

Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery
Full Committee Hearing: Domestic Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Examining the
Threat of Racially, Ethnically, Religiously, and Politically Motivated Attacks, Part I
August 3, 2021

This is the first of two hearings the Committee will hold this week to continue examining the current domestic terrorism threat in the United States, and the actions the federal government should take to address the alarming rise of extremist violence, including white supremacist violence, anti-government violence, anti-Semitic and other faith-based violence, and violence targeting communities of color.

Today, we will hear from experts representing faith-based, civil rights, academic and policy research organizations on how increasing violent attacks, motivated by ethnicity, race, religion, and politics, have impacted countless Americans.

I would like to thank each of our witnesses for joining us today, and for their work in the public and private sectors to protect the American people.

I look forward to hearing each of your perspectives on how to better define this threat and its roots, how it spreads, the impact it has on communities, and what more the federal government should do to address domestic terrorism, while respecting Americans' civil rights and civil liberties.

In the last few years, our nation has witnessed horrific acts of violence, such as the massacres at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, and a shopping center in El Paso that targeted Black, Jewish and Latino Americans, respectively.

Even more recently, we have seen rising violent attacks on Asian Americans, and a growing anti-government movement that planned and executed an attack on the seat of our democracy earlier this year.

While these only represent a handful of attacks driven by white supremacy and violent extremism, each one takes an unimaginable toll on the victims and their families.

Communities across the country live in fear that they could be attacked or murdered on the street, in their place of worship, or while going about their daily lives, just because of who they are.

I am particularly concerned that these attacks, along with the growing climate of hateful rhetoric, intimidation and targeted violence that we are seeing across the country, are a signal of something worse to come.

If the federal government does not take swift action to address this festering threat, I fear we will see more tragic attacks and lose more lives to domestic violent extremism.

But effectively combatting this growing threat requires the federal government to accurately assess it, track and publicly report these incidents, and use that data to ensure they are devoting the appropriate resources and personnel to tackle the threat.

Organizations, like the Anti-Defamation League and Center for Strategic and International Studies, have tracked data related to domestic violent extremism, and concluded that our nation is facing the highest levels of violence based on religion, race, ethnicity, and politics in decades.

I'm disappointed that despite these clear warning signs, the federal government has failed to effectively track the rising domestic terrorism threat.

I have been raising concerns about this failure for years. I worked with Senator Johnson to write a provision signed into law as part of the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act, to require DHS, FBI and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence to better track and publicly report this critical data.

Despite passing that law, the first report was nearly nine months overdue, and did not provide all of the required data.

We need to get serious about taking on these heinous threats and the violence that stems from them. In my view, we must change the way the federal government approaches domestic terrorism.

That will require not only improving the way the government tracks this threat, but also better understanding how these hateful ideologies spread across social media platform,— and how that online transmission can lead to real-world violence.

This is an issue that this Committee will continue to examine throughout the year. I look forward to taking what we learn from our witnesses today, and using it to inform our efforts going forward.

Whether we are conducting oversight, or working on additional policy solutions, we must ensure we are doing everything in our power to address the grave threat posed by domestic terrorism.