



**Written Testimony of
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**Before the Congress of the United States
House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations,
and Accountability**

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Thank you, Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Ivey, and members of the Committee. I'm grateful for the opportunity to be here today.

My name is Amy Spitalnick and I am a Senior Advisor on Extremism at Human Rights First, a nonpartisan organization committed to ensuring that the United States is a global leader on human rights. I am also the incoming CEO of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, a nearly 80-year old nonpartisan organization that serves as the national convener of Jewish coalitions to build a safe, just, and inclusive democracy.

I previously led Integrity First for America, the nonpartisan nonprofit that held accountable the neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and hate groups responsible for the August 2017 violence in Charlottesville.

Many of us remember the visceral horror of watching neo-Nazis with torches storm the University of Virginia, chanting things like "Jews will not replace us" as they beat students and other community members. Or seeing the horrific images of violence the next day, culminating in the car attack that claimed Heather Heyer's life and injured so many others.

That violence was no accident. Rather, it was planned meticulously in advance - on social media sites like Discord, via text, and on other channels - down to discussions of whether they could hit protesters with cars and claim self-defense.

As the evidence in my organization's lawsuit made clear - and as the jury agreed, when they found every single defendant liable¹ - these extremists planned violence; came to Charlottesville to engage in that violence; and then celebrated that violence.

This matters, not only because a young woman was murdered and so many others were grievously injured. It also matters because Unite the Right was a flashpoint in the rise of deadly white supremacist extremism - serving as a harbinger of a cycle of far-right violence that continues to claim lives around the country.

Charlottesville.

Pittsburgh, where a white supremacist murdered 11 Jews praying in synagogue.

El Paso, where a white supremacist targeted a predominately Hispanic community, killing 23 people at a Walmart.

January 6th, where extremists with Confederate flags, nooses, QAnon conspiracy theory propaganda, and even a "Camp Auschwitz" shirt attacked the seat of our government with the intent to harm members of Congress and law enforcement.

¹ Sganga, N. (2021, November 23). "Jury awards \$26 million in Charlottesville 'Unite the Right' rally civil case." *CBS News*. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/charlottesville-unite-the-right-rally-trial-verdict-26-million/>

Buffalo, where a year ago Sunday a white supremacist drove hours in order to target a Black community, murdering 10 people at a grocery store.

And earlier this month, Allen, Texas, where a man who held neo-Nazi and white supremacist views, and sported a swastika tattoo and “Right Wing Death Squad” patch, murdered eight people shopping at an outlet mall.

And these are just a handful of far too many examples I could cite. We are experiencing a tidal wave of white supremacist extremism in which individuals and communities are attacked based on who they are. It targets entire groups with the goal of making them feel unsafe, unwelcome, and unable to protect themselves.

But I don’t just want to share examples. I want to talk about data - the hard facts that are too often missing from these conversations.

According to data released earlier this year by the ADL, every single extremist-related murder in 2022 was committed by right-wing extremists. The vast majority of those were white supremacists.²

Over the past decade, 96 percent of the events in which extremists killed someone were committed by people with right-wing ideologies. In the same time period, three-quarters of the murders linked to extremism were committed by right-wing actors, while only four percent were linked to left-wing actors.³

A 2022 University of Maryland-led study specifically looked at disparities in violence among extremist groups, concluding radical acts perpetrated by individuals associated with left-wing causes are less likely to be violent.⁴

Research from the START Center at the University of Maryland also tracks trends in mass casualty terrorist attacks and failed terrorist plots. Attacks are considered “mass casualty” when the perpetrator intended to kill or injure four or more people. Their data show that, over the last thirty years, far-right actors were responsible for 74 percent of these planned or successful terrorist attacks by domestic extremists. In comparison, far-left perpetrators were responsible for only 13 percent.⁵

² Anti-Defamation League (ADL). (2023). “Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2022.”

<https://www.adl.org/resources/report/murder-and-extremism-united-states-2022>

³ Bump, P. (2023, February 28). “Underrecognized: Extremist murders are usually from right-wing actors.” *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/02/28/extremism-right-wing-deaths/>

⁴ Jasko, K.; LaFree, G.; Piazza, J.; and Becker, M. (2022, July 18). “A comparison of political violence by left-wing, right-wing, and Islamist extremists in the United States and the world.” *PNAS*.

<https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2122593119>

⁵ National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). (2023). “Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS).”

It's not just NGOs and academic institutions that are tracking this disproportionate threat. In late 2020, former President Trump's Department of Homeland Security found that white supremacists were "the most persistent and lethal threat" in the United States.⁶

This isn't to say that other forms of political violence don't exist. Of course they do. That includes left-wing or anarchist violence; Islamist violence; or violence that doesn't fit neatly into one particular ideology.

There was a time when left-wing extremist violence was a bigger threat: nearly 50 years ago, during the 1970s. But since the 1990s, available data show that right-wing extremism has consistently been the most violent domestic terror threat.⁷

Unless we're clear-eyed about the facts, the data, and the reality of the current violent threat – which every indicator tells us is disproportionately emanating from the far right – we will never be able to intervene and break the cycle of violent extremism.

It's all the more important to understand this reality because it's not happening in a vacuum. Rather, the rise in right-wing violence has gone hand-in-hand with an increasing normalization of right-wing extremism.

Human Rights First is particularly focused on the mainstreaming of hate. The ideology driving far-right extremism, and the broader antidemocratic movement, in the United States has become increasingly visible in our institutions, policies, and public discourse, and represents an existential threat to our democracy. This hate and bigotry is not new but it has been given new life through the rampant spread and normalization of racist, antisemitic, misogynistic, anti-LGBTQ+, and other bigoted conspiracies.

Conspiracy theories which were once relegated to the dark corners of the internet -- like the Great Replacement Theory-- are espoused not just by mass murderers but by elected officials, political candidates, and pundits.

Policies aimed at dehumanizing and stripping away the rights of certain communities are fueling attacks on those communities – such as the neo-Nazi organizations using anti-drag and anti-trans protests as recruitment opportunities.

https://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/publications/local_attachments/PIRUS-Mass%20Casualty%20Extremist%20Offenders_0.pdf

https://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/publications/local_attachments/PIRUS-Mass%20Casualty%20Extremist%20Offenders_0.pdf

⁶ Sands, G. (2020, September 8). "White supremacy is 'most lethal threat; to the US, DHS draft assessment says." CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/08/politics/white-supremacy-dhs-draft-assessment/index.html>

⁷ Watson, D. (2002, February 6). Testimony Before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

<https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/testimony/the-terrorist-threat-confronting-the-united-states>

Violent extremists take the normalization of conspiracy theories and bigotry as license for violence: for attacks on our democratic institutions and on vulnerable populations. It's not just a threat to our communities; it also directly threatens our democracy and our national security.

The challenge ahead of us is great because this extremism is no longer relegated to fringe actors and violent groups, it is both mainstream and it is a movement. Therefore, mitigating this threat requires an approach that includes addressing the violent and most visible components of the movement, but also the mainstream networks that build support for the movement.

It also means acknowledging the age-old bigotry this network has employed, addressing their attacks on civil and human rights across our country, and repairing and reconciling the harm it has caused.

So what can we do about it?

While we can and should invest in responsive measures like security, we also acknowledge that we can't simply sue, prosecute, or barricade our way out of this crisis.

We need comprehensive solutions emphasizing protection of our democratic institutions, processes, and values. It also requires real accountability, supporting targeted communities, and building societal resilience to mitigate the further normalization of hate and extremism. This includes:

- **Defending Election Legitimacy:** Undermining the legitimacy of our elections, the cornerstone of our democracy, is a key goal of this extremist movement and is already underway.
- **Protecting Democratic Institutions & Civil Rights:** Creating a concerted effort to protect our public education, health care, and voting systems -- as well as communities' fundamental civil and human rights -- against the antidemocratic attacks at the local, state, and federal levels.
- **Seeking Accountability:** Holding elected officials accountable for the impact of the extremist rhetoric they perpetuate, such as the harmful "invasion" narrative and "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory in furthering violence.
- **Confronting Extremism in the Military and Law Enforcement:** Recognizing and addressing the threat of extremism in the military and law enforcement.
- **Empowering Civil Society:** Empowering our society with tools to identify mis/disinformation and conspiracies and prevent radicalization: from media and digital literacy and other forms of education, to resources for parents, educators, and caregivers.
- **Combating Armed Extremism:** Making it harder for violent extremists to get their hands on the deadly weapons too often used in these acts of mass violence.

- **Building Cross-Community Coalitions:** Understanding that growing, mainstreamed extremism puts all of us at risk – and building cross-community coalitions rooted in the necessary idea that none of us are safe if one of us isn't safe.

The facts and the data are clear: we are grappling with a very real threat of right-wing extremism in this country. Every single statistic makes clear that the vast majority of extremist violence is perpetrated by those motivated by white supremacist and other right-wing ideologies. Acknowledging that doesn't take away from the fact that other forms of political violence exist. But this moment requires us to be clear-eyed about our reality if we're to do something about it.

Again, I'm grateful for the opportunity to be here today, and I look forward to your questions. Thank you very much.