *The Daily Stormer* have run their operations, promoting white supremacy in the United States, from Russia.⁴² There are also reports of American white supremacists receiving tactical training in Ukraine.⁴³ Additionally, the FBI is reportedly investigating foreign financial support for efforts to organize the January 6 insurrection.⁴⁴

In-person engagement

Online engagement has allowed white supremacists to expand their reach and access to new audiences, but groups and even loosely associated individuals still frequently meet, organize, and train in person. The scale of these in-person interactions varies but includes everything from informal gatherings to violent activities.

White supremacists used COVID-19 “reopen” demonstrations as an opportunity to engage with potentially like-minded individuals and spread propaganda material.⁴⁵ Private militia organizations routinely conduct training on paramilitary tactics, encouraging their members to obtain and practice with semi-automatic weapons and military gear.⁴⁶ The National Partisan Movement, a hate group that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, has blended interactions across multiple platforms such as Instagram,

Telegram, and Snapchat with informal in-person gatherings to recruit younger members.⁴⁷ The Base conducts interviews with its recruits to discuss everything from bombings to communications, and the Atomwaffen Division, a neo-Nazi organization that reorganized as the National Socialist Order in 2020, hosted a training camp in Nevada to teach hand-to-hand combat and propaganda development.⁴⁸ According to the criminal complaint, the organizers who plotted to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer hatched the scheme at an in-person meeting in Dublin, Ohio.⁴⁹

While much attention has been paid to online outreach and organizing within violent extremist movements, more research and analysis is needed to understand the relationship between online and in-person engagement and mobilization, especially as it specifically pertains to white supremacist violence.

Recruiting and infiltration of military and veterans' communities

White supremacists seek to bring tactical skills and credibility to their movement by recruiting current and former military members and by attempting to join the military.⁵⁰ Those with military experience have been overrepresented in the extremist community for decades, and over the past few years, service members and veterans have been involved in high-profile white supremacist activities.⁵¹ The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) has expressed commitment to ridding the ranks of extremism, but due to inadequate reporting, the prevalence of white supremacy in the military is presently unknown.⁵² There have been shortfalls in investigative attention to this issue and in screening for white supremacist affiliations.⁵³ Commanders and supervisors are best suited to detect service member participation in white supremacist activities and to address risk factors that make individuals more susceptible to recruitment; however, they are not yet trained and resourced to do so.⁵⁴ Detection is all the more difficult with Reserve and National Guard members when there is less frequent service member interaction. Furthermore, across the total force, service members themselves are not yet trained to recognize when they are being recruited.

Participation in extremism and extremist violence is especially a problem among veterans. In addition to carrying out lethal attacks over the past few decades, veterans represented more than 15 percent of those charged with attacking the Capitol on January 6, 2021.⁵⁵ Researchers studying the radicalization of veterans found pathways that stemmed from identity loss in post-military life and the restoration of that identity and purpose provided by extremist groups.⁵⁶ Other factors that increase susceptibility to extremism among veterans include loss of social support and the

appeal of ideologies that address personal grievances.⁵⁷ Additionally, a 2015 study found that white all-volunteer-force veterans held more negative views regarding Black Americans than did the general civilian population.⁵⁸ Militias, with their military-style structure and customs, and narratives regarding armed defense and nationalism, are particularly well-suited to exploit these vulnerabilities.

Recruiting and infiltration of law enforcement communities

White supremacist groups also target law enforcement for recruitment, especially to “anticipate law enforcement interest in and actions against them,” and capitalize on sympathetic views within the law enforcement community.⁵⁹ Government data collection regarding the prevalence of white supremacy within the broader law enforcement community, and public access to that data, is limited, but there are numerous public examples of law enforcement participation in racist discourse and white supremacist groups.⁶⁰ A 2019 report found that since 2009, “There have been scandals in over a 100 different police departments, in 49 different states where individuals have sent overtly racist emails, texts, or made racist comments via social media.”⁶¹ At the federal law enforcement level, studies and investigations have found the U.S. Border Patrol—Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) predecessor—was “steeped in institutional racism,”⁶² which persists today, with little oversight or accountability for CBP officers who exhibit racist behaviors both in online forums and on the job.⁶³

The law enforcement community encompasses approximately 18,000 federal, state, local, and tribal agencies and departments. While many departments have fired law enforcement members who participated in white supremacist activities or demonstrated repeated discriminatory behaviors, the accountability measures and capability varies.⁶⁴ There is no central governing body; some law enforcement leaders are appointed, others are elected. This complicates efforts to assess and determine the scope and nature of white supremacy across the various elements of law enforcement and to implement communitywide solutions. Additionally, a lack of broadly accepted conduct standards, including policies that address online engagement and overtly racist behavior, and strong employment protections for officers make it difficult to hold officers accountable. Law enforcement leaders need training and support to identify and counter radicalization in their forces, as well as a set of agreed policies and best practices to exclude white supremacists from carrying a badge.

Use of firearms and reliance on gun culture

Guns are increasingly the weapon of choice for white supremacists who commit acts of violence, and firearms are becoming the weapon of choice for violent extremism. A CAP analysis of National Crime Victimization Survey data found that from 2010 to 2016, 56,130 hate crimes in the United States involved the use of a gun.⁶⁵ Additionally, the ADL found that 72 percent of the people murdered over the past 10 years by domestic extremists—though not limited to white supremacist extremists—were killed with guns.⁶⁶ A 2017 joint DHS-FBI report on white supremacist extremism concluded that “firearms likely will continue to pose the greatest threat of lethal violence by WSEs [white supremacist extremists] due to their availability and ease of use.”⁶⁷ In just a few realizations of this assessment, white supremacist gunmen attacked the Tree of Life synagogue in Pennsylvania in 2018, the Chabad of Poway synagogue in California in 2019, and a Walmart in Texas in 2019. Part of the reason for this reliance on firearms by white supremacists is the degree to which American gun culture and extremism are intertwined. For many organized anti-government groups, the importance of guns as a tool to put their beliefs into action is a foundational tenet. For example, much of the rhetoric used by the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters, both militia-style anti-government groups, involves references to their willingness to use guns against perceived government overreach.⁶⁸

Current gaps in regulations and legislation make extremist attacks deadlier and more difficult to investigate: “In the United States between 1970 and 2014, the average percentage of terrorist attacks that were lethal was 4 percent if the attack did not involve firearms and 40 percent if the attack did involve firearms.”⁶⁹ While those convicted of felony hate crimes cannot purchase firearms, those convicted on misdemeanor hate crime charges can. Moreover, individuals who are prohibited from gun possession because of prior convictions for violent crimes can avoid background checks by purchasing firearms from unlicensed gun sellers. They can also purchase “unfinished,” or “80 percent,” receivers, then finish them into untraceable, unmarked “ghost guns” at home.⁷⁰

Recommendations

White supremacist violence is a complex threat that requires comprehensive and coordinated government efforts. This section includes an outline of recommendations for legislative and federal-level action that complements the critical work of organizations and leaders at the state, local, and grassroots levels. The policy proposals fall into five broad categories:

1. Leverage executive branch actions and authorities
2. Improve data collection, research, and reporting
3. Protect communities and prosecute crimes
4. Counter recruiting and infiltration in military, veteran, and law enforcement communities
5. Employ financial and technological tools and authorities

While there are many important policy steps outlined below, perhaps the most important ingredient of an effective strategy is the will of the nation's leaders to act. The country is in a pivotal moment with a new administration, a new Congress, and a motivated electorate; there is an opportunity to harness momentum into action to defeat white supremacist violence.

Leverage executive branch actions and authorities

The executive branch has an important role to play in addressing white supremacist violence, not least of which is demonstrating commitment by vocally opposing white supremacy and by setting high expectations for federal government action. Executive branch-led plans should complement the ongoing efforts in Congress and in communities across the country to end white supremacist violence. The executive branch should also focus particularly on white supremacy and racial bias within the federal workforce. Ending white supremacist violence must start with federal leadership that acknowledges and prioritizes the problem and commits to driving resources and developing cooperative strategies.

Recommendation 1: Prioritize the threat of white supremacist violence across federal government departments and agencies, driving federal resources, manpower, and attention to the issue on a scale that is consistent with the threat.

- A. Require federal departments and agencies to develop interoffice strategies to prevent and address the threat of white supremacist violence.** Prevention, public health, and public awareness strategies should include the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), and U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). At a minimum, these strategies should address violence prevention, cybersafety, and ways to identify and counter the misinformation and disinformation exacerbating the current extremist threat.⁷¹ Investigation and prosecution strategies should be coordinated across the intelligence community, DOJ, FBI, and DHS, as well as the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Treasury Department, IRS, and the Federal Communications Commission. This will ensure a comprehensive approach that accounts for the roles that militias, media, and financing play in white supremacist violence.
- B. Allocate federal resources commensurate with the threat of white supremacist violence within existing federal prioritization frameworks.** The threat of white supremacist violence has been elevated within the FBI's Threat Review and Prioritization process, and federal resources should be allocated accordingly. Intelligence collection and analytic resources should also be leveraged against transnational white supremacist actors. In some cases, government reports and agencies are using a general category of racially motivated violent extremism.⁷² It is important to communicate, plan, and resource with specificity around white supremacist violence to ensure that strategies are consistent with the threat and are not misused against marginalized communities.⁷³
- C. Enhance cooperation with state, local, and tribal law enforcement to identify and investigate white supremacist violence.** Fusion centers provide an existing network to leverage for information sharing both horizontally and laterally.⁷⁴ At the federal level, agencies should implement procedures and guidance to sanitize or write information associated with white supremacist violence for release to allow ease of access by state, local, and tribal departments. Feedback mechanisms across the network serve as a learning and incentive tool to ensure local units are aware of when information they shared is used to successfully prevent or prosecute white supremacist violence. To increase protection and respect for citizens' privacy, civil liberties, and civil rights, the DOJ should provide direct funding and personnel for recurring training on oversight.

D. Collaborate with international partners, academic institutions, and nonprofit organizations that have expertise in understanding and addressing white supremacist violence. This should start with joining the Christchurch Call, an international commitment by governments to eliminate violent extremist and terrorist content online. As white supremacist violence is a transnational challenge, international partnership is necessary to address it. Federal departments should be directed and empowered to learn from and cooperate with international partners already working to counter white supremacist violence. Academic institutions and nonprofit organizations have been studying white supremacist violence, its effects, and ways to address it for decades. Experts outside the government should be part of the process when refining solutions and building out implementation plans.

E. Establish a funded and staffed lead executive branch task force or committee. This team should coordinate strategies across the government, report on accountability measures, interface with affected communities, and cooperate with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and academic institutions.⁷⁵ This team should also be empowered to direct assessments regarding the prevalence and nature of white supremacy across federal government organizations, departments, and agencies.

Recommendation 2: Establish and enforce standards of conduct to ensure members of the federal workforce, including federal law enforcement and contract employees, are not participating in and contributing to white supremacist violence.

A. Draft employee conduct guidelines that address participation in delineated white supremacist activities. Those who are entrusted to carry out the work of developing, implementing, and upholding the nation's laws should be held to a high standard of conduct that is incompatible with participation in white supremacist activities and violence. The executive branch should establish clear policy guidance defining and outlining white supremacist activities in which federal employees and contractors may not participate: This should include, at a minimum, planning, participating in, and advocating for white supremacist violence. Policies should be tailored to types of employees—for example, contract employees, civil servants, and law enforcement—to account for varying precedent regarding First Amendment protections.⁷⁶

B. Update federal hiring standards and security clearance processes to screen for applicants who participate in white supremacist activities or are affiliated with white supremacist groups and private militias. Existing processes to screen for ties to terrorism and foreign extremism should be updated and clarified to explicitly address domestic violent extremism, including white supremacy and self-organized militias. For positions requiring security clearances, the Office of Personnel Management

(OPM) should update questions regarding extremist associations, drawing on recent Defense Personnel and Security Research Center findings and recommendations to ensure applicants and reference contacts understand what they are being asked to disclose.⁷⁷ When adjudicating clearances and waivers, association with white supremacist extremism and private militias should be as significant an insider threat indicator as association with foreign extremism.

C. Mandate tailored training regarding current extremist recruitment threats for federal employees.

Federal departments and agencies should integrate domestic violent extremism threats into information security and insider threat training. Based on current DHS, FBI, and Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) assessment, the most pertinent current threat is from white supremacist actors, and this should be specifically addressed in the training.⁷⁸ Training should address relevant recruitment tactics used by white supremacists; indicators, symbols, and messaging associated with white supremacists; and how to discern misinformation, disinformation, and increasingly violent content. Federal employees should also know how and what to report if they think they are being targeted for recruitment in domestic violent extremists.

D. Mandate data collection and reporting regarding white supremacist activity and associated behaviors across the federal workforce to assess and track the prevalence of the problem.

Data collection and reporting should include recurring workforce surveys; filed complaints; and disciplinary actions associated with discrimination, harassment, racism, and extremism. Surveys should allow for employees to convey experiences and observations of white supremacist and misogynist displays and behaviors in the workplace, in addition to workplace harassment and discrimination.

Improve data collection, research, and reporting

Besides a lack of previous political will to act, the lack of comprehensive and detailed data has hindered the development of targeted strategies to address the problem. To optimize the effectiveness of solutions and buy-in of the American public, research should adhere to standards of academic and scientific rigor, and the findings should be made and kept public. Improvements in data collection, research, and reporting cannot be a one-time or short-term change; they must be enduring to allow for long-term accountability. Enduring study is also critical to ensuring resources are allocated according to need.

Recommendation 1: Conduct quality research to address knowledge gaps and inform the development of measures to address white supremacist violence.

A. As part of the president's racial equity initiative, conduct a study of the history of how major government agencies have enacted effective reforms to address systemic racism. A commission of historians and social scientists would be ideally placed to research how white supremacist ideas were built into the operating practices of many government agencies, how these were reformed over time to serve all citizens equally, and where racist and white supremacist practices remain. The study would offer practical examples from U.S. history of how institutions can be reformed to live up to the nation's values.

B. Conduct a thorough federal-level review of previous counter-terrorism initiatives. The intent of the review is not to encourage a counter-terrorism approach, but rather to identify where and how these initiatives were effective, fell short, and caused harm; where there are opportunities for improvement; and where valuable improvements have been made. Reviewing departments and agencies should include, at a minimum, the DOJ, DHS, and FBI. The review should invite participation by those communities that were targeted by these policies, and the executive branch should encourage congressional oversight to ensure transparency and accountability. The review should consider revisions to the attorney general (AG) guidelines and the FBI's Domestic Investigation and Operations Guide. The final report and recommendations should be made publicly available.

C. Increase availability and public access to multisource information regarding white supremacist violence. Statistics should be published—for public use and at least annually—pertaining to white supremacist activities, including violence and national hate crime data. Data should be incorporated from all levels of law enforcement, other state and local offices to which community members can report violence and harassment, and federal government agencies and departments—such as the DOD, FBI, and DOJ—that track violent and criminal activity. Data from nongovernmental organizations, such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies and ADL, should also be used for comparison to identify potential discrepancies and gaps in government data reporting and collection processes.

D. Fund and/or conduct and publish research regarding:

- Recruiting, communication, and messaging methods of violent white supremacist actors, groups, and movements
- Effective community-led strategies for white supremacist violence prevention, intervention, disengagement, and rehabilitation
- The nature and prevalence of racism and white supremacy in the law enforcement community and across government institutions
- The role and effects of internet community engagement, social media products, and recommendation algorithms in recruiting and radicalizing individuals to white supremacist violence
- The role of exposure to and belief in misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy in radicalizing individuals to white supremacist violence
- The relationship between online and in-person outreach, engagement, and organizing prior to white supremacist violence
- White supremacist fundraising and financing methods, including the use of peer-to-peer technologies and cryptocurrencies
- Effective digital product, algorithmic, or content moderation strategies for preventing online organizing, radicalization, and financing of white supremacist violence

E. Deliver research funding through HHS, the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the National Institute of Justice, and the DHS' Science and Technology Directorate. The federal government should encourage peer-reviewed, scientific research; encourage collaborative and multidisciplinary approaches; and create a research marketplace to secure a role for civil society contribution. Research grants should provide multiyear funding to allow a focus on work versus fundraising, and grant reviews should account for the demographic diversity of research teams and institutions to prevent cultural bias.

Recommendation 2: Improve and enforce criminal data reporting standards and processes.

A. Conduct a review of gaps in federal and state hate crime reporting tools and create federal incentives to improve reporting accuracy by state and local law enforcement. The Hate Crime Statistics Act mandate for data collection and reporting standards should be reviewed to ensure that it sufficiently captures and differentiates crimes committed in part or in full because of the victim's race, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or national origin. Moreover, to improve compliance with hate crime reporting standards, it is vital to develop accountability measures,

including reporting audits, and to condition federal grants based on compliance—for example, the Urban Areas Security Initiative or programs provided through the Bureau of Justice Assistance and Community Oriented Policing Services.

- B. Establish and support implementation, including funding, of crime reporting standards and systems that facilitate more complete and contextualized reporting associated with white supremacist violence.** The federal government should continue to fund and incentivize state, local, and tribal law enforcement adoption of the National Incident-Based Reporting System and reporting in accordance with federal hate crime standards.⁷⁹ The federal government should also explore options to issue and enforce mandates for hate crime reporting. Federal hate crime reporting standards must be implemented to capture criminal offenses “motivated, in whole or in part, by the offender’s bias(es) against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity,” regardless of whether the act is prosecuted as a hate crime.⁸⁰
- C. Establish and support mechanisms and processes to report white supremacist violence outside law enforcement channels.** These processes should center the needs and experiences of those who experience such violence, account for language or cultural barriers, and not retraumatize or cause more harm.⁸¹ Examples include national hotlines and local resource lines that offer victims and witnesses avenues to report crimes, abuse, and harassment free from fear of retribution.⁸² Where possible, it is important to use existing infrastructure, such as local 211 lines, that is already trusted by and familiar to the community.⁸³
- D. Enforce hate crime reporting from federal government agencies and departments, such as DOD and DHS.** These federal agencies and departments should also conduct and share audits of hate crime reporting.
- E. Prioritize updates regarding occurrences and threats of white supremacist violence during annual DHS and FBI hearings to inform lawmakers and the public.**

Protect communities and prosecute crimes

While many programs to protect communities are best executed at the state and local level, there are opportunities for federal policies and funding to support community-based efforts. Strategies to protect communities should be grounded in a public health approach to bolster resilience, support recovery of those harmed by violence,

and prevent mobilization to violence. To prosecute crimes associated with white supremacist violence, the federal government should ensure that law enforcement has the training to leverage existing tools and authorities while recognizing the harm and distrust caused by racially, ethnically, and religiously discriminatory policing practices. Most mechanisms to investigate and charge perpetrators of white supremacist violence are already available, and any new laws should ensure that constitutional rights are respected and mitigate the potential for government abuse.

Recommendation 1: Assess and invest in programs and initiatives that protect against violence and build resilience and trust at the state and local levels.

A. Invest in public health approaches to violence prevention and disengagement. It

is vital to fund programs that bolster protective factors against white supremacist recruitment, as well as programs to rehabilitate and reintegrate people who seek to disengage from violent white supremacist movements and groups. For example, funding the development of curriculum and subsequent training on cybersafety and digital media literacy for youth and adults can help them to strengthen their resilience against online recruitment tactics. This effort must also emphasize mental health and wraparound services—which address all of the biological, psychological, and social needs an individual presents—as key components of public health approaches to violence prevention and peace building.

B. Invest in the capacity of the mental health and social work field to provide prevention and disengagement services. A network, modeled after the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, should be created to distribute funds for organizations and facilitate connections between groups working to prevent white supremacist violence.⁸⁴

C. Fund community-led programs that build resilience against white supremacist violence. This should involve investing in restorative justice initiatives, nonjudicial interventions, and trauma-informed care and services for communities affected by hate crimes. Often the communities most affected by white supremacist violence possess a great deal of collective strength and resiliency already. Care and services embedded within these communities can capitalize on existing group resiliency while attending to individuals within the group who are at risk of the adverse effects of violence-induced trauma.

D. Provide and publicize bystander intervention resources.⁸⁵ This can start with the development of a violence prevention and bystander intervention campaign tailored to stopping white supremacist violence and harassment. The Department of Education can be leveraged to publicize the campaign with parents as part of youth

violence and cyberbullying prevention. Meanwhile, HHS, technology companies, law enforcement, and locally trusted institutions can be leveraged to encourage reporting when citizens witness white supremacist violence.

E. Continue federal funding for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program and conduct a program review with strong third-party program oversight.⁸⁶ While continuing to fund existing projects, the program should also be reviewed to ensure that support is provided to communities most in need of federal assistance. This review should incorporate analysis of whether these funds are equitably distributed among both secular and faith-based institutions and whether the current grants are serving the full spectrum of religious institutions in need of this assistance. Review and program oversight should include engagement of a third-party entity, such as representatives from both the local community and independent organizations. The intent is to emplace a trusted intermediary between the government and faith communities that have historically been subjected to undue surveillance of members by law enforcement in order to receive funds. In building trust between the government and faith communities, existing policies should be reviewed to ensure that grants are not contingent on surveillance.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen the ability to leverage existing investigation and enforcement authorities against white supremacist violence at the federal, state, and local levels.

A. Prioritize investigation and prosecution of white supremacist violence. Additional resources should be provided to the DOJ and FBI to pursue criminal prosecutions against those who perpetrate white supremacist violence. There is also a need to develop training programs for state and local law enforcement on existing authorities and legal authorizations to address white supremacist violence. Furthermore, Joint Terrorism Task Force resources should be appropriately allocated to white supremacist extremism, according to the threat.

B. Fund programs for state attorneys general offices to combat domestic violent extremism and unlawful militia activities. Washington, D.C., has built an office that focuses on countering hate and furthering racial and social justice, and Michigan has a position dedicated to investigating and prosecuting hate crimes and domestic violent extremism. These are models that deserve resource support across the nation. A dedicated office or team that partners with civil rights offices at the AG level would help with monitoring and reporting of extremism, enforcement of state laws, and coordination with federal officials. This office could also take the lead on

enforcing state anti-militia laws, which exist in every state, and would address a key group contributing to the rise of white supremacist violence.⁸⁷ Such an office would serve as a useful voice for a community-led approach to protecting vulnerable groups, emphasizing local social services.

C. Provide training to state, local, and tribal law enforcement regarding strategies to prevent and investigate white supremacist violence. While domestic violent extremism is not new, the focus of the past two decades has been on homegrown violent extremism associated with foreign terrorist organizations. The mainstream nature of the white supremacist movement is different, and law enforcement officials face challenges in discerning the line between unlawful and constitutionally protected activities. The federal government should provide training for state, local, and tribal law enforcement to enable them to understand and effectively counter this threat. Training should evolve as the government learns more about the nature of white supremacist violence and include strategies for prevention. Moreover, departments should be encouraged to share lessons learned from their respective communities. Programs such as the State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training (SLATT) Program, developed by the Bureau of Justice Assistance following the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, provide workshop-based models for training to tribal, local, and state law enforcement agencies. Its curriculum is focused on equipping law enforcement agents with the tools required to understand, identify, deter, and investigate domestic and foreign terrorist activity.⁸⁸ Such programs should be revised, staffed, and funded to address current and emerging threats.

Recommendation 3: Pursue legislation to more effectively prosecute hate crimes, prohibit racial and religious profiling, and prevent perpetrators of white supremacist violence from arming themselves.

A. Enact legislation to:

- a. Designate lynching as a federal hate crime.⁸⁹
- b. Update the federal statutory definition of hate crimes to clarify that “the term ‘because of’ means the actual or perceived protected characteristic of the victim was a substantial motivating factor in the offense” but not the only motivating factor.⁹⁰
- c. Prohibit “law enforcement from targeting a person based on actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation without trustworthy information that is relevant to linking a person to a crime.”⁹¹

B. Enact legislation to require background checks for gun sales by unlicensed individuals and firearm transfers between private parties.⁹² Under current federal law, unlicensed individuals who sell guns are not required to conduct a background check for every gun sale. This gap in the law allows individuals who are prohibited from buying or possessing guns—for reasons such as a conviction for a violent felony offense—to purchase them through a private sale with no background check and no records kept of the sale, which means the gun cannot be traced if it is later used in a crime.⁹³ As discussed in the “Current tactics of white supremacists” section of this report, guns continue to be the weapon of choice for violent white supremacists. Closing this legislative gap would support the investigation and prosecution of those who use guns to commit acts of white supremacist violence.

C. Enact legislation and/or take regulatory action to ban untraceable “ghost guns.” The federal requirements to engrave serial numbers on the frame or receiver of every firearm should apply to partially finished firearms, frames, and receivers. “Unfinished,” or “80 percent,” receivers are readily available online and through other vendors. Guns made at home using these unfinished receivers have become known as “ghost guns” because they are untraceable when recovered after use in a crime, and recent reporting suggests these weapons are increasingly being used by violent white supremacists.⁹⁴

D. Enact legislation prohibiting individuals who have been convicted of misdemeanor-level hate crimes from gun purchase, possession, or transfer.⁹⁵ The restrictions on firearm sales, transfers, and possession for individuals with felony hate crime convictions should be extended to include misdemeanor hate crime convictions. In many states, certain types of assault and battery committed with bias motivation are classified as misdemeanor offenses, as are hate crimes involving threats and intimidation against a member of a protected class, including through the use of force.⁹⁶ Researchers have also found that individuals who commit hate crimes often escalate their conduct, moving from relatively minor crimes to more serious or violent conduct.⁹⁷

E. Enact legislation creating an extreme risk protection order remedy at the federal level and incentivize states to enact these laws as well. An extreme risk protection order (ERPO) is a civil remedy that allows law enforcement or family members to petition a court to temporarily remove firearms from a person who poses a risk of harm to self or others. For the duration of the order, the individual is also prohibited from purchasing firearms. ERPO laws are designed to provide a legal tool to intervene

when there is demonstrable evidence that an individual is experiencing a temporary crisis, poses an imminent risk of harm to self or others, and has a firearm.⁹⁸ ERPO laws provide a valuable tool to help ensure extremists are disarmed before they commit acts of violence.⁹⁹ Measures to create a federal ERPO and provide grants to encourage state-level enactment have bipartisan congressional support.¹⁰⁰

A federal anti-militia statute

An idea, first proposed by Mary McCord, that CAP and the McCain Institute considered, but did not include in this blueprint, is a federal anti-militia statute that would allow federal prosecutors to charge private militias and paramilitary groups rather than relying on state officials. A federal anti-militia statute could provide an alternative to

state enforcement of such laws, which can be complicated by elected state officials who face political challenges in enforcing these laws when militias have community support. The authors think this idea has merit but lacked time to thoroughly discuss and vet this proposal with stakeholders.¹⁰¹

Counter recruiting and infiltration in law enforcement, military, and veteran communities

White supremacists deliberately target law enforcement, military, and veterans' communities for recruitment and infiltration.¹⁰² Because of the danger successful recruitment poses to local communities and national security, the federal government should implement enduring measures to counter white supremacist efforts.

Recommendation 1: Establish national policies, guidelines, and resources to prevent and address law enforcement member participation in white supremacist activities.

A. The DOJ should establish a federal advisory committee to develop policies and guidelines and advise on implementation strategies to address and mitigate law enforcement participation in white supremacist activities and white supremacist infiltration of law enforcement. Such guidance would complement legislative efforts to improve accountability for police misconduct, update use-of-force reporting requirements, and eliminate bias and discrimination in policing practices.¹⁰³ A committee staffed jointly by the DOJ Civil Rights Division and Office of Community Oriented Policing Services should also include civil liberties experts, representatives from all levels of law enforcement, and communities affected by white supremacist violence. The committee should address:

- a. Definitions regarding white supremacist extremism
- b. White supremacist activities in which law enforcement members are prohibited from participating
- c. Conduct standards for both on- and off-duty behavior as it pertains to white supremacy, including online behavior, as well as the display and advocacy of white supremacist insignia, symbols, and messages in the workplace¹⁰⁴
- d. Hiring standards and screening processes to identify and prevent infiltration by white supremacists
- e. Local through national accountability and tracking mechanisms for findings of derogatory statements, discriminatory conduct, and participation in prohibited white supremacist activity
- f. Provisions for termination based on violation of behavior regulations and patterns of discriminatory conduct
- g. Measures to continuously assess and report the prevalence and nature of white supremacy within the law enforcement community, as well as responses and efforts to mitigate and address the issue

B. Enforce policy implementation at the federal level and facilitate and incentivize policy implementation at the state and local law enforcement levels. The federal government has limited ability to enforce policies aimed at preventing and addressing participation in white supremacist activities at the state, local, and tribal levels. However, it can bring together law enforcement leaders to identify strategies and incentives for policy adoption and implementation across law enforcement departments and offices, as well as by state certification entities.

C. Update new hire and clearance questionnaires and recurring background investigation processes to assess and identify white supremacist affiliations and activities. To identify potential infiltration, screening questionnaires should be updated with language that specifically asks about white supremacist activities and affiliations.

D. Implement training regarding anti-white supremacy policies and recruitment threats. Training should be provided to all employees so that they understand policy updates and changes. Work must be done across relevant agencies, NGOs, and academic institutions to develop and provide training that addresses white supremacist recruitment tactics and messaging.

E. Research and develop bias assessment tools, standards, and training. Work can be done with social scientists to develop bias assessment tools, including those that leverage virtual reality systems, based on studies regarding effectiveness.¹⁰⁵ Such systems can be used to assess biased behavior and train police officers to recognize and control

for their biases in a variety of environments and situations. These systems should be paired with academic instruction to help law enforcement officers understand how their biases affect behavior and to develop mitigation strategies.

F. Develop accountability mechanisms to document and track law enforcement participation in restricted activities and misconduct in the line of duty. This should include a national police misconduct registry and reporting of police misconduct complaints and findings to the DOJ. It should also include workplace surveys to assess the observation and perception of white supremacist behaviors.

Recommendation 2: Update DOD processes and resources to prevent infiltration and detect white supremacist extremism and associated risk factors in the military.

A. Update DOD recruitment and clearance questionnaires and recurring background investigation processes to assess and identify white supremacist affiliations and activities. Domestic violent extremism, including white supremacy, must be viewed as an insider threat on par with foreign extremism. As recommended by the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, the DOD and OPM should update screening questionnaires regarding terrorist associations with language that asks about specific types of extremism and extremist activities. Questionnaire instructions should convey activities that constitute participation in extremism, including online activities. Instructions should also explicitly characterize groups that advocate for a white ethno-national state, or that espouse racial, religious, ethnic, and/or gender superiority, as extremist. The DOD should also leverage publicly available information—for example, social media accounts and internet forum posts—to identify and investigate service members and new recruits with white supremacist associations.

B. Partner with federal agencies, NGOs, and local law enforcement to build and update a database of white supremacist extremism indicators. Such a database would serve as a valuable resource for identifying individuals who may be participating in white supremacist activities. It should include a listing of groups that advocate for and engage in white supremacist violence, including hate groups, private militias, and paramilitary organizations, as well as a listing of participatory indicators, such as insignia, tattoos, and slogans. At the installation level, investigative offices—for example, the Criminal Investigation Division (CID), Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS), and Office of Special Investigations (OSI)—should work with local law enforcement and anti-hate community groups to develop and publish a similar local supplement.

C. Update and publicize reporting options to detect extremism in the DOD. If service members have concerns that they are being recruited or targeted by extremists, there should be a well-advertised office to which they can report those concerns, so military and federal investigators can assess and address threats. Service members should also be encouraged to report concerns about others within the ranks to their chain of command but need to have and understand nonchain reporting options.

D. Leverage surveys and studies to understand extremism and cultural biases in the military. While the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) mandates assessment of extremist behavior, surveys should specify the types of extremist behavior observed or experienced. DOD workplace surveys should allow service members and civilians to report at least:

- a. Observations and experiences of white supremacist behavior, messaging, and symbols in the workplace
- b. Experiences or observations of discrimination and harassment based on race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, and sexual orientation
- c. Perceptions regarding commander attitudes and enforcement of anti-extremist and anti-discrimination regulations
- d. Confidence in and awareness of reporting processes

The DOD should also leverage longitudinal studies to assess the racial attitudes of service members and civilians upon accession or hiring to determine if and how attitudes change throughout service. This will allow the study of factors associated with those changes—or lack of change—including but not limited to unit location, demographic composition of units, perceptions regarding racial attitudes of supervisors and leadership, significant public sociocultural events, local area events, and unit, service, and DOD training programs.

E. Update information reporting requirements to capture complaints and disciplinary actions regarding white supremacy across the DOD. Surveys can characterize the prevalence of those who witness or are affected by extremist behaviors, but complaint and disciplinary reporting is key to understanding the prevalence of extremists. Reporting should include complaints filed with chain of command; investigative offices such as the NCIS, OSI, and CID; inspector general offices; and equal opportunity offices. It should also include the findings of resulting investigations, judicial and nonjudicial actions taken to address extremist and discriminatory behavior, and details regarding the type of behavior and type of extremism and/or discrimination.

Recommendation 3: Update DOD extremism and diversity and inclusion policies; enforcement processes and expectations; and training.

A. Clarify DOD and service-specific policies regarding prohibited activities, behaviors out of line with military values, and commander enforcement responsibilities and options.¹⁰⁶ Continue to pursue the DOD and service-level changes recommended in 2020 by the Diversity and Inclusion Board regarding extremism policy clarity and updates to the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). Additionally, as extremist modes of operation and new technologies evolve, the DOD should update activities that constitute participation.

B. Provide DOD-wide training and references to ensure that all service members, civilians, and contractors understand policies and threats and to equip commanders to recognize and address racism, misogyny, and white supremacist extremism. Policy improvements and reference supplements regarding white supremacist threats and activities are necessary, but DOD members also require training and resources to understand and enforce the policies and to navigate the threat landscape. While it is valuable to hear from those who have been harmed by discrimination, harassment, and violence, the onus of educating a unit should not be on victims or minority service members. Because conversations regarding race and ethnicity, structural racism, and cultural aspects of white supremacy require nuance and care, the DOD should engage in partnerships with professionals in relevant fields, bringing in experts to lead trainings and discussions on such issues when possible. Additionally, the DOD should partner with federal agencies, NGOs, and academic institutions to develop and implement training that addresses threat indicators and recruitment tactics associated with white supremacist extremism, as well as the history of the issue. At a minimum, this should include:

- a. A review of prohibited activities, conduct out of line with military values, and a discussion of protected versus unprotected speech for military members
- b. How to access military resources and listings of white supremacist groups and associated insignia
- c. Indicators of white supremacist recruitment and DOD member involvement in white supremacist activities
- d. White supremacist messaging, including common memes and narratives, and indicators of misinformation and disinformation
- e. The history and evolution of white supremacist extremism, with a focus on issues within the military and violence against service members and veterans of color. An inclusion of history in training will shed light on issues with which DOD members may otherwise be unfamiliar, underscore the importance of addressing white supremacy, and can serve as a starting point for unit discussions.

C. Pursue and assess efforts to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the DOD.¹⁰⁷ In accordance with recommendations from its 2020 Diversity and Inclusion Board, the DOD should continue to address discriminatory and harmful behavior inconsistent with military values. The case for these efforts extends well beyond a need to address extremism within the ranks. However, much of white supremacist recruiting begins with racist and misogynist jokes, memes, and discussions. It is therefore critical that regardless of the views service members bring with them into the military or are exposed to outside the military environment, they recognize the falsehoods and harms of white supremacist narratives.

D. Expand DOD mental health programs to include extremism disengagement services.

Not all forms of participation in extremist activity will reach the threshold for discharge, even with UCMJ updates. When members are found to be engaging in extremism, they must be required to disengage for retention, and there is an opportunity and responsibility to intervene from a mental health perspective. The DOD should work with disengagement practitioners to provide counseling and mandate service member participation to continue serving; the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment (ADAPT) and ASAP (Army Substance Abuse Program) programs provide two useful models.

E. Provide training to separating and retiring service members during transition assistance programs to address extremist recruitment tactics, mental and emotional hardships associated with leaving the military community, and positive community resources. Veterans are targeted for recruitment by extremist groups and may be more vulnerable to that recruitment due to loss of community and personal identity. The ways in which service members may struggle with those personal challenges, and the ways extremist groups and conspiracy theorists will try to recruit them, should be addressed during the transition period. Soon-to-be veterans should learn where to report such recruitment efforts and learn about positive veteran community organizations.

Recommendation 4: Establish a role for the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) in countering veteran participation in white supremacist violence.

A. Partner with veterans' organizations and advocacy groups that publicly oppose white supremacy. Participation in white supremacist violence harms veterans and their communities. As part of its mission to care for veterans, the VA should take a clear and public stance against veteran participation in white supremacist activity. It is vital to collaborate with these veterans' groups to develop solutions to counter white supremacist recruitment of and violence against veterans.

- B. Establish a central VA office to field reports of violent extremist recruiting, distribute warnings regarding specific groups and tactics, and partner with local and federal law enforcement to counter recruiting efforts.** Veterans who are being recruited by violent extremist groups should have a central office to which they can report these activities. That office should work with law enforcement to report on these extremist groups and conduct information exchanges regarding observed tactics and insignia or symbols. Notices and warnings developed in cooperation with law enforcement should then be distributed to the veteran community via VA service centers, emails, and veteran service organizations.
- C. Provide Veterans Health Administration services to veterans to prevent and report radicalization and recruiting and to assist disengagement from white supremacist activity.** Resources must be available to veterans during and after transitioning out of the military to identify misinformation, disinformation, and extremist recruiting. For those veterans who are engaging with extremist ideologies or groups, there should be targeted questions on point-of-care screeners to assess engagement, while mental health, counseling, and wraparound services can be provided to veterans looking to disengage from violent movements and groups.
- D. Expand the statutory grounds for forfeiture of post-service DOD and VA benefits to include hate crimes and domestic violent extremism offenses.** Congress has previously enacted statutes such as the Hiss Act (5 U.S.C. 8311 et seq.) and 38 U.S.C. 6105 to strip military retirees of their pensions, and veterans of certain benefits, upon conviction for subversive activities.¹⁰⁸ Congress should work with the VA to expand those statutes to identify and include convictions relating to hate crimes and domestic violent extremism offenses. However, removals of benefits should be limited to financial benefits, such as military retirement or GI Bill benefits, as well as honorary benefits such as burial in a VA cemetery. Veterans should not, however, be denied access to VA health care, because such denial of access could exacerbate harm and contribute to further extremism.

Employ financial and technological tools and authorities

There are significant tools in the financial and technology sectors that can be used as part of a broader effort to defeat white supremacist violence. These measures must be balanced with protecting First Amendment rights, and both the financial and technological aspects activities associated with white supremacist violence merit greater study. Some tools used against foreign terrorist and extremist activity are not entirely applicable in the domestic context, but there are still important ways to leverage financial and technological capabilities.

Recommendation 1: Leverage the powers of the Treasury Department to investigate and disrupt funding networks.

A. Apply existing approaches used against financial crimes to identify and investigate financial activity associated with white supremacist violence. This includes anti-money laundering measures, suspicious activity reporting, and tax investigations. The Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) can use its Section 314(a) authorities to request information from financial institutions “regarding individuals, entities, and organizations engaged in or reasonably suspected, based on credible evidence, of engaging in terrorist acts.”¹⁰⁹ These requests can cover suspicious small, peer-to-peer transactions as well as larger domestic and international money flows.

B. Sanction foreign financiers of white supremacist violence within the United States. Treasury’s Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence should investigate international funding and support, including through cryptocurrencies, for those who carry out white supremacist violence.

C. Work with companies to prohibit and demonetize hateful and violent content and white supremacist groups. Part of this effort should include increasing cooperation to understand and counter white supremacist violence, fundraising, and coordination methods, building on the lessons learned through the development of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) and furthering the efforts of civil rights coalitions such as Change the Terms to combat “hateful activity” online.¹¹⁰ As technology platforms increase their methods to raise and distribute funds either through direct monetization or via grassroots users, greater emphasis is needed to ensure appropriate measures are taken to prevent abuse.

Recommendation 2: Ensure technology companies take steps to end and are held accountable for the use of their platforms to finance and plan white supremacist violence.

A. Embrace global allies in a shared fight against white supremacy and extremism online. As noted earlier, these actions should include joining the Christchurch Call against online extremism. Created in response to the 2019 terrorist attack against mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, “The Christchurch Call is a commitment by Governments and tech companies to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online.”¹¹¹ The commitment recognizes freedom of speech and expression online but outlines the need to address terrorist and violent content.¹¹²

- B. Encourage all platforms to develop specialist teams and resources to prevent white supremacist violence.** Technology companies should plan early to address the potential of white supremacist violence by creating specialist teams and proactive procedures. The government should earmark resources to allow smaller companies to train and identify this content early in their development and to provide functional, transparent law enforcement portals with clear process requirements to make lawful intercept requests.
- C. Ensure partnerships are effective, reciprocal, and rights-respecting.** Effectively combating white supremacist organizing and violence online requires increasing partnerships for information sharing and coordination between technology platforms and government, between companies that run different platforms on a bilateral basis as well as through entities such as GIFCT, and between technology platforms and civil society. In order to ensure efficacy and trust, partnerships should be two-way relationships for information sharing, require certain disclosures, and include representatives from the civil and human rights community.
- D. Drive the creation of universal standards for classification of types of hateful content and white supremacist groups identified or removed by technology companies.** Through privacy-sensitive methodologies with appropriate civil liberties protections, independent auditors must have the ability to examine the accuracy of these data as reported and shared by companies.
- E. Advocate for transparent methods of content moderation and algorithmic recommendation by major technology platforms.** The executive branch and Congress should work together to pass legislation on digital transparency. The federal government should also hold technology companies accountable for failures to take down identified illegal content and explore how to encourage companies to identify and remove content prohibited by their terms of service.
- F. Encourage civil rights investigations and audits of companies where there is evidence of failure to address violent content and white supremacist groups engaged in illegal activities.** Investigations should look beyond stated policies to examine social media business models, product features, algorithmic systems, targeting strategies, and content moderation practices. For example, Facebook’s civil rights audit, conducted from 2018 to 2020, focused on not only traditional corporate diversity and inclusion efforts around civil rights but also the impact of product decisions and business models—including algorithmic biases and advertising practices—on civil rights.¹¹³ Additional investigations that take a holistic look at civil rights impacts are needed.

G. Join the legislative conversation on charting an effective future to address and prevent extremism online. These legislative conversations should include product features and algorithms that may promote extremism, the impact of existing intermediary liability laws, and other issues. Consideration should be given to whether any reforms might better incentivize companies to ethically and effectively discourage white supremacist violence and extremism and disincentivize business models that enable its spread while protecting freedom of expression, especially for marginalized communities.

Conclusion

From growing their movement with online organizing and deliberate recruiting to leveraging gun culture and a transnational community, perpetrators of white supremacist violence use a wide variety of tactics. In turn, public officials must deploy a wide variety of policies to slow the spread of violence and address its root causes.

There is no simple solution that will effectively address the issue of white supremacist violence in America. However, the comprehensive set of policies contained within this blueprint provide the main areas of consensus on how to best leverage national resources, authorities, and tools, and where to grow capacity and capability.

This report offers a plan to capitalize on common ground among diverse groups and protect those communities most vulnerable to white supremacist violence. Much work remains to further develop these policy ideas and convert them into action. Now is the time to unite around and act on these areas of consensus. Defeating white supremacist violence will require both a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. It is up to all of us to meet this rising security threat and create a brighter, safer future for every American.

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Opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied within this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Air University, the U.S. Air Force, the Department of Defense, or any other U.S. government agency.

Acknowledgments

This project and report reflect the contributions of the many experts, advocates, practitioners, and stakeholders who lent us their time and expertise over the past year to help shape our understanding of the problem, navigate the complexities of white supremacist violence, and develop and refine our recommendations. We are sincerely thankful for their support.

This report also reflects the collective work of numerous researchers, analysts, and experts across the Center for American Progress. Teams involved in development and drafting include National Security and International Policy, Gun Violence Prevention, Technology Policy, Immigration, Criminal Justice, Race and Ethnicity, Faith and Progressive Policy, and State and Local Policy, and Democracy and Government—with significant contributions from James Lamond, Siena Cicarelli, Adam Conner, Erin Simpson, Chelsea Parsons, Maggie Siddiqi, and Richard Figueroa.

The authors would especially like to recognize the contributions of CAP and McCain Institute interns Karuna Nandkumar, Irma Crawford, and Cade Shore.

Appendix A: Terms and definitions

Alt-right: “The Alternative Right, commonly known as the ‘alt-right,’ is a set of far-right ideologies, groups and individuals whose core belief is that ‘white identity’ is under attack by multicultural forces using ‘political correctness’ and ‘social justice’ to undermine white people and ‘their’ civilization.”¹¹⁴ — Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)

Anti-government extremism: Also called anti-authority extremism, those associated with this movement are “sometimes influenced by anarchist ideology, have been associated with multiple plots and attacks, which included a significant uptick in violence against law enforcement and government symbols in 2020.” They also “are likely to be emboldened by a perceived success exploiting otherwise peaceful protest movements and concealing violent tactics.”¹¹⁵ — DHS’ October 2020 Homeland Threat Assessment

Domestic violent extremist: “An individual based and operating primarily within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power who seeks to further political or social goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence”¹¹⁶ — DHS’ October 2020 Homeland Threat Assessment

Hate crime: “Willfully causing bodily injury” when “(1) the crime was committed because of the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin of any person or (2) the crime was committed because of the actual or perceived religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability of any person and the crime affected interstate or foreign commerce or occurred within federal special maritime and territorial jurisdiction.”¹¹⁷ — 18 U.S.C. § 249

People of color: For the purposes of this report, “people of color” is an inclusive definition for nonwhite individuals, including but not limited to the Black, Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), and Latinx communities. In the instances where this report refers to a specific community or group, it does so directly.

Terrorism: Activities that “involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any state” and “appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.”¹¹⁸ — 18 U.S.C. § 2331

White nationalism: A specific form of white supremacist ideology that “emphasizes defining a country or region by white racial identity and which seeks to promote the interests of whites exclusively, typically at the expense of people of other backgrounds.”¹¹⁹ — ADL

White supremacy: “A term used to characterize various belief systems central to which are one or more of the following key tenets: 1) whites should have dominance over people of other backgrounds, especially where they may co-exist; 2) whites should live by themselves in a whites-only society; 3) white people have their own “culture” that is superior to other cultures; 4) white people are genetically superior to other people.”¹²⁰ — ADL

White supremacist extremists: “A group or individual who facilitates or engages in acts of unlawful violence directed at the federal government, ethnic minorities, or Jewish persons in support of their belief that Caucasians are intellectually and morally superior to other races and/or their perception that the government is controlled by Jewish persons.”¹²¹ — DHS’ October 2020 Homeland Threat Assessment

White supremacist violence: Violence driven or motivated, at least in part, by white supremacist beliefs or ideology. This includes, but is not limited to, hate crimes and terrorism and is carried out in part, but not exclusively, by white supremacist extremists. This is derived from and based on above definitions.

Appendix B: Referenced groups and organizations

Atomwaffen Division: The Atomwaffen Division, which reorganized as the National Socialist Order in 2020, is an accelerationist neo-Nazi organization. Members promote the use of violence to overthrow the government and establish a new society based on white supremacy, and the group has been linked to violence in the United States.¹²²— Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University

The Base: The Base is a militant neo-Nazi organization. Its members believe themselves to be vigilante soldiers defending the “European race” from a broken “system” that has been infected by Jewish values. The Base embraces Hitlerian and white supremacist ideologies, and it maintains that a race war is imminent. The group also promotes nihilistic and accelerationist themes, ultimately believing that a societal collapse is necessary.¹²³ — ADL

National Partisan Movement: The National Partisan Movement (NPM) is a U.S.-based white identity movement that distinguishes itself from other far-right groups by appealing to and recruiting Generation Z members through social platforms such as Telegram and Instagram. Although its membership is relatively small, the group has international status with most members living in Europe. Similar to other far-right groups, hate-based rhetoric is common and organizing happens both online and offline. However, social distancing guidelines have managed to keep most of NPM’s activity online, as this group originated during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹²⁴ — HOPE not hate

Oath Keepers: Oath Keepers is a loosely organized paramilitary group comprised of anti-government extremists. What differentiates the Oath Keepers from other anti-government extremist groups is its explicit focus on recruiting current and former military members, police officers, and firefighters. While white supremacy is not a specific focus of the Oath Keeper ideology, some members blend anti-government sentiments with white supremacist rhetoric.¹²⁵ — ADL

Proud Boys: The Proud Boys is a far-right extremist group that espouses Islamophobic, transphobic, misogynistic, nationalistic, and white supremacist rhetoric. Members typically adhere to the idea that white men are losing their power in society due to multiculturalism, and some have turned toward violence to advance their white supremacist agendas.¹²⁶ — ADL

Three Percenters: The Three Percenters is a broad anti-government movement that encompasses many loosely organized militia groups. These groups generally adhere to the notion that a small force with a just cause can overthrow a tyrannical government if armed and prepared. Because anyone can declare themselves a Three Percenter, the movement invites a wide range of extremists to engage in paramilitary activities. While white supremacy is not a specific focus of the Three Percenter ideology, some militia members blend anti-government sentiments with white supremacist rhetoric.¹²⁷ — ADL

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The Center for American Progress is an independent, nonpartisan policy institute that is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans, through bold, progressive ideas, as well as strong leadership and concerted action. Our aim is not just to change the conversation, but to change the country.

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As progressives, we believe America should be a land of boundless opportunity, where people can climb the ladder of economic mobility. We believe we owe it to future generations to protect the planet and promote peace and shared global prosperity.

And we believe an effective government can earn the trust of the American people, champion the common good over narrow self-interest, and harness the strength of our diversity.

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We develop new policy ideas, challenge the media to cover the issues that truly matter, and shape the national debate. With policy teams in major issue areas, American Progress can think creatively at the cross-section of traditional boundaries to develop ideas for policymakers that lead to real change. By employing an extensive communications and outreach effort that we adapt to a rapidly changing media landscape, we move our ideas aggressively in the national policy debate.

