



The Road to January 6 and How Metastasizing Far-Right Extremism Leaves Democracy in Peril

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Global Project Against Hate and Extremism

**Before the
Congress of the United States
Select Committee to Investigate the January
6th
Attack on the United States Capitol Regarding**

**“The Road to January 6 and How
Metastasizing Far-Right Extremism
Leaves Democracy in Peril”**

March 31, 2022

Chairman Bennie Thompson and esteemed members of the select committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit a written statement on the circumstances and policy failures that paved the way for the Capitol insurrection on January 6, 2021. We are co-founders of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism (GPAHE), founded in 2020, and have long track records investigating, documenting, and combating far-right extremism, having both worked at the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) for nearly two decades. Via is expert in the intersection of technology and far-right extremism and achieving change and

influencing narratives and actions around civil and human rights issues, including the effects extremism and systemic racism have on our society. She serves on the core committee of the Christchurch Call Advisory Network, founded by the governments of France and New Zealand, which seeks to stop the proliferation of online violent extremism and terrorism, and is the author of numerous reports on transnational extremism. Beirich holds a Ph.D. in political science from Purdue University and is an expert on white supremacist and far-right extremist movements, serving as an advisory board member of the International Network for Hate Studies, a co-founder of the Change the Terms Coalition, which advocates for solutions to online extremism, and the author of numerous studies on extremism as well as co-editor of *Neo-Confederacy: A Critical Introduction*. Our organization, GPAHE, is a member of the International Network Against Cyberhate, the Christchurch Call Advisory Network, and President Biden's Summit for Democracy Year of Action. GPAHE works to expose transnational white supremacist networks and the export of far-right extremism from the United States into other countries. GPAHE employs research, advocacy, activism, and education to counter the rising tide of extremism across borders.

This statement will examine the growth of far-right extremist movements in recent decades; the factors and technologies that helped fueled their growth; the policy decisions, or rather lack thereof, by multiple administrations that allowed those movements to metastasize largely unchecked; the transformation of these movements into an anti-democracy bloc during Donald Trump's candidacy and years in office, often at his encouragement; the mainstreaming of extremist

ideas particularly into the GOP's ranks; and the serious challenge these movements now pose to America's democratic political system.

Introduction

On January 6, 2021, the nation watched as never-before seen events unfolded in horrifying detail on every media and online outlet. For the first time, the Capitol was under attack by Americans intent on subverting democracy. America had never experienced and could hardly imagine this mass movement inspired by a sitting president determined to stop the certification of a free and fair election **naming his successor** [<https://www.american.edu/sis/centers/security-technology/the-capitol-has-been-attacked-before-this-time-it-was-different.cfm>] . And the violence was equally shocking. January 6 was the deadliest attack on the Capitol ever, **killing five people** [<https://www.factcheck.org/2021/11/how-many-died-as-a-result-of-capitol-riot>] and injuring **140 police officers** [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/police-union-says-140-officers-injured-in-capitol-riot/2021/01/27/60743642-60e2-11eb-9430-e7c77b5b0297_story.html] .

As disturbing as the events of that day were, they were entirely foreseeable and likely preventable. Analysts of the radical right had been warning for years of the consequences of allowing the far-right to grow unchecked and had even issued **multiple warnings in the days prior** [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/interactive/2021/warnings-jan-6-insurrection/>] . Leading up to

January 6, some federal and local law enforcement agencies had reams of information and some federal agencies were **sounding the alarm** [<https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2022-03/OIG-22-29-Mar22-Redacted.pdf>] . Other agencies withheld **relevant material** [<https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/08/politics/dhs-ig-report-threats-intelligence-january-6/index.html>] , but ultimately no one in a position to stop the events that day adequately responded to **relevant intelligence** [<https://www.vox.com/2021/1/16/22234574/washington-post-capitol-police-report-congress-targeted-riot>] . This is sadly not surprising. Our country has a long history of racially motivated violence and antigovernment activity, yet our government has failed repeatedly, over decades, to take advantage of opportunities to do something meaningful to understand and curb the rise of far-right domestic terrorism. As a result, our entire political system is currently threatened by an anti-democracy movement made up of millions.

There is no question that the **major terrorism threat to the U.S. today is coming from the far right** [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2020_10_06_homeland-threat-assessment.pdf] , and on January 6, 2021, extremists of various stripes—white supremacists, neo-Nazis, antigovernment ideologues, conspiracists along with regular Trump supporters—merged together in what now appears to be cooperation to storm our Capitol in what FBI Director Christopher Wray described as an **act of “domestic terrorism.”** [<https://apnews.com/ar2cle/4i-chris-wray-tes2fy-capitol-riot-9a5539af34b15338bb5c4923907eeb67>] It has been known for years that changing U.S. demographics (that will within a few decades put

white people in the minority), have been driving greater and greater resentment of the “other,” growing extremist movements and **racially-motivated violence** [<https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL32701.html>] . Due to repeated policy failures to address this situation, the conflagration of January 6 was a situation foretold.

This unrest and belief that the country is being destroyed by progressive, inclusive ideals, was hyped by Donald Trump, who stoked an already charged environment with his rhetoric during his candidacy and presidency. Trump arrived on the political stage at an already fraught moment for many. The prior decade had seen a period of economic crisis, a Black president, marriage equality for LGBTQ people, and a growing hate movement motivated by our country’s changing racial demographics. The far right was already incensed by these events, and the 2020 racial justice protests that spanned the country and inspired more across the globe added to the far right’s anger, enraging those who wish things to remain the same or to return to prior eras of racial oppression. These movements are threatened by the advancement of rights of all communities, and we know now, are willing to take up arms to preserve their outdated vision of America.

The blatantly racist and bigoted statements Trump regularly expressed exacerbated the volatile environment during his presidency. His actions were directly responsible for injecting formerly fringe ideas and conspiracy theories into the mainstream, causing deep mistrust and anxiety throughout the country. And by the time he ran for reelection, hate movements and far-right extremists had embraced him, at his

invitation. He ultimately encouraged people who were willing to believe his lies about a rigged election to revolt, and attempt to prevent a peaceful transfer of power, one of America's most hallowed commitments. Adding to this already volatile environment, Trump's false election narrative had ongoing and enthusiastic support from increasingly radicalized GOP members who were willing to play to a fringe base and align themselves with Trump, in hopes of ensuring their own reelection.

It is clear that Trump and those who attacked the Capitol on January 6, could not have been so successful in garnering a large hate, conspiracy, and violence-based movement without the complicity of social media companies. The major tech companies repeatedly made the affirmative decision to allow hate speech, lies, conspiracies, and calls for violence to thrive on their platforms, for the sake of their bottom lines. The companies have yet to take fulsome action to mitigate the harmful activity on the platforms, but the situation was even worse during Trump's presidency. That includes allowing Trump and other politically powerful people like Steve Bannon to openly abuse loopholes in content policies and community standards that are supposed to apply to all users in an effort to maintain a safe online environment. Furthermore, tech companies refused to adequately address the algorithms that radicalize users, the hate content that thrives on the platforms and inspires a range of harms, the fundraising and organizing functions harnessed by extremists, and the spread of disinformation.

In the days before the tragedy of January 6, if law enforcement agencies had taken the threats seriously, if government agencies had shared information

appropriately, if the tech companies had enforced their content rules and prevented online planning, there is no question that day's events could have been mitigated, if not prevented. And it's not just the U.S. that was deeply affected that day. America's global reputation as a bastion of democracy is forever tarnished. The Capitol riot **inspired far-right and white supremacist groups** [<https://newrepublic.com/article/160861/capitol-riot-inspiring-far-right-groups-around-world>] around the world. The movements that came together on January 6 to upend American democracy have spread internationally, bolstering, and feeding anti-democracy tendencies and far-right populist movements in multiple countries.

Thriving democracies are key to achieving freedom, equality and fairness, racial justice, solutions to climate change, and economic justice. Free and fair elections are the linchpin to a better world. As these anti-civil rights and anti-democracy movements continue to grow, they threaten liberal democracy here at home and around the world. As they gain power, liberal democracy is becoming more fragile, and a better future for all **is threatened** [<https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-report-us-democracy-has-declined-significantly-past-decade-reforms-urgently-needed>] .

For the United States, the big question remains, was January 6 a one-off or was it a precursor to more ominous developments to come?

Government Inaction in the Years Prior to January 6

The events of January 6 are only one data point, albeit the worst direct threat to our democracy in terms of domestic terrorism over recent decades. But the events of that day were the logical outcome of the years of growth and the mainstreaming of racist and antigovernment ideas and movements. It was also the outcome of an ongoing, longstanding failure of political leaders to recognize and address the dangers of far-right domestic terrorism. For instance, it took until 2018 for federal agencies to finally label far-right domestic terrorism as the single **biggest security threat to America**

[<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/interactive/2021/warnings-jan-6-insurrection/>] . It wasn't until 2021 that a presidential administration actually began to devote the appropriate resources and urgency to counter this threat. The totality of the failures is outlined in **two congressional reports** [<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/08/us/politics/capitol-riot-security.html>] . For those paying attention, the possibility of violence at the Capitol that day was clear. It was the failure of communication between agencies and lack of imagination that led to January 6, not the absence of relevant intelligence which was hiding in plain sight online.

Over the last 30 years, multiple administrations and Congresses have had many opportunities to take proactive steps to curb the threat of far-right domestic terrorism, but instead, their inaction allowed the metastasis of these movements. The inaction was in part due to a lack of understanding and recognition of the seriousness of the domestic terrorism threat, but it was also politically motivated. There is much evidence in modern American history of political figures encouraging fringe and far-right conspiracy theorists. In the 1990s, the perpetrators of the Oklahoma City

bombing, which killed 168 women, children, and men, and was the largest domestic terrorist event to date, were clearly inspired by antigovernment and white supremacist ideas. That did not deter some Congressional members from associating with antigovernment and militia groups, and even engaging them on their campaigns and events, **much like today** [<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-04-28-mn-59916-story.html>] . At least one representative, Helen Chenoweth (R-ID), wrote to then-Attorney General Janet Reno with concerns about law enforcement raiding militia movements, even though those groups had been behind substantial violence in that decade.

Antigovernment and militia groups became less active under President George W. Bush, as attention turned to Islamist extremism after 9/11. But the decision to completely abandon addressing far right extremism, which had been so deadly in the 1990s, turned out to be an egregious and unnecessary error. By the time President Obama was elected, the far right was metastasizing. The country experienced a **rash of domestic terrorism** [<https://www.rand.org/blog/2016/08/president-obamas-controversial-legacy-as-counterterrorism.html>] incidents largely in response to the election of a Black president, with several new movements popping up in 2009. The Oath Keepers made their first appearance that year, with one member saying, **“We’re in perilous times...perhaps more perilous than in 1775** [<https://www.splcenter.org/20090731/second-wave-return-militias>] .” The conspiracy theories around Obama’s citizenship, spread with the help of Donald Trump, the idea that Mexicans were re-conquering the southwest coupled with a declining white

population, rumors of U.S. concentration camps for gun owners, and the coming socialist “New World Order” revitalized and motivated a growing anxiety and distrust of the government among the far right. Again, supposedly mainstream politicians and media pundits played a significant role in inflaming racist and antigovernment sentiment.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), jointly with the FBI, released a prescient report written during the Bush presidency in 2009, *Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment*, detailing how economic hardship, changing demographics, conspiracy theories, the capitalization of divisive issues, recruitment of military members and veterans, and the new social media platforms were creating a rich environment for far right domestic terrorists and lone wolf actors. The **backlash**

[\[https://www.facingsouth.org/2019/08/how-southern-politicians-hamstrung-fight-against-right-wing-domestic-terror\]](https://www.facingsouth.org/2019/08/how-southern-politicians-hamstrung-fight-against-right-wing-domestic-terror) from political conservatives to the conclusions of the report was swift and ferocious, with GOP members of Congress immediately disavowing the threat of domestic terrorism, describing the report as a “political witch hunt,” and demanding hearings. Mike Pompeo, then a Republican congressman from Kansas and later Secretary of State under President Trump, **said** [\[https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/11/us/politics/domestic-terrorism.html\]](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/11/us/politics/domestic-terrorism.html) focusing on domestic terrorism was a “dangerous” undertaking born of political correctness that downplayed the seriousness of Islamist terrorism. Within weeks, then-Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano rescinded the report and the right-wing domestic terrorism unit at

DHS was effectively dismantled in the months that followed. Napolitano issued a [statement](https://www.dhs.gov/news/2009/04/15/secretary-napolitanos-statement-right-wing-extremism-threat) [https://www.dhs.gov/news/2009/04/15/secretary-napolitanos-statement-right-wing-extremism-threat] effectively caving to critics and promising to protect civil liberties.

The report however was prescient; just months after it was pulled, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was attacked by a neo-Nazi and similar attacks soon followed. The report's lead author, Daryl Johnson, predicted the future in 2011 saying, "my greatest fear is that domestic extremists in this country will somehow become emboldened to the point of carrying out a mass-casualty attack, because they perceive that no one is being vigilant about the threat from within. That is what [keeps me up at night](https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2011/inside-dhs-former-top-analyst-says-agency-bowed-political-pressure) [https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2011/inside-dhs-former-top-analyst-says-agency-bowed-political-pressure] ." The country suffered repeated domestic terrorist attacks perpetrated by the same movements Johnson warned us about. And by January 6, these larger and more violent movements coalesced to attack the Capitol.

President Obama's administration failed to adequately address the threat of far-right domestic terrorism largely due to outside political pressure. When Trump became president, the pressure to avoid addressing domestic terrorism and preventing radicalization came from [within the administration](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/11/us/politics/domestic-terrorism.html) [https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/11/us/politics/domestic-terrorism.html] . With Trump's own hate-filled actions and statements, his refusal to meet with his own DHS secretary about domestic terrorism, his instruction to DHS to focus on threats from the southern border and foreign threats, his reluctance to

denounce the murder of an activist and other events at the 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, and his command to the white supremacist Proud Boys to “stand back and stand by,” it is not surprising that DHS staff were **hesitant to highlight** [\[https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-joe-biden-race-and-ethnicity-donald-trump-chris-wallace-ob32339da25fbc9e8b7c7c7066a1db0f\]](https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-joe-biden-race-and-ethnicity-donald-trump-chris-wallace-ob32339da25fbc9e8b7c7c7066a1db0f) threats stemming from far-right extremism. Exemplifying Trump’s refusal to address this issue, just 11 days after the antisemitic mass murder at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018, Trump’s administration cancelled the grant program for organizations aimed at combating hate groups and **preventing radicalization** [\[https://thehill.com/policy/defense/414448-trump-will-not-renew-obama-era-program-to-fight-domestic-terrorism-report\]](https://thehill.com/policy/defense/414448-trump-will-not-renew-obama-era-program-to-fight-domestic-terrorism-report) . Indeed, there is evidence that this coddling of far-right extremism infected intelligence agency staff. For example, one recent report revealed that NSA and other intelligence agency staff used internal communications forums to spread their own hate speech, with **one analyst calling it** [\[https://www.spytalk.co/p/classified-us-intelligence-chat-rooms?s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web\]](https://www.spytalk.co/p/classified-us-intelligence-chat-rooms?s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web) a “dumpster fire” of “racist, homophobic, Islamophobic, and misogynistic hate speech.”

In June 2021, President Biden released his new blueprint to combat domestic terrorism which says that far-right domestic terrorism is the **most urgent terrorism threat** [\[https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/15/fact-sheet-national-strategy-for-counteracting-domestic-terrorism/\]](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/15/fact-sheet-national-strategy-for-counteracting-domestic-terrorism/) the United States faces today. The

blueprint contains strategies that should begin addressing extremism in the U.S. Significant among them is addressing the lack of information sharing between government and law enforcement agencies, addressing extremism in the military and police forces, and reinstating the grant program that Trump halted. Importantly, there is also a strong international component, given the increasingly transnational nature of this threat.

The blueprint is commendable, but ambitious. It will be incumbent upon the administration and federal agencies to adequately implement the plan to achieve real progress in combating domestic extremism. A good start is the introduction of a new domestic terror unit in the Department of Justice (DOJ) as national security officials warn of a “**persistent and evolving threat** [<https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/11/doj-unveils-new-domestic-terror-unit-says-threats-rising-a-year-after-jan-6.html>] .” The DOJ’s investigations into the January 6 insurrection have yielded more than **800 arrests** [<https://news.yahoo.com/most-arrests-capitol-riots-misdemeanor-225235647.html>] . But, a recent DHS report revealed ongoing troubles within the agencies, finding that there are significant gaps in the department that have “impeded its ability to comprehensively prevent, detect, and respond to potential threats related to **domestic violent extremism within DHS** [<https://thehill.com/policy/national-security/597886-dhs-report-finds-significant-gaps-in-agencys-domestic-extremism>] .” The report also noted insufficient training and inadequate data collection on the part of the DHS. A recent podcast interview with Department of State employees also revealed inadequate resourcing for those tasked with designating white supremacist **international terrorist**

groups [<https://vpm.org/news/articles/30610/new-podcast-explores-global-reaches-of-white-supremacy>]. The administration also faces the difficulty that any efforts to combat domestic extremism and fully investigate January 6 are being carried out under the fierce opposition of partisan factions, creating a significant challenge for the Biden administration and our democracy.

Social Media, Tech Companies Facilitate Hate and Extremism

It is inconceivable that social media companies, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, and now Telegram, and others are not major drivers behind the growth of hate and far-right extremism movements, conspiracy theories, radicalization of individuals, and organization of potentially violent events. It was nearly impossible for extremists in earlier eras to connect and recruit in such large numbers when their only tools were faxes and phones, and they had no ability to monetize or advertise their content. Much as Hitler used the then-new technology of radio to push his views into German families' homes, thereby radicalizing nearly an entire country into genocidal thinking, extremists who saw the potential of the internet in the 1990s have been able to successfully use mainstream online platforms in the same way. Given that the major platforms did not really begin to enforce their anti-hate terms of service until after the Charlottesville, Virginia, riots in 2017 and had few policies to address disinformation, and are still acting with a "too little, too late" approach to these issues

today, there is no way to know how many millions may have been radicalized online.

There is no doubt that the dynamics that created today's growing extremism problem originate in large part, in cyberspace. Extremist users deploy sophisticated strategies to draw in recruits, and they make their posts as appealing as possible through inside jokes, memes, slick videos, and references that only those on the inside understand. They use private groups and the organizing and fundraising tools provided by the tech companies with great effect. And they're often quite open about what they're doing without fear of repercussions from breaking the companies' community standards and other rules. The social media accounts are used to drive traffic to darker corners of the internet, where messaging is even more explicit and hateful, and offers no pretense of acceptance of Muslims, immigrants, LGBTQ people, Black people, women, and many other communities, spreading hate and heightening radicalization.

The answer to slowing the spread and influence of hateful, extremist, and disinformation content is largely in containing the proliferation of these ideas online. Social media companies have a lot of work to do in this regard. First, they must set aside their driving profit motive and alter their algorithms to prevent the radicalization of users. They need to, at a minimum, enforce their own rules, and take down violative content and increase their safeguards against extremist content. The recent disclosures of “whitelists [<https://www.thedailybeast.com/facebook-lets-whitelist-vips-break-all-of-its-posting-rules-report-says>]” for political figures and influencers, as well as

the lack of fact-checking standards for political advertising must end, as these practices fuel far-right extremism and populism in the U.S. and abroad. It is not within the social media companies' purview to determine what the user audience should hear. It's their responsibility to protect their users by strengthening and enforcing their rules. Social media companies must also commit the necessary resources to moderate content in languages other than English. In places such as India, Brazil, and The Philippines, **lack of content moderation has fueled extreme violence and rights-restricting movements** [<https://globalextrmism.org/reports/democracies-under-threat/>] .

Because of the internet and the lack of adequate content moderation, **QAnon** [<https://www.aljazeera.com/podcasts/2021/2/10/how-did-the-qanon-conspiracy-go-global>] networks are now found in most European countries, and **dozens of others** [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/qanon-conspiracy-global-reach/2020/11/12/ca312138-13a5-11eb-a258-614acf2b906d_story.html] , with adherents mixing in with anti-lockdown and anti-vaxx movements in increasingly violent street actions. Anti-vaxx and anti-lockdown ideas have also migrated from the U.S. abroad. **The “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory is also widespread** [<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20211108-how-the-french-great-replacement-theory-conquered-the-far-right>] , particularly in Europe having actually been formulated by the Frenchman Renaud Camus. Far-right candidates in multiple countries, including the U.S, France, Netherlands, Poland, and Hungary, exploit the idea as an excuse for anti-immigrant crusades. And the transnational white supremacist

network, [Generation Identity](https://globalextrmism.org/reports/generation-identity/) [<https://globalextrmism.org/reports/generation-identity/>], deftly uses YouTube to recruit members and has a presence in almost every European country, with ties to the U.S. Changing the trajectory of extremism growth and protecting our democracy is deeply tied to the reform of social media and tech companies.

President Trump's Role in Inspiring January 6

In the lead up to the attack, election year 2020 was harrowing. Trump and his teams exploited social media and online technology with a sophisticated determination, dominating the popular narrative with hateful and fringe ideas. He did this with unfettered access to platforms that gave him a massive audience to enrage and manipulate. It wasn't until after the insurrection that tech companies took action against him, removing his accounts for spreading lies. Hate against marginalized populations, rage over Covid measures, and outrage over a possible Trump loss converged online and created a combustible environment. The violence spilled offline against Black Lives Matter protesters and in plots like the attempt by militia members to kidnap the governor of Michigan, an attempt by far-right Boogaloo Bois to bomb BLM protesters in Las Vegas, and dozens of car ramming attacks. All the while, Trump and his allies and followers continued to push anti-lockdown, anti-vaxx, and anti-democracy messaging, [telling his followers](https://www.justsecurity.org/74138/incitement-timeline-year-of-trumps-actions-leading-to-the-) [<https://www.justsecurity.org/74138/incitement-timeline-year-of-trumps-actions-leading-to-the->

[attack-on-the-capitol/](#)] that “the only way we’re going to lose this election is if it’s rigged.”

This followed a racist and bigoted candidacy that began with Trump calling Mexicans rapists and continued into a presidential term dominated by bigoted policies against Muslims, immigrants, and LGBTQ people and the reinforcement and mainstreaming of once fringe ideas that radicalized Americans. Trump was no stranger to conspiracy theories when he launched his first campaign as he had been a leading proponent of the false idea that Obama was not a U.S. citizen. Throughout his presidency, Trump relentlessly endorsed violence, tweeting statements like “[when the looting starts the shooting starts](#) [<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/29/us/looting-starts-shooting-starts.html>]” about the racial justice protests in 2020. He legitimized the racist violence of the riots in Charlottesville by refusing to condemn those involved, saying that there are good people on both sides. With Trump’s support, the QAnon conspiracy theory exploded during his presidency. When asked about the idea that the media and financial institutions are controlled by a global group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles, who run a child sex trafficking operation, he said, “Well I don’t know much about the movement, but from what I understand they like me very much, [which I appreciate](#) [<https://www.justsecurity.org/74138/incitement-timeline-year-of-trumps-actions-leading-to-the-attack-on-the-capitol/>].” He later also said [<https://www.justsecurity.org/74622/stopthesteal-timeline-of-social-media-and-extremist-activities-leading-to-1-6-insurrection/>], “I know nothing about QAnon ... What I do hear about it, they are very

strongly against pedophilia, and I agree with that.”

Trump tweeted

[<https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/12/trump-tweeting-qanon-followers-357238>] out QAnon material hundreds of times. Adding fuel to the white supremacist fire, when asked during a September 2020 presidential debate to denounce the Proud Boys, who would soon play a leading role in storming the Capitol, he said they should “stand back and stand by,” further inspiring them.

By the time he lost the 2020 presidential election, Trump had cemented fringe far-right adherents and hate group members among his followers, and they were primed for the “Stop the Steal” movement. Trump had repeatedly told his followers that the election was rigged, that it was stolen, that Biden should not take office, and encouraged his followers to come to D.C for the rally. On December 19, 2020, Trump publicly urged his followers to meet him in D.C. on January 6 for the first time, tweeting, “Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!” Extremists celebrated, seeing this as an invitation from the president of the United States and began planning. On December 22, Oath Keeper leader **Stuart Rhodes** [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/stewart-rhodes-arrested-jan-6/2022/01/13/558ecc42-7414-11ec-8boa-bc%20fab800c430_story.html] , now under arrest for seditious conspiracy, said [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/29/us/politics/trump-tweet-jan-6.html?referringSource=articleShare>] there would be “a massively bloody revolution” if Biden took office. On December 27, Trump tweeted, “See you in Washington, DC, on January 6th. Don’t miss it. Information to follow.” On December 30, another

tweet read, “JANUARY SIXTH, SEE YOU IN DC!”

And, on **January 1, 2021**

[<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/06/us/politics/capitol-mob-trump-supporters.html>] , “The BIG

Protest Rally in Washington, D.C. will take place at

11:00 A.M. on January 6th. Locational details to

follow. StopTheSteal!” At the January 6 rally at the

Ellipse, just prior to the Capitol insurgency, **he**

proclaimed to attendees

[<https://www.justsecurity.org/74138/incitement-timeline-year-of-trumps-actions-leading-to-the-attack-on-the-capitol/>] , “Something is wrong here,

something is really wrong, can’t have happened and

we fight, we fight like hell, and if you don’t fight like hell, you’re not going to have a country anymore.”

Then he instructed them to head to the Capitol.

There is no question that Trump bears much of the

blame for the January 6 insurrection. His first

Secretary of Defense James Mattis called the riots a

“violent assault on our Capitol, an effort to subjugate

American democracy by mob rule” and said it “was

fomented by Mr. Trump.” Mattis further **said**

[[https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/congress-electoral-college-vote-count-](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/congress-electoral-college-vote-count-2021/h_3f9fc2002acfc3ed3a0058d380892c65)

[2021/h_3f9fc2002acfc3ed3a0058d380892c65](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/congress-electoral-college-vote-count-2021/h_3f9fc2002acfc3ed3a0058d380892c65)]

Trump’s efforts to exploit the presidency to “destroy

trust in our election and to poison our respect for

fellow citizens have been enabled by pseudo-political

leaders whose names will live in infamy as profiles in

cowardice.”

From the time of his candidacy, Trump decimated

American social norms, stoked racism and anti-

immigrant hatred, and spread noxious conspiracies

that impacted globally. But the most dangerous thing

he did was undermine our nation’s faith in democracy

by pushing the idea that his electoral “win” was stolen—and that future elections will be as well, thereby radicalizing so-called mainstream politicians at the local, state, and national levels and empowering extremist far-right movements. The long-term implications of how this could undermine American democracy are deadly serious. Research from the University of Chicago now identifies an American insurrectionist movement made up of about 21 million people who believe that “Use of force is justified to restore Donald J. Trump to the presidency” and that

[\[https://cpost.uchicago.edu/research/domestic_extremism/why_we_cannot_afford_to_ignore_the_american_insurrectionist_movement/\]](https://cpost.uchicago.edu/research/domestic_extremism/why_we_cannot_afford_to_ignore_the_american_insurrectionist_movement/) “The 2020 election

was stolen, and Joe Biden is an illegitimate president.” This group of people also share two other central and dangerous beliefs: 63 percent believe in the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory and 54 percent in QAnon. Made up of “mainly highly competent, middle-aged American professionals,” the researchers conclude

[\[https://cpost.uchicago.edu/research/domestic_extremism/why_we_cannot_afford_to_ignore_the_american_insurrectionist_movement/\]](https://cpost.uchicago.edu/research/domestic_extremism/why_we_cannot_afford_to_ignore_the_american_insurrectionist_movement/) that the

radicalization of this insurrectionist movement “does not bode well for the 2022 midterm elections, or for that matter, the 2024 Presidential election.”

The Challenge of Metastasized Hate, Antigovernment, and Conspiracy Movements

Hate-based extremism, antigovernment organizations, and conspiracy movements motivating

domestic terrorism are not a new phenomenon for the U.S, but the growth in the last decade has been significant, particularly given the policy failures in addressing this issue. Also, in prior decades, extremists did not have access to tools like social media, which have helped spread deep fears about whites becoming the minority, conspiracy theories, and led to easier recruitment into these ideas. And an almost unprecedented willingness of political leaders and other influencers to harness dangerous disinformation and hate for their own purposes has exacerbated this problem.

All evidence and opinion, by government agencies in the U.S. and abroad, and by other experts who study the radical right, points to far-right extremism as a metastasizing problem that this country and many others will be dealing with for the long term. In August 2019, the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) **quietly added white supremacist violence to its mandate** [https://www.realcleardefense.com/2019/08/09/nctc_now_going_after_domestic_terror_309384.html] . In **September 2019** [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/domestic-terror--particularly-white-supremacist-%20violence--as-big-a-threat-as-isis-al-qaeda-dhs-says/2019/09/20/dff8aa4e-dbad-11e9-bfb1-%20849887369476_story.html] , the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), declared white supremacy as big a threat as ISIS or al-Qaeda. DHS specified the sharing of the “ethnic replacement” idea, or the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory, which has motivated multiple mass shootings, as particularly problematic. DHS also warned that “white supremacist violent extremists have adopted an increasingly transnational outlook” driven by

connecting with “like-minded individuals online [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19_0920_ply_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf] .”

In February 2020, the FBI announced that it now considered the risk of violence from these groups as “on the same footing” as threats posed to the country by foreign terrorist organizations such as ISIS [<https://www.npr.org/2020/02/10/804616715/fbi-announces-that-racist-violence-is-now-equal-priority-to-foreign-terrorism>] . In June 2020, the bipartisan Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) [<https://www.csis.org/analysis/escalating-terrorism-problem-united-states>] analyzed a data set of terrorist attacks in the United States occurring between January 1994 and May 2020. CSIS concluded that “far-right terrorism has significantly outpaced terrorism from other types of perpetrators, including from far-left networks and individuals inspired by the Islamic State and al-Qaeda.” Right-wing extremists perpetrated two-thirds of the attacks and plots in 2019 and over 90 percent between January 1 and May 8, 2020. CSIS additionally warned, accurately, that “terrorism in the United States will likely increase over the next year” in particular because of the 2020 presidential election. American law enforcement and intelligence agencies agree with CSIS. In May 2021, Attorney General Merrick B. Garland and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro N. Mayorkas, in discussing Biden’s blueprint to combat domestic terrorism, told senators that the greatest domestic threat facing the United States came from what they both called “racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists [<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/12/us/politics/domestic-terror-white-supremacists.html>] .”

“Specifically those who advocate for the superiority of the white race,” said Garland. And in February 2022, DHS issued a bulletin saying of the domestic terrorism threat, “The convergence of violent extremist ideologies, false or misleading narratives, and conspiracy theories have and will continue to contribute to a **heightened threat of violence in the United States** [<https://www.dhs.gov/ntas/advisory/national-terrorism-advisory-system-bulletin-february-07-2022>] .”

Perhaps most worrying in terms of violence is the **continued growth of accelerationist networks** [<https://globalextrmism.org/post/dangers-of-white-supremacist-movements-accelerationism-and-militias-online-recruitment-and-growth/>] , populated by violent neo-Nazis, who share terrorism manuals online and whose members have committed murders and other violence offline. The groups are called accelerationist as they aim to “accelerate” the collapse of democratic systems through mass violence, including civil war. The three groups with members charged with conspiracy for their acts on January 6 – the white supremacist **Proud Boys** [<https://globalextrmism.org/post/heidi-beirich-served-as-expert-witness-in-metropolitan-a-m-e-church-vs-proud-boys-international-llc/>] and the anti-government, paramilitary organizations the **Oath Keepers** [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/13/us/politics/oath-keepers-stewart-rhodes.html>] and the **Three Percenters** [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/three-percenters-charged-conspiracy-capitol-riot/2021/06/10/f84091e6-c9ec-11eb-81b1-34796c7393af_story.html] – had already been

involved in considerable violence

[<https://acleddata.com/2021/04/22/actor-profile-proud-boys/>] in the years prior. The prosecutions of those involved in the insurrection have failed to shut down these groups

[<https://globalextrmism.org/post/violent-domestic-extremist-groups-and-recruitment-of-veterans/>] , and the participation of active-duty military and veterans failed to inspire adequate measures to weed-out extremists and prevent troops from being radicalized. Additional research suggests that far-right extremists disproportionately have military experience, and extremists have prioritized their recruiting of active-duty military, law enforcement, and veterans, which ultimately contributed

[[https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2013.802976?](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2013.802976?needAccess=true&journalCode=uter20)

needAccess=true&journalCode=uter20] to the invasion of the Capitol in the form of tactical guidance. And, the possibility of mass attacks remains high. In rural Texas, a man found with Neo-Nazi and white supremacist paraphernalia, multiple weapons and ammo, was arrested

[<https://www.kens5.com/article/news/crime/kerrville-man-arrested-for-alleged-terror-plot-white-supremacist-paraphernalia-found-in-home/273-1851e754-505e-47ac-a69c-5277b14c2188>] for

planning to carry out a mass shooting in 2021 at a Walmart. Also that year, another Texan, who claimed to have been at the Capitol on January 6 and was active on mymilitia.com [http://mymilitia.com/] , planned

[<https://www.dallasobserver.com/news/north-texas-militiaman-seth-aaron-pendley-pleads-guilty-to-plot-to-explode-amazon-data-center-in-virginia-12033111>] to bomb an Amazon data center in Virginia with C-4 explosives.

Deeply concerning is the makeup of the January 6 mob. Due, in part, to encouragement by Trump and others, the barriers that once existed between divergent forms of far-right extremism melted away, making America's extremist movement more dangerous and multifaceted. Neo-Nazis, white supremacists, conspiracy theorists, militias, and everyday "Make America Great Again" supporters worked hand in hand on January 6 – a cooperation that once seemed impossible. Together, those factions turned against democracy and invaded the Capitol to stop the peaceful transfer of power. Images of the Confederate flag in those hallowed hallways was a signifier of how much extremism has penetrated the mainstream, posing a significant threat to American democracy beyond the events of January 6.

Some of the main players on January 6 have taken steps to make sure they are still visible and active, even in the face of the hundreds of prosecutions and charges of seditious conspiracy. For example, in the last year, **Proud Boys** [<https://www.vice.com/en/article/z3n338/what-the-proud-boys-did-after-jan-6>] , whose leaders are charged with conspiracy, made at least 114 uniformed appearances across 73 cities in 24 states. They broadened out their activities and interests and focused them largely at the local and state level, shifting activism to local chapters and small communities. NPR reported that "Members of the group have attended anti-abortion 'prayer' events with conservative Christian organizations; they've protested the removal of Confederate monuments in North Carolina; in Washington state, they responded to a false rumor that a student would be arrested for not wearing a mask, **prompting the lockdown of three schools**

[<https://www.npr.org/2021/09/29/1041121327/despite-arrests-and-setbacks-far-right-proud-boys-press-new-ambitions>] .” The goal apparently is to amass more supporters in time to influence next year’s midterm elections. These changes have led members to appear at town council gatherings, school board presentations and health department question-and-answer sessions across the country [<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/14/us/proud-boys-local-issues.html>] . Their presence at the events is part of a strategy shift by the organization toward a larger goal: to bring their brand of menacing politics to the local level. And they have been clear about their new strategy. “The plan of attack if you want to make change is to get involved at the local level,” said Jeremy Bertino, a prominent member of the Proud Boys from North Carolina. Examples abound of these activities. Members showed up at a school board building in Beloit, Wisconsin, to protest school masking requirements. They turned up at a school board meeting in New Hanover County, North Carolina, before a vote on a mask mandate. They attended a gathering in Downers Grove, Illinois, where parents were trying to remove a nonbinary author’s graphic novel from public school libraries. At some local meetings, they have spoken and threatened community leaders [<https://chapelboro.com/news/pre-k-12-education/proud-boys-presence-leads-to-metal-detectors-deputies-at-school-board-meetings>] . At others, they have simply stood silently, and menacingly, and watched events. On Telegram, some members have said they handed out cell phone numbers to potential recruits.

Proud Boys have also been involved directly in politics at the local level. In Nevada, Proud Boys have tried to

exert control over the local GOP. In Kansas City, Proud Boy Josh Wells, who is running for the school board, told undercover antifascists in April that he wants “white nationalism and or a pro-Western Christian theocracy with a protected white majority status. Whichever one is more obtainable.” **Luis**

Miguel

[\[https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2021/08/25/proud-boys-are-still-violent-despite-legal-woes\]](https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2021/08/25/proud-boys-are-still-violent-despite-legal-woes) , a

U.S. Senate candidate in Florida, declared in July his commitment to the far-right activists who attended his campaign events: “Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and Three percenters have often been the only ones defending innocent Americans from violent Antifa commies. I am PROUD to stand with these patriots.”

Another person seeking local office is Joel Campbell, a **former Proud Boy running for city council in Topeka, KS**

[\[https://www.washingtonian.com/2021/09/07/guaranteed-disaster-proud-boys-discourage-members-from-attending-september-18-rally-in-dc/\]](https://www.washingtonian.com/2021/09/07/guaranteed-disaster-proud-boys-discourage-members-from-attending-september-18-rally-in-dc/) . At the

state level, a self-acknowledged member of the Proud Boys is running for an assembly seat. The candidate, **Jeffrey Erik Perrine** [\[https://www.adn.com/nation-world/2022/03/08/how-far-right-militia-groups-found-a-foothold-in-deep-blue-california/\]](https://www.adn.com/nation-world/2022/03/08/how-far-right-militia-groups-found-a-foothold-in-deep-blue-california/) , was expelled from the Sacramento County Republican Party. Without question, there will be violence at one or more of these highly intense local meetings in the future.

There are a number of reasons for the explosion of far-right extremism in recent years, but the acceptance of fringe conspiracy theories is unprecedented. The QAnon conspiracy cult has seen significant growth, and the **FBI has warned** [\https://d.docs.live.net/e1eebc49a81b2139/Documen

ts/GPAHE/Congressional/Proud%20Boys%20testimony%20HBeirich.docx] that the movement is deeply connected to violence. Even though the user “Q” hasn’t posted since 2020, polls show around a **quarter of Republicans believe the conspiracy** [<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/27/us/politics/qanon-republicans-trump.html>] . But the predominant factor driving the growth is the near certainty that the U.S. and other Western countries are moving towards a future where the white population will be fewer in number than people of color. For years, this reality has fueled white supremacist and anti-government movements that explain natural demographic shifts using a racist conspiracy theory called the “Great Replacement,” which alleges demographic change is a plot against white people, often instigated by Jews, to reduce their power – in essence, a white genocide to use the extremists’ term. This racist idea stayed on the fringe of the far-right for years but has increasingly been incorporated into hate and far-right movements’ conversations. It is now also voiced by supposed mainstream conservatives and politicians and spread by far-right media personalities – both in the U.S. and around the world. The idea has also been pushed by powerful conservatives, including Fox News host **Tucker Carlson** [<https://www.thedailybeast.com/tucker-carlson-pushes-racist-great-replacement-theory-yet-again-adl-renews-call-for-fox-to-fire-him>] and GOP heavyweights including **Newt Gingrich and Trump advisor Stephen Miller** [<https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-racist-theory-that-inspired-murderers-is-now-gop-dogma>] . This is a blatant white supremacist concept, once consigned to the racist movement, where no mainstream influencer would dare to tread.

This is not idle talk, but a violence-inspiring idea. At the 2017 white supremacy rally in Charlottesville, attendees shouted “Jews will not replace us,” referencing the “Great Replacement.” Since October 2018, there have been at least six global mass attacks motivated by “Great Replacement” conspiracy ideas. Besides the Christchurch, New Zealand, mosque shootings, mass attacks were staged at two American synagogues, an El Paso Walmart, a synagogue in Halle, Germany, and two shisha bars in Hanau, Germany, where the shooter is believed to have been targeting Muslim immigrants. The white supremacist killers in these attacks did not pick up their ideas of white genocide and the “Great Replacement” randomly. There is a massive online presence to spread abhorrent anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant messaging, which warns of a coming civil war while assiduously recruiting young people into these ideas and extremist movements. There is also an increasing number of political figures who are willing to openly embrace and spread this thinking when talking about immigration policies. The racist, extremist, and often violent reactions to changing demographics will likely worsen in the U.S. and abroad, setting the stage for further tragedies in the months and years to come.

The Future of American Democracy is Perilous

The growth of white supremacist and other extremist movements is always concerning, especially in terms of the violence inherent to those movements, but the infiltration of their racist and conspiracy-laden ideas into mainstream political discourse, especially around

the legitimacy of our elections, is absolutely terrifying.

On January 6, Representative **Mo Brooks**

[\[https://www.justsecurity.org/74138/incitement-timeline-year-of-trumps-actions-leading-to-the-attack-on-the-capitol/\]](https://www.justsecurity.org/74138/incitement-timeline-year-of-trumps-actions-leading-to-the-attack-on-the-capitol/) (R-AL) spoke at the “Stop the Steal” rally, saying, “Today is a time of choosing and tomorrow is a time of fighting. Today is also a day of revelation and separation...Today is the day American patriots start taking down names and kicking ass.” As he entered the Capitol on January 6, Senator **Josh Hawley**

[\[https://missouriindependent.com/2022/03/21/josh-hawley-refuses-to-stop-selling-mug-featuring-pre-riot-jan-6-fist-pump/\]](https://missouriindependent.com/2022/03/21/josh-hawley-refuses-to-stop-selling-mug-featuring-pre-riot-jan-6-fist-pump/) (R-MO) made a clear gesture of support for the pro-Trump crowd. These are only two examples among hundreds of the way that lawmakers have become performative, slinging dog whistles and lies at their constituents, indeed contributing to the insurrection and now the ongoing perpetuation of lies around the 2020 election, such things as critical race theory, and QAnon. We saw this at the recent Supreme Court confirmation hearings for Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, when Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) grilled Jackson about “**racist babies** [\[https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2022/03/ted-cruz-racist-babies-kbj-hearing.html\]](https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2022/03/ted-cruz-racist-babies-kbj-hearing.html)” and Senator Hawley repeatedly asked questions about pedophilia, a **clear signal to QAnon devotees** [\[https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/599304-hawley-jackson-engage-in-dramatic-clash-over-handling-of-child-pornography\]](https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/599304-hawley-jackson-engage-in-dramatic-clash-over-handling-of-child-pornography) .

A thriving democracy needs competitive political parties pursuing legitimate agendas that give options to voters. But more than a year after January 6, elements of the GOP are increasingly adopting formerly fringe and potentially violent conspiracy

ideas, like QAnon, with many of its members also questioning the legitimacy of the 2020 election, downplaying the events of January 6, and spreading extremist views themselves. A disconcerting number of Republicans – **nearly 75 percent** [<https://www.newsweek.com/2021/12/31/millions-angry-armed-americans-stand-ready-seize-power-if-trump-loses-2024-1660953.html?amp=1>] – now believe that elections are no longer free and fair, and that January 6 was perpetrated by righteous patriots. The Republican National Committee even went so far as to declare the violent insurrection of January 6 as “legitimate political discourse.” A **September 2021** [<https://www.newsweek.com/2021/12/31/millions-angry-armed-americans-stand-ready-seize-power-if-trump-loses-2024-1660953.html?amp=1>] poll by the Public Religion Research Institute finds that nearly a third of Republicans agree that “true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country.” This is a staggeringly dangerous number considering that **20 million guns were sold in 2020** [<https://www.forbes.com/sites/joewalsh/2022/01/05/us-bought-almost-20-million-guns-last-year---second-highest-year-on-record/?sh=3e41fc5813bb>] and about 18 million in 2021, with nearly 14 million people becoming **first-time gun owners** [<https://freerangeamerican.us/gun-sales-2021/>] over that same period. A CBS/YouGov poll found that half of Republicans believe that the insurrectionists who invaded the Capitol last January were “**defending freedom**” [<https://www.newsweek.com/2021/12/31/millions-angry-armed-americans-stand-ready-seize-power-if-trump-loses-2024-1660953.html?amp=1>].” Political scientists now place the Republican Party in the **same bucket** [<https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/if-trumpers-lived-in-germany-theyd-be-in-the-fascist-party.html>] as very far-right parties like the anti-

Muslim and anti-refugee Alternative for Germany, parts of which are considered officially extremist by the **German security services** [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/03/german-intelligence-agency-to-spy-on-far-right-afd-party>] .

This radicalization of many conservatives even has our military concerned. **Three retired generals warned in a December opinion piece** [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/12/17/eaton-taguba-anderson-generals-military/>] , “We are chilled to our bones at the thought of a coup succeeding next time.” They pointed to a number of factors, including that a group of 124 retired military officials, under the name “**Flag Officers 4 America** [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/05/15/former-military-leaders-criticized-election-administration-that-hurts-militarys-reputation/?itid=lk_inline_manual_9] ,” released a letter echoing Donald Trump’s false attacks on the legitimacy of American elections. The generals called on the military to immediately introduce civics courses for active-duty troops, that all leaders of the insurrection be held to account, and for military intelligence to root out possible extremists before 2024. They also pointed to a terrifying possibility that rogue military units might reject an election outcome and support a losing presidential candidate in 2024.

The situation has become so serious that a member of the CIA’s Political Instability Task Force warned in December 2021 that the U.S. is “**closer to civil war** [<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/dec/20/us-closer-to-civil-war-new-book-barbara-walter-trump-capitol-attack>] ” than most would ever believe. Canadian political scientist

Thomas Homer-Dixon

[<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/03/us-rightwing-dictatorship-2030-trump-canada>] said in January 2022 that “By 2025, American democracy could collapse, causing extreme domestic political instability, including widespread civil violence.” *The Atlantic*

[<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/01/january-6-insurrection-trump-coup-2024-election/620843/>] put it this way: “Trump’s next coup has already begun...January 6 was practice. Donald Trump’s GOP is much better positioned to subvert the next election.” The European think tank International IDEA now calls the U.S. a “backsliding democracy” heading towards authoritarianism

[<https://www.npr.org/2021/12/01/1059896434/unit-ed-states-backsliding-democracy-donald-trump-january-6-capitol-attack>] . This is part of a global pattern, as the number of countries trending toward authoritarianism in 2020 outnumbered those moving in a more democratic direction. Furthermore, Trump’s allegations during the 2020 election had a “spillover effect” on elections in Brazil, Mexico, Myanmar, and Peru. Freedom House reported in March 2021 that America’s democracy score fell another three points, for a total of 11 over the past decade (out of a hundred). Freedom House [<https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-report-us-democracy-has-declined-significantly-past-decade-reforms-urgently-needed>] concluded that although the U.S. remains a “free country,” it is now more akin to states with less robust democracies, such as Romania, Croatia, and Panama.

The increasing numbers of Republicans buying into the big election lie and working to undermine electoral infrastructure **undergird these analyses**

[<https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/568958-more-insidious-power-grab-than-one-attempted-jan-6>] . Trump allies like Steve Bannon have been blatant about their attempts to manipulate the American electoral system. In [an April call to supporters to take over local election boards](#)

[<https://www.propublica.org/article/heeding-steve-bannons-call-election-deniers-organize-to-seize-control-of-the-gop-and-reshape-americas-elections>] , Bannon said, “They’re not going to be welcomed with open arms...But hey, was it nasty at Lexington? Was it nasty at Concord? Was it nasty at Bunker Hill?” Then, in October, Bannon said that “shock troops” need to be prepared to take over and “deconstruct” the state when the next [Republican president is elected](#) [<https://www.businessinsider.com/steve-bannon-shock-troops-take-over-state-2021-10>] .

January 6 could have been the moment that the nation united to protect our democracy and align against far-right extremism. Instead, extremist movements are stronger, conspiracy networks larger, and elements of the GOP more radical, with some elected officials spreading dangerous extremist views. The number of arrests since January 6 of white supremacist, antigovernment, and other hate actors is unprecedented, with federal prosecutors saying this probe is “likely the [most complex investigation](#) [<https://www.axios.com/capitol-riot-investigation-complex-7200484d-1943-41cd-be28-7102ab730ab5.html>] ever prosecuted by the Department of Justice.” However, a report by the [International Center for the Study of Radicalization](#) [<https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ICSR-Report-Far-From-Gone-The-Evolution-of-Extremism-in-the-First-100-Days-of-the-Biden-Administration.pdf>] at King’s

College London revealed online extremist networks continue to spew hate, racism, and bigotry. Support for extremist groups that stormed the Capitol has burgeoned. The tech companies will likely refuse to change this situation in any meaningful way without regulation here or abroad. Fifteen percent of Americans agree with QAnon that the U.S. government, media, and financial worlds “are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation.” The **conspiracy theory** [<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/meet-the-press/study-finds-nearly-one-five-americans-believe-qanon-conspiracy-theories-n1268722>] is now as popular as some major religions in the U.S.

Looking ahead to the remainder of 2022, far-right extremism and the violence that accompanies it will continue to grow and be cause for great concern, as will the radicalization of the GOP. Historians see worrying parallels between today and the 1930s and have serious concerns that January 6 might be the first in **future coup attempts** [<https://www.salon.com/2021/05/26/historian-of-fascism-wonders-is-joe-biden-a-speed-bump-on-the-fascists-march-to-power/>]. Without a doubt the biggest cause for concern is the threat to the foundations of our democracy. Already several states have passed laws making it harder to vote. More alarming is the success of far-right conservative activists working to undermine America’s election infrastructure, proposing changes that could put election results in the hands of partisan legislatures, **rather than the popular vote** [<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/01/january-6-insurrection-trump-coup-2024-election/620843/>]. Elections have historically been

connected to violence including hate crimes. In 2018 [<https://www.splcenter.org/terror-from-the-right-archives#2018>] , there were four domestic terrorist attacks or attempted attacks in the month around the election. Election officials in multiple states have been threatened and others have left their positions due to these threats [<https://www.businessinsider.com/elections-officials-plan-to-quit-before-2024-fear-for-safety-poll-2022-3>] . Conflicts over voting, critical race theory, the pandemic and other issues have become inflamed at the state and local level, and extremist groups like the Proud Boys have gained a foothold in local school boards and similar elected bodies. These conflicts are so intense that it is likely that there will be serious violence around the upcoming midterm elections. Lone actor violence at the local level or against candidates or government entities is quite possible, with the probability increasing as we move closer to the 2024 elections. And, even if Trump runs again in 2024, it will likely have no impact on a path that is almost certainly already set. Too many have been indoctrinated into his web of lies and bigoted hyperbole, and too many in the GOP will continue to adhere to the playbook he's written and do anything to get his endorsement.

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