



CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Hearing on “Domestic Extremism in America: Examining White Supremacist
Violence in the Wake of Recent Attacks”

Written Testimony Submitted for the Record by
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Introduction

Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the danger of white nationalism as a domestic terrorism threat. I commend you for using this bipartisan forum to address this urgent problem.

While the number of distinct hate groups in America peaked in 2018, the FBI's annual Hate Crimes Report documented that 2020 saw a six percent increase in reported hate crimes from the previous year and represented the highest total in 12 years. Even more alarmingly, we are seeing an erroneous and dangerous belief voiced again and again by many of the shooters in our most horrific recent massacres. In a Buffalo grocery store, a Charleston church, an El Paso Walmart, the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, and too many other locales – the shooters justified their actions with the “great replacement” theory. This conspiracy theory is at the core of the white nationalist movement and poses a grave threat to our democracy.

In my experience, understanding white nationalism as a domestic terrorism threat is not a partisan issue. For eight years in the 1990s, when the predominantly white, rural Pacific Northwest and intermountain region was designated an “Aryan homeland” by white nationalists, I worked with Republican governors, local elected officials, law enforcement, business and civic leaders to establish over 120 multi-disciplinary anti-hate task forces across six states.

Earlier, working with a faith-based coalition, I founded and directed a community project to expose and counter hate groups. Through this work I had the opportunity to be in direct dialogue with a number of white nationalist and white supremacist organizers and persuaded several violent neo-Nazi leaders to renounce racism and violence.

On a more personal level, my life experience has proved that common values can bring us together, regardless of differences in how we might vote. Having grown up in poverty in Long Beach, California, facing racist harassment and violence as a young Black man, I expected better when I moved to the reputedly liberal haven of Eugene, Oregon. Instead, I found that despite my long resume of work experience, no one would hire me. Finally, someone decided to take a chance on me. He happened to be a conservative white Republican. I was the first Black person he'd ever met. We spent eight to twelve hours a day together, five days a week, installing insulation in crawl spaces under houses. What I learned, while working the jobsites with him and sharing our life stories, was that our lives and our values were not as different as they seemed. We both believed in hard work, fair work, and taking care of your neighbors.

Because of these experiences, I have dedicated my life's work to uniting Americans across party, race, class, occupation, and geography in shared commitment to a country where all of us can live, love, worship and work free from bigotry and violence.

The Impact of White Nationalist Violence on State & Local Governance

You will have ample data from federal offices and other witnesses about the extremist groups who comprise the white nationalist movement, and the many acts of violence that are being driven by this hateful ideology. I will focus on the impact this violence is having on state and municipal governance, before discussing the dangerous mainstreaming of these extremist beliefs.

Let's look at the big picture for a moment. In 2021, domestic extremists killed at least 29 people in the United States, in 19 separate incidents; 26 of these 29 were killed by right-wing extremists.¹ Over the past 10 years, white supremacists have committed 244 murders in the United States.² In addition, the number of reports of assaults, vandalism and harassment targeting Jewish communities and individuals in the United States was the highest on record in 2021, a 34% increase from the prior year.³

In another measure of the rise of extremism, in 2021, 72 active Proud Boys chapters were documented across the country, a near doubling from 43 the year before.⁴

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project found that of all named groups identified at armed demonstrations since 2020, the vast majority (81.9%) are right-wing actors. Overall, the top three named actors present at armed demonstrations since 2020 are the Boogaloo Boys and their affiliates, the Three Percenters and their associated groups, and the Proud Boys.⁵ Armed demonstrations are nearly six times as likely to turn violent or destructive compared to unarmed demonstrations.⁶

The point I want to underscore is this: with the exception of any events in the nation's capital, these incidents occur in local communities, including state capitals, that are often ill-equipped to handle this kind of extremist violence without additional training, tools, and resources.

Western States Center and other respected organizations have been monitoring closely how white nationalist and other anti-democracy groups have been interacting with local government and local officials, often using threats, intimidation, and even sometimes violence. From planned violent rallies that undermine the capacity of cities and counties to keep people safe, to a wave of resignations of local officials – several of whom have explicitly cited threats and harassment as their reason for leaving public office – the impact is significant.

As the examples I'm about to share will illustrate, it's not only minority communities that are the targets of extremist violence. Law enforcement, the military, elected officials, health care workers, and election officials have all been targeted. Left unchecked, this puts national security at risk.

The impact of anti-democracy and white nationalist extremism is reaching into every sector. To share a few examples:

Violence & Threats of Violence Against Police Officers

Since the beginning of 2020, far-right extremists have shot and injured police officers in 10 different incidents, four of which resulted in the murder of a police officer. There have been several additional shoot-outs between bigoted extremists and law enforcement in which law enforcement was not injured.⁷

Additionally, both law enforcement and our military face the threat of rising extremism within their ranks, as documented by the Brennan Center report, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism, White Supremacy, and Far-Right Militancy in Law Enforcement."

One member of the U.S. Army, a self-proclaimed neo-Nazi currently on trial for plotting to murder other soldiers, wrote on an encrypted app "that he had joined up solely to gain knowledge of military weaponry and tactics," according to reporting on the case.⁸

Elected Officials Facing Threats of Extremist Violence

The paramilitary plot to abduct Michigan Gov. Whitmer is the highest profile plan for violence against elected officials aside from the January 6 insurrection in recent years, and there have been few legal consequences for those charged. Acquittal of two men accused of attempting to abduct Gov. Whitmer sends a troubling signal to bigoted extremists.⁹ A new report from the National League of Cities finds that harassment, threats, and violence directed at local elected officials is rising at an alarming rate: 87% of local officials surveyed observed an increase in attacks on public officials in recent years, while 81% reported having experienced harassment, threats and violence themselves.¹⁰

Election Officials Facing Violent Threats & Resigning or Not Running Again

A new survey found that almost a fifth of election administrators say they've been threatened because of their jobs, and one in five local election officials say they are likely to quit before 2024.¹¹ The reporting consortiums Spotlight PA and Votebeat found, "In 14 southwestern Ohio counties, one in four directors or deputy auditors of elections has left. One in four election

officials in Kansas either quit or lost re-election in November. Twenty-one directors or deputies have left or will leave election posts in Pennsylvania's 67 counties."¹²

"In interviews, some election officials said they also worried that a flood of departures in the next two years could drain elections of nonpartisan expertise at a hinge moment for American democracy — or worse, encourage partisans to fill the vacuum, according to the *New York Times*. One said of the impact of the threats of violence, "We may lose a generation of professionalism and expertise in election administration. It's hard to measure the impact."¹³

"Great Replacement" Theory, a Core Tenet of White Nationalism

Much of the violence and violent intimidation I have been describing is perpetrated by those who have been influenced by the "great replacement" conspiracy theory.

As we think of the victims in the recent Buffalo massacre, we think also of the murders of Black Bible study students in Charleston, Latino Walmart customers and workers in El Paso, Jewish worshippers at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, and Muslim worshipers in Christchurch. The "great replacement" theory is a disturbing thread connecting all of these events.

- In **Buffalo** the shooter, who drove hundreds of miles to target Black grocery shoppers in a planned attack, left a lengthy manifesto containing dozens of racist memes and repeated references to the "great replacement" theory. In response to the question of why he was going to attack he wrote, "To show to the replacers that as long as the White man lives, our land will never be theirs and they will never be safe from us."¹⁴
 - "The real war I'm advocating for is the gentiles vs the Jews. We outnumber them 100x, and they are not strong by themselves."¹⁵
 - "By their Jewish ways, they turn us against each other. When you realize this you will know that the Jews are the biggest problem the Western world has ever had. They must be called out and killed."¹⁶
 - "The Jews are responsible for many problems that we in the western world face today," he wrote, elaborating that Jews mainly use control of the media to spread propaganda. "For our self-preservation, the Jews must be removed from our Western civilizations, in any way possible."¹⁷
 - In response to a question about if he hates Black people, he wrote, "A black man or woman choosing to invade our lands, live on our soil, live on government support and attack and replace our people? Yes, I dislike them."¹⁸
- In **Charleston**, the shooter's manifesto included this analysis: "As an American we are taught to accept living in the melting pot, and black and other minorities have just as much right to be here as we do, since we are all immigrants," it said. But in Europe—

“the homeland of White people”—he said “I saw that the same things were happening in England and France, and in all the other Western European countries. ... [I]n many ways the situation is even worse there.”¹⁹

- The **El Paso** shooter’s manifesto read, “In general, I support the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto. This attack is a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas.” Citing the “great replacement” theory, he echoed the slogan that was chanted during a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017: “Jews will not replace us.” The writer of the manifesto also suggested that Democrats in the United States have a strategy to gain a permanent majority by embracing the growing Hispanic population, according to the *New York Times*.²⁰
- The **Tree of Life** shooter wrote on Gab that white Americans and “Western Civilization” were “headed towards certain extinction,” and argued that Jewish and Muslim people were to blame.²¹ The Robert Bowers account reposted another user who wrote: “Open you[r] Eyes! It’s the filthy EVIL jews Bringing the Filthy EVIL Muslims into the Country!!”²²

In all of these mass shootings (and more), the killers drew on the so-called “great replacement” theory, the belief that a global conspiracy is orchestrating a master plan to undermine white political power by increasing the number of Black and brown people. Depending on the version of the conspiracy theory one runs across, that conspiracy might be run by “global elites” or “an international cabal” or “monied interests.” But we all know they’re really talking about Jews.

Antisemitism is the loom on which other hatreds are woven, so essential that it’s easy to ignore. If we seek to counter domestic extremism, we must recognize that antisemitism remains the energizing principle behind white nationalism. White supremacists and the white nationalist movement are angered by their perception that white people have lost so much control of the country since the upheavals of the 1960s. Someone must be pulling the strings, they theorize, given their belief in the intellectual inferiority of people of color. Someone must be betraying white people. Someone must be brainwashing white people, making them unaware of their racial identity and the dangers they face. That someone, of course, is Jews.

That antisemitism has survived until 2022 shouldn’t surprise anyone. It’s survived for thousands of years in Europe, adapting itself to the fears and challenges of the day, always assuring believers that whatever the current threat might look like, the face behind the mask was always a Jewish one. More recently, “The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion”—a forgery that purports to represent the minutes of a meeting of the international Jewish conspiracy—was first circulated by Czarist secret police in Russia in 1903 and introduced to the United States by Henry Ford in 1920, establishing antisemitic ideology in its modern form.

The modern-day antisemitic conspiracist belief in the “great replacement” theory must be unequivocally denounced by all levels of government and civil society. Instead, it is finding increased acceptance in mainstream media and culture.

The Mainstreaming of White Nationalist Ideology

One of the primary promoters of the “great replacement” theory is Fox News personality Tucker Carlson. According to a recent *New York Times* study²³, Carlson has promoted the conspiracy that Democrats want to push demographic change through immigration in more than 400 episodes of his show, using language such as:

- “I know that the left and all the little gatekeepers on Twitter become literally hysterical if you use the term ‘replacement’ if you suggest that the Democratic Party is trying to replace the current electorate—the voters now casting ballots—with new people, more obedient voters from the Third World. But they become hysterical because that’s what’s happening actually. Let’s just say it. That’s true.”²⁴
- He asserted that President Biden wanted to “reduce the political power of people whose ancestors lived here and dramatically increase the proportion of Americans newly arrived from the Third World,” before proceeding to use the term “great replacement.”²⁵

Some elected officials have defended Carlson’s repeated promotion of this racist and antisemitic conspiracy theory. Rep. Matt Gaetz tweeted²⁶ last September: “Tucker Carlson is CORRECT about Replacement Theory as he explains what is happening to America.”

Rep. Scott Perry used similar language in a committee hearing, claiming that many Americans were concerned that “we’re replacing national-born Americans, native-born Americans to permanently transform the landscape of this very nation.”²⁷

Others have tapped into demographic anxiety and promoted the idea of a conspiracy to disadvantage white people without explicitly using the term “great replacement.” For example:

- An ad run last year by Rep. Elise Stefanik read, “Radical Democrats are planning their most aggressive move yet: a PERMANENT ELECTION INSURRECTION,” The text accompanied an image of numerous migrants reflected in the aviator sunglasses worn by President Joe Biden.²⁸
- Senate candidate JD Vance of Ohio said in a campaign event last month, “You’re talking about a shift in the democratic makeup of this country that would mean we never win, meaning Republicans would never win a national election in this country ever again.”²⁹ One of his campaign ads read, “Are you a racist? Do you hate Mexicans?” The media calls us racist for wanting to build Trump’s wall. They censor us, but it doesn’t change

the truth. Joe Biden's open border is killing Ohioans, with more illegal drugs and more Democrat voters pouring into this country."³⁰

Statements by political and cultural leaders are having an impact on the larger populace:

- A month before the Buffalo massacre, in which a white gunman killed 10 people and injured three, most of them Black, a poll found that 7 out of 10 Republicans said they believe in the ideas that constitute the "great replacement" theory.³¹
- A poll in April found that 42% of young male Democrat and 45% of young Republican men said they approve of violence to achieve political change.³²
- Sixty-seven percent of Republicans told the same pollster they "believe the country's demographic changes are being orchestrated by 'liberal leaders actively trying to leverage political power by replacing more conservative white voters.'" The poll found that some Democrats also believe the changes are orchestrated: 35% of self-identified Democrats said they agree the change is driven by politicians. (Unlike Republicans, most Democratic respondents saw the demographic changes as positive.)
- In May 2022 55% of GOP Primary voters in Idaho agreed either strongly (26%) or somewhat (28%), with the statement "There is a conscious effort being made to replace white Americans with people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds."³³

Some of these disturbing trends are the result of a long-standing goal of the white nationalist movement to infiltrate and take over the Republican party. The executive director of Identity Evropa, which has rebranded as the American Identity Movement, told NBC News in 2018 that their mission was "to take over the GOP as much as possible."³⁴ The Republican party has, many times in its history, stood against hate and extremism – and there are Republicans who continue to, today. It is incumbent on all of us to ensure that our political parties, regardless of ideology, firmly reject bigotry and political violence.

Across the Ideological Spectrum, Steps Can Be Taken Locally

We are not helpless in the face of rising extremist violence. We have seen numerous examples of civil society institutions, political parties, and local governments across the ideological spectrum rejecting extremist ideology.

In the recent primary election in Idaho, Republican groups successfully pushed back against bigoted anti-democracy candidates. Democrats and Republicans, along with law enforcement and religious and business leaders, condemned extremist behavior as unacceptable.

In northern Idaho a former candidate for Kootenai County sheriff who "made it clear that he's a staunch, conservative Republican" blew the whistle on the Kootenai County Republican Central

Committee plans to “recruit volunteers to infiltrate the Kootenai Democrats, install an ‘antisemitic troll’ as party chair and funnel money donated to Democrats to local Republicans instead” according to the *Idaho Capital Sun*.³⁵

In Washington state, former Representative Matt Shea’s extremist actions were investigated by the FBI, and a wide range of civil society groups condemned his actions. An independent investigation commissioned by the state legislature resulted in him being stripped of committee memberships on a bipartisan basis. The Republican leader of the chamber called on him to resign, and he declined to seek reelection after another Republican announced a primary challenge.

And in the December 2020 attack on the Oregon Capitol, law enforcement agencies and a legislative committee investigated to establish the facts. A wide coalition of business, civic and religious leaders spoke out, and when the facts were established that revealed former Representative Mike Nearman helped plan the attack and opened the door for armed rioters who attacked law enforcement, both parties jointly expelled him from the body in a bipartisan vote that was unanimous except for Nearman.

To support this kind of push-back on extremism, we’ve created tools for communities, democratic institutions and local officials to counter white nationalism and respond effectively to anti-democracy and bigoted social movements with strategies that strengthen democratic practice while closing space for political violence. This includes a set of recommendations for local government to counter the impact of anti-democracy groups, such as identifying the core work of local government that may be vulnerable in each locality and reinforcing it, providing staff with training, considering all legal options including civil suits, and creating safety plans to support staff and officials in the event of doxxing, threats or other harassment.

Western States Center’s toolkits and resources include:

- *Community Guide for Opposing Hate*, a publication of the Bard Center for the Study of Hate, Western States Center, and the Montana Human Rights Network
- *Confronting Conspiracy Theories and Organized Bigotry at Home: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers*
- *Confronting White Nationalism in Schools: A Toolkit*
- *Reader’s Guide for Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right* by Cynthia Miller-Idriss
- *Strengthening Local Government Against Bigoted and Anti-Democracy Movements: Recommendations for Civic Leaders*

Recommendations for the Committee

Respectfully, we offer several actions the Committee could take to reduce the threat to national security caused by domestic extremism.

Cities and counties are increasingly isolated and overwhelmed in responding to targeting by anti-democracy and white nationalist groups. State and federal government are needed not only to raise their voices against white nationalism and political violence, but to enact policies that tackle this threat head on, including stronger laws and enforcement to prevent dangerous paramilitary activity, more training and support for government employees and local elected officials responding to attacks, examination of political bias in law enforcement, improved information sharing across municipalities and agencies, and a dedicated desk at the Department of Justice focused specifically on anti-democracy and hate groups.

Non-governmental organizations have already started to experiment with how to strengthen community-based responses to extremism – for example, a recently-announced \$10 million investment in local leaders, networks, and community groups who are bolstering pluralism in American neighborhoods, towns, and counties.³⁶

NGOs and local governments can't face down this threat on their own. We urge you to consider:

Block Grants to Counter the Impacts of Extremism on Local Governments

The Committee's bipartisan support for appropriations creating block grants for local governments is needed to help counter the impacts of extremism on the functioning of local governance. When local government or community institutions become weak or fail, we have seen in many different locations that extremist groups will step in to occupy the vacuum. The worsening breakdown in trust between local government and community trust creates further space for extremism to build power. As political violence becomes more commonplace, there are insufficient resources to maintain security for the functioning of school boards, city councils, county commissions, and other local bodies. There are a number of tools available to help local governments to counter the impact of anti-democracy groups; federal financial assistance in the form of block grants is needed for state and local governments to choose and implement the tools that are right for them.

Support for Civil Litigation

Civil litigation is an important tool to hold white nationalist, paramilitary and other bigoted actors accountable for the violence they foment. We urge you to seek ways to lend Congressional support to communities pursuing relief through civil courts. Examples include Integrity First for America’s historic federal lawsuit against the neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and hate groups responsible for the deadly 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville.³⁷ The verdict held that defendants engaged in an unlawful conspiracy to commit violence and intimidation and to deprive a community of their civil rights. Other examples of civil litigation from Idaho include the 2000 landmark case³⁸ led by local Cœur d’Alene attorneys and a national NGO that resulted in the dissolution of the Aryan Nations compound in North Idaho after its security guards engaged in hate violence. Currently pending is a lawsuit from the state’s largest hospital system against Ammon Bundy and his anti-government People’s Rights network for coordinated harassment of health care workers and law enforcement and violence that caused a Boise hospital to lock-down and divert its ambulances.³⁹

Implementation of the DHS Chief Security Officer’s Recommendations

As you are aware, the recent domestic violent extremism internal review for the Secretary of Homeland Security⁴⁰ contains a number of critical recommendations. We hope the Committee will prioritize follow up with DHS to make sure they are collecting the data and putting in place the necessary policies to ensure they are addressing current and potential internal engagement or collaboration with extremist movements. One thing missing from this important report is the unlawful paramilitaries operating at the southern border; we’re seeing a spike in their activity. Their actions and even collaboration with CBP officers is something that poses a grave national security risk. If government entities don’t explicitly reject this, paramilitaries gain credibility and build power to advance their goals. This may influence unbalanced individuals to commit violence such as we have seen in Buffalo.

Disavowal of the “Great Replacement” Theory

The Senate has a highly influential platform to shape which political ideas are acceptable in mainstream political discourse and which are not. Regardless of differing views on immigration policy, it is one policy area where white nationalist views are clear—and clearly aligned with the conspiracist “great replacement” theory—with goals of, in effect, ending asylum and other avenues for people of color to immigrate to the U.S. There’s a connection between these goals and the Buffalo shooter’s goals. This Committee has a unique purview that confers authority on this issue. The Committee could have an enormous impact by clearly rejecting the “great replacement” conspiracy theory and aligned policy goals like severely restricting asylum and immigration especially for Black and brown migrants. Disavowal of the “great replacement”

theory is an appropriate focus of a Joint Congressional Resolution; in our view this would send a powerful signal to people and groups who pose a risk to the nation's security.

Conclusion

Over the last several years, the antisemitic conspiracy called the "great replacement" theory has surged into the political mainstream. The violence and physical harm spawned by the conspiracy isn't a bug but a feature. For the majority of Americans who care about democratic practice and our republican form of government, we are not powerless. Just the opposite. Examples I have provided from the local and state level show that when elected officials, businesses, nonprofit institutions, faith leaders and ordinary citizens join together across lines of political ideology and reject the violence and antisemitic conspiracies of white nationalism, we begin the important process that both closes the door to political violence and stops anti-democracy extremists from mainstreaming their tactics and agenda.

I remain inspired by the broad coalition of local elected leaders, civil servants and community members who raise their voices against political violence and bigotry, sometimes at great risk to themselves and their families. But increasingly, I'm dismayed by the large swath of federal elected officials who refuse to join them in the condemnation of the antisemitic conspiracy theory justifying the violence. The burden of responding to political violence cannot be limited to local level government leaders. It requires the visible moral condemnation of federal elected officials and the agencies they oversee. Many of those voices are noticeably absent in the aftermath of the white nationalist-driven murders of African Americans in Buffalo, New York.

Let's be clear. Under the best conditions, no city in America can successfully meet the challenge posed by the white nationalist replacement theory on its own. It's time for the federal government to acknowledge this. Local government is deserving of federal relief and support in addressing white nationalist political violence. Our local rural and urban communities are facing an existential threat aimed at the heart of our democracy and it's time for the federal government to act like it.

About Western States Center

Based in the Pacific Northwest and Mountain West, Western States Center (WSC) works nationwide to build a future where all people can live, love, worship, and work free from bigotry and fear. For over 35 years, Western States Center has fostered leaders, organizations, collaborations, and initiatives that reduced disparities and advanced equity; lifted up the leaders of marginalized communities; and delivered accessible tools for community organizing and civic engagement to tens of thousands of people throughout the West and beyond.

Four strategic pillars guide Western States Center’s work. **Building Movement** by strengthening the organizing capacity of often-marginalized communities with an emphasis on gender and racial justice and combatting antisemitism. **Developing Leaders** by providing training, leadership development, and organizational capacity support to social justice movement leaders. **Shifting Culture** by convening culture makers to shift the narrative and use culture as a vehicle for social change. **Defending Democracy** by helping communities and civil society effectively respond to white nationalism and anti-democracy social movements.

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