

FACT SHEET

A National Policy Blueprint To End White Supremacist Violence

By the Center for American Progress and the McCain Institute for International Leadership April 21, 2021

White supremacist violence in the United States is not new, but in recent years, it has become a top national security threat. In October 2020, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) concluded that racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists, particularly white supremacist extremists, are “the most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland.”¹

To confront this challenge, the Center for American Progress and the McCain Institute for International Leadership conducted a yearlong research project, convening a coalition of more than 150 leaders from the communities most affected by white supremacist violence, along with civil rights advocates and experts in law enforcement, counter-terrorism, and national security. The result is a blueprint that reflects a broad consensus on policies to tackle white supremacist violence while also respecting civil liberties and protecting vulnerable communities.

The policy recommendations focus on five interconnected areas, which are briefly summarized below and covered in more depth in the full report.²

1. Leverage executive branch actions and authorities

Ending white supremacist violence starts with federal leadership that prioritizes the problem in the following ways:

- Direct federal departments and agencies to develop strategies to address the threat.
- Collaborate with international partners, academic institutions, and nonprofits; and join the Christchurch Call.
- Ensure that federal employment guidelines prohibit planning, participating in, or advocating for white supremacist violence.
- Allocate resources in accordance with the threat priority of white supremacist violence.
- Update federal hiring standards to screen for white supremacist and militia involvement.

2. Improve data collection, research, and reporting

Reliable data and research guide action and inform the public. The federal government should therefore take the following steps:

- Increase availability of multi-source information on white supremacist violence.
- Support mechanisms for reporting white supremacist crimes, violence, and harassment outside law enforcement channels.
- Fund research on white supremacist tactics, effective disengagement approaches, racism in government, online engagement, recruitment, fundraising, and prevention.
- Review gaps in hate crime reporting tools, creating incentives to improve accuracy.
- Prioritize updates on domestic violent extremism from the DHS and FBI.

3. Protect communities and prosecute crimes

Strategies grounded in a public health approach bolster resilience, support recovery of those harmed, and prevent mobilization. Federal policies can help in the following ways:

- Invest in the capacity of mental health and social work networks designed to prevent white supremacist violence.
- Fund community-led programs to build resilience against white supremacist violence and to provide trauma-informed care.
- Prioritize and resource U.S. Department of Justice and FBI investigation and prosecution of white supremacist violence.
- Fund programs for state attorneys general offices to combat domestic violent extremism.
- Designate lynching as a federal hate crime and ban racial and religious profiling.
- Enact legislation to require background checks for gun sales by unlicensed individuals, close “ghost gun” loopholes, enact federal extreme risk protection orders, and prohibit those convicted of misdemeanor hate crimes from owning guns.

4. Counter recruiting and infiltration in military, veteran, and law enforcement communities

Updated policies, processes, and training are needed to prevent infiltration and stymie recruiting:

- Develop guidelines and policies to prevent white supremacist recruitment in the law enforcement community and law enforcement member participation in white supremacist activities.
- Establish a national police misconduct registry.
- Update U.S. Department of Defense screening processes, behavior policies, and training to recognize, prevent, and address white supremacist activities among service members.
- Provide services to veterans to prevent recruiting, support disengagement, and field reports of recruitment by white supremacist groups.
- Expand the statutory grounds for forfeiture of financial benefits to include hate crimes and domestic violent extremism offences.

5. Employ financial and technological tools and authorities

Financial and technology tools should also be deployed to defeat white supremacist violence:

- Request information from financial institutions on white supremacists reasonably suspected of engaging in terrorist acts.
- Sanction foreign financiers of white supremacist violence.
- Develop universal classification standards for hateful content and white supremacist groups on technology platforms, with appropriate civil liberties protections.
- Develop legislation on transparent methods of content moderation and algorithmic recommendations.

The full blueprint has more detail on these and other related policy recommendations. Taken together, these are the national solutions we need to address the urgent threat of white supremacist violence.

Endnotes

1 U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Homeland Threat Assessment” (Washington: 2020), available at www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2020_10_06_homeland-threat-assessment.pdf.

2 Katrina Mulligan and others, “A National Policy Blueprint To End White Supremacist Violence” (Washington: Center for American Progress and McCain Institute for International Leadership, 2021), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/?p=498156>.