

**Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee  
“Countering Domestic Terrorism: Examining the Evolving  
Threat”**

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Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Peters, and esteemed members of the committee, I would like to thank you on behalf of the START Consortium for inviting us to testify today.

START data from a number of relevant datasets demonstrate the following:

1. In the US over the last decade, domestic terrorists<sup>1</sup> are more numerous, active and lethal in gross numbers than international terrorists<sup>2</sup>, including what the U.S. government refers to as Homegrown Violent Extremists (HVE)<sup>3</sup>.

Among domestic terrorists, violent far right terrorists<sup>4</sup> are by far the most numerous, lethal and criminally active. Far right extremists conducted over 50% of successful terrorist attack in 2017 and 2018.

There were six lethal terrorist attacks in the US in 2018. All six lethal attacks shared far-right ideological elements including primarily white supremacy and in at least two cases, male supremacy. We observed this general pattern continue in 2019.

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<sup>1</sup> The FBI defines domestic terrorism as that “Perpetrated by individuals and/or groups inspired by or associated with primarily U.S.-based movements that espouse extremist ideologies of political, religious, social, racial or environmental nature.” See <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism>.

<sup>2</sup> The FBI defines international terrorism as that “Perpetrated by individuals and/or groups inspired by or associated with designated foreign terrorist organizations or nations (state-sponsored).”

<sup>3</sup> Umbrella terms (e.g., domestic, international, far-right, far-left, religious) used by government entities, researchers and the media are necessary to aggregate and communicate information about these diverse motivations, but are not universally agreed upon, are imprecise, and are influenced by differing considerations such as bureaucratic considerations, legal considerations, political considerations and preferences for specificity or inclusiveness. Furthermore, terrorist ideologies morph over time, new terrorist ideologies emerge, and many individual terrorists are influenced by more than one ideology. Therefore, data and analysis emerging from one government entity or research project may be based on different definitions and inclusion criteria than data and analysis emerging from another, making direct comparisons difficult. Finally, many terrorist ideologies espouse the use of violence to advance the same or similar beliefs and world views that non-violent and/or law-abiding citizens and organizations espouse. As a result, ideological definitions may be misunderstood to mean that anyone subscribing to a set of beliefs is a terrorist, when in actuality it is an individual or organization’s behavior that qualifies them as a terrorism, and ideological considerations are merely understood as motivation that helps to shape the perpetrators’ violence.

<sup>4</sup> START’s Global Terrorism Database defines far right extremism” as “Violence in support of the belief that personal and/or national way of life is under attack and is either already lost or that the threat is imminent. Characterized by anti-globalism, racial or ethnic supremacy or nationalism, suspicion of centralized federal authority, reverence for individual liberty, and/or belief in conspiracy theories that involve grave threat to national sovereignty and/or personal liberty.”

Looking back over a longer time horizon: Between 1990-2018 the violent far right is responsible for 800 failed or foiled plots and 215 homicide events compared to 350 failed or foiled plots and 50 homicide events for HVEs.

They have pursued chemical or biological weapons more frequently, than HVEs, albeit infrequently.

Far right extremists are more active in illicit financial schemes, with nearly 1000 far right extremists engaging in over 600 terror financing schemes generating over \$1B in damages to the US Government between 1990 and 2013.

Furthermore, between 80-90% of the hate crime perpetrators in START's new BIAS dataset conform to ideological tenets of violent far right extremism.

2. The composition of far right targets has changed, with anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim attacks increasing in frequency. Over the last ten years of data, (2009-2018), 22% of violent far-right offenders were motivated at least partly by anti-immigrant or anti-Muslim sentiment compared to only 3% in the ten years prior. This percentage spiked to 37 and 38 percent in 2016 and 2017, respectively.
3. Despite the fact that more domestic terrorists are arrested than HVEs in gross numbers, 62% of far right and 78% of far left terrorists succeed in violent plots, compared with 22% of HVEs. This is due to a combination of pragmatic and political factors that collectively reduce resource allocation to domestic terrorism.

### **The Status of Data Collection and Threat Tracking Performed by the Government**

There are several sets of challenges to the U.S. Government's ability to maintain, share, analyze and make public data on U.S. persons involved in domestic extremism. I'll share just three of them.

One set of challenges emerges because domestic terrorism and international terrorism are handled separately within and between executive branch agencies and departments, leading to bifurcated threat assessments and situational awareness, undermining risk assessment and rational resource allocation decisions. To reflect reality, violent extremism data has to be collected and analyzed globally.

A second set of challenges result from civil rights and civil liberties protections. The U.S. Government is limited in its ability to maintain data on ideologues, propagandists, and recruiters who are not acting in violation of current law. Researchers outside of the government are often better able to examine domestic extremist movements.

For active investigations, the FBI Counterterrorism Division (CTD) maintains high quality data on individuals under investigation and uses that data to manage risk across their portfolio of international and domestic terrorism investigations. That information is highly granular, but there are limitations as to how broadly case information on known or suspected domestic terrorists can be shared outside of the FBI. That information is not included in our interagency watch-listing efforts, for example.

The next set of challenge speaks to a criminal's journey through the criminal justice lifecycle. There has historically been a break down once these perpetrators enter the correctional system and again when they exit the correctional system.

The final set of challenge speaks to politics. Given the inherently political nature of terrorism, defining, tracking and reporting data on terrorism is subject to biases, subtle pressures, or even manipulation.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

It is clear that domestic terrorism, and specifically far-right extremism, require greater attention and resource allocation. This is not to say that the U.S. Government should respond to domestic terrorism in the same ways as it has responded to international terrorism and homegrown violent extremism.

- Congress should pass the Domestic Terrorism DATA Act or similar legislation, including the continued funding of unclassified, objective and longitudinal data collection and dissemination through the DHS Center of Excellence apparatus. That language was stripped out of the House Homeland Security Committee version and should be reinserted.
- The Homeland Security Grants Program, responsible for things like UASI grants, should incorporate these objective data.
- The US Government should scale up the DHS Office of Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention, and specifically, replicate the program being run out of Colorado which has quietly succeeded in over 40 interventions.
- The U.S. Government should take a public-health approach to violence prevention and invest in programs that build community resilience, programs that foster non-criminal justice interventions for at-risk individuals, and programs that foster rehabilitation and reintegration of domestic extremists. A parallel grants program to the Homeland Security Grants Program could be run out of an organization like the Department of Health and Human Services to support these public health programs.

Thank you