

POLICY REPORT

# The Three Percenters: A Look Inside an Anti-Government Militia





# The Three Percenters: A Look Inside an Anti-Government Militia

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COVER PHOTO: A “Three Percenter” patch is seen at a rally at Delta Park in Portland, Oregon in September 2020. (MARANIE R. STAAB/Getty Images)



## Executive Summary

- The U.S. far-right milieu is not monolithic. It can be divided into at least five sections: racist extremism, namely white nationalism/supremacy; anti-government extremism; nativist extremism; anti-abortion extremism; and male supremacy.
- The anti-government movement, which is the most relevant to this brief, can be categorized into six further sub-sections: militias, tax protesters, sovereign citizens, constitutional sheriffs, far-right segments of survivalist or “prepper” communities, and conspiracy propagandists.
- The Three Percenter movement is a subset of the larger far-right anti-government militia movement, organized primarily around intense fear and loathing of the U.S. federal government. Although fixated on the federal government, anti-government extremists use coded rhetoric that also expresses anxiety toward historically disenfranchised racial/ethnic/religious minorities. Their ideology and narratives are malleable enough to identify additional perceived enemies, including Muslims. They also often attempt to portray themselves as armed protectors of the U.S. Constitution against tyrants-in-waiting (the U.S. federal government) and various collaborators (anti-fascists [“antifa”], Black



National Guard soldiers secure the U.S. Capitol grounds on Feb. 8, 2021 in preparation for Congressional hearings for the impeachment of former President Donald Trump. The Three Percenters movement has been linked to the Capitol riots that fueled the impeachment process. (TASOS KATOPODIS/Getty Images)

Lives Matter, George Soros, Muslims, and others).

- Like other anti-government extremists, Three Percenters frame their activities – including paramilitary, firearms, and other weapons/survival training – in defensive terms. Nevertheless, the movement’s supporters have engaged in armed confrontations with law enforcement and engaged in planned violence against various targets, including American Muslim faith-based institutions.

### Policy Recommendations

- First, increase public awareness and understanding of the potential threats Three Percenters and the broader U.S. far right pose, in terms of their associated extremism, hate, and violence, to local communities.

- Second, before proposing additional federal domestic terrorism statutes related to penalty enhancements, officials must rigorously enforce existing federal and state legal prosecuting authorities and carefully study their effects.
- Third, enhance physical security for nonprofits and places of worship that are often the object of fixation and/or targeted violence by anti-government extremists, including Three Percenters.
- Fourth, we reiterate and reemphasize our call that law enforcement, military, and intelligence community leaders need to implement stricter measures and policies to purge militia members and extremists from their ranks.





Weapons lean on a panel during military-style drills of the III% Georgia Security Force in Flovilla, Ga. in November 2016. The militia calls itself the Georgia Security Forces (GSF). The group is part of the Three Percenters movement. (MOHAMMED ELSHAMY / Getty Images)

## Introduction

The insurrection at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6, 2021, is the latest in a string of events shining a spotlight on the dangers of far-right extremism and its propensity for violence. Thousands of devout followers of former President Donald Trump answered his call to assemble near the White House and march to the U.S. Capitol to contest the false claims of a “stolen election” and unsubstantiated allegations of rampant “voter fraud.”

Using the rally as cover, more extreme elements of the crowd came prepared to enact violence and insurrection. According to academic researchers and watchdog advocates, they

included adherents of a dozen different far right extremist groups and movements.<sup>1</sup> Among them were supporters of the Three Percenters, a subset of the broader anti-government militia landscape. This publication provides background and analysis on who they are, what they believe, the types of challenges and violent threats some adherents pose, and policy recommendations on how to mitigate for the risks they pose.

Some may wonder why we chose to examine anti-Muslim animus in the context of a publication about the Three Percenter movement. In recent years, the expression of prejudice toward Muslims has become a key feature of various far-right movements around the world. Relative to

other groups traditionally targeted by far-right actors, Muslims tend to be understudied.<sup>2</sup> Yet the growing importance of anti-Muslim hate on the far right must not be overlooked. Unlike more traditionally recognized motivations, anti-Muslim hate is one of the few issues that brings together otherwise disparate and fractious elements of the far-right, both within<sup>3</sup> and beyond national borders.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, for analysts interested in forecasting trends, closely watching dynamics of anti-Muslim prejudice may hold insights for future developments on the far right. Starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s, far-right actors began to pivot their focus from pseudo-scientific biological distinctions



# U.S. Anti-Government Movement Typology

The U.S. far-right anti-government movement can be divided into at least six distinct sub-movements.

This diagram is based on the insights of the authors and other analysts' experiences with monitoring and researching the U.S. far right.

It is intended to give a simple understanding of the various major sub-movements and overlaps of the anti-government movement.



Sources: Authors; J.J. MacNab (Fellow at George Washington University Program on Extremism), April 2018; Southern Poverty Law Center

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toward greater emphasis on socio-cultural differences – what some researchers have called “biological racism” versus “cultural racism,” respectively.<sup>5</sup> In turn, this has coincided with shifts in ideology, rhetoric, and violent targeting preferences. Muslims now reside in far-right actors’ expanding target set and are increasingly confronted by various forms of ideologically motivated violence.<sup>6</sup> This ranges from sporadic hate crimes to planned mass casualty incidents at Utoya Island and Oslo, Norway (2011), Quebec City, Canada (2017), Christchurch, New Zealand (2019) and Hanau, Germany (2020).

As we will discuss further in this publication, these shifts have also occurred in the United States. Although the focus here is on anti-government extremism, and

the Three Percenter movement in particular, the intent is to add our voices to the growing chorus of researchers providing policymakers with a sober, but urgent analysis of far-right violence and extremism challenging our nation.

## The Contemporary U.S. Far Right, the Anti-Government Movement and ‘Militias’

### A Brief Typology of the U.S. Far-Right Milieu and U.S. Anti-Government Movement

Many researchers have attempted to define and categorize what constitutes the contemporary American “far right,” leading to different definitions and typologies, each with their own strengths and limitations.<sup>7</sup> This plethora of

perspectives has been described by at least one scholar as “conceptual chaos.”<sup>8</sup>

These issues notwithstanding, to set the wider context of this brief’s topic we categorize the U.S. far right as an umbrella political milieu divided into at least five types:<sup>9</sup> racist extremism, namely white nationalism/supremacy; anti-government extremism (also sometimes called the “Patriot” movement), which is animated by intense fear and loathing of the federal government rather than racial/ethnic/religious hatred, per se; nativist extremism, characterized by anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments; anti-abortion extremism, which advocates for and condones unlawful violence against abortion providers; and male supremacists,





who believe women are innately physically, intellectually, and/or morally inferior to men due to biology, which justifies their advocacy for oppression of women.

The anti-government movement is particularly relevant to this publication. According to J.J. MacNab, a Fellow at George Washington University's Program on Extremism, as of April 2018 this movement can be further divided into at least five other overlapping but distinct sub-movements/ideologies:<sup>10</sup>

- Militias
- Tax protesters
- Sovereign citizens
- Constitutional sheriffs
- Far-right segments of survivalist/“prepper” communities

We humbly add a sixth category, conspiracy propagandists,<sup>11</sup> to this typology.

It is outside the scope of this brief to further discuss other segments of the anti-government movement and what relationship, if any, they may have to Three Percenters. (For a brief overview of the other subsections of the U.S. far-right anti-government movement, please see Appendix A.) It is sufficient to say here that the segment of the U.S. anti-government movement most relevant to Three Percenters is the so-called “militia”<sup>a</sup> movement.

## The Contemporary U.S. ‘Militia’ Movement

According to Arie Perliger, professor at the University of Massachusetts Lowell,<sup>12</sup> the militia movement is concerned with three overarching issues:

- Preventing a “New World Order” (NWO)
- Armed protection of constitutional rights against perceived threats/enemies
- Maintaining a tradition of civil activism<sup>13</sup>

The NWO theory is a conspiratorial narrative that claims American national sovereignty and citizens’ rights are being eroded by a cabal of foreign actors (“globalists”) and institutions (e.g., the United Nations) conspiring with collaborators working outside (“socialists” & “Marxists”) and inside U.S. federal government agencies (“deep state”). While the NWO and other anti-government narratives primarily fixate upon the federal government, they also use coded rhetoric that expresses anxiety toward historically disenfranchised racial/ethnic/religious minorities. As we will explain later, this and other anti-government narratives are malleable enough to adopt new objects of fixation, including Muslims.

Second, in reaction to this perceived threat, militia movement actors engage in what they

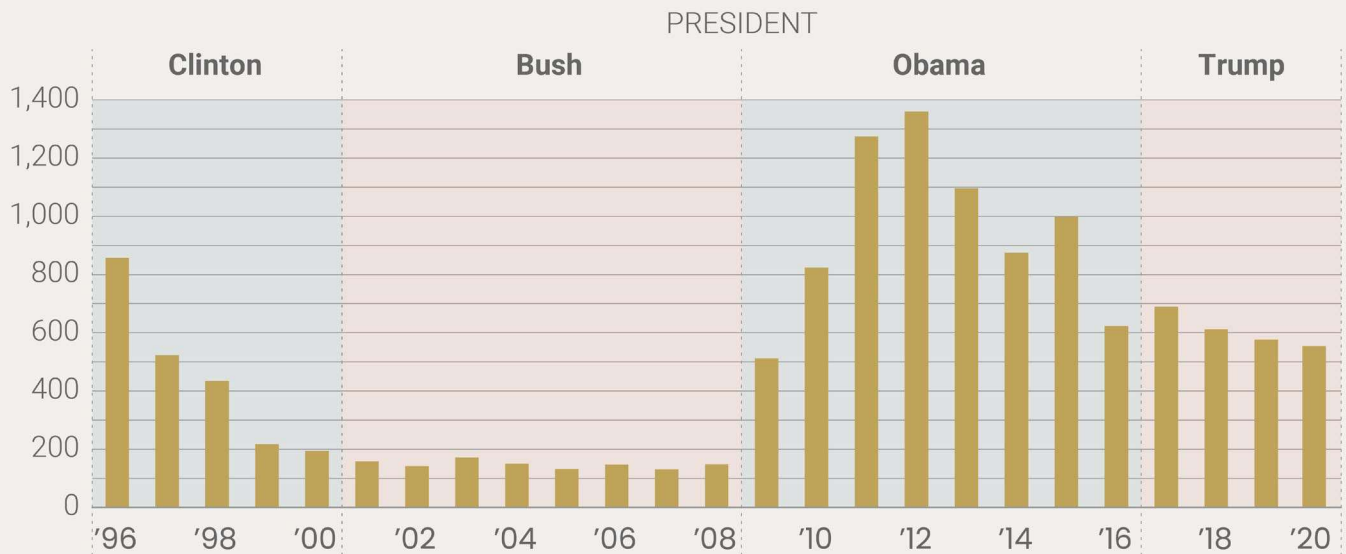
see as the armed protection of constitutional rights against an NWO-type threat. Therefore, in line with their tradition of civil activism (see below), they tend to vehemently oppose laws and regulations they perceive to restrict the use or possession of firearms in any way. By extension they also support laws that maximize an individual’s ability to use or possess firearms, such as “open carry” laws. Outside of nonviolent civil and political activism, they also organize and train in armed paramilitary formations, tactics, and strategies. The narrative of preparing for “civil war” to defend against perceived overreaching or “tyrannical” government actions is strongly associated with this movement.

Third, they seek to maintain a tradition of civil activism, partly as a nonviolent means to protect constitutional rights (e.g., voting/lobbying elected officials or community service), and claim to leave armed violence as a last resort.<sup>14</sup> It is also partly a means of legitimating their paramilitary training and ideology to the wider public. To do so, they often portray themselves using narratives, vocabulary, and imagery closely associated with the American Revolution and the Founding Fathers.<sup>15</sup> They often refer to themselves as the “Citizens’ Militia” or the “Unorganized Militia,”<sup>16</sup> which are intended to connect themselves to citizen state militia units that fought alongside the Continental

a Under the Militia Act of 1903, there are official militias created and controlled by the federal and state governments. Each state has two mandatory organized militias, the state Army National Guard and the state Air National Guard. These are both state and federal forces, which at any point can be called up by the president of the United States. Many states also have state defense forces and state naval forces that assist, support, and augment National Guard forces. This study excludes any information pertaining to these official militias and instead focuses on unofficial, private militias that have no legal existence codified in law.



# Active Anti-Government ‘Patriot’ Groups



Source: Southern Poverty Law Center (www.splcenter.org)

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Army in the War of Independence.<sup>17</sup> (The term “Three Percenter” is a pseudo-historical attempt to make a similar type of connection.)

Data from the Southern Poverty Law Center points to two “waves” of contemporary militia and other anti-government movement activity.<sup>18</sup> The first wave was from 1993 until the early 2000s. Observed militia movement activity went through a nadir from 1999 to 2008, despite efforts to rebuild the movement during this period.<sup>19</sup> The second wave of observed activity and group (re)formation began in 2009 and continues to the present. While in recent years the number of observed active anti-government groups is down from its peak in 2011-2015, it has consistently remained on par with numbers from 2009, when the second wave began.<sup>20</sup> It is around the beginning of this second wave that the Three Percenter movement arose.

## Rise of the ‘Three Percenters’<sup>21</sup>

The Three Percenters are a decentralized movement within the broader U.S. far-right anti-government militia movement. There is no single central authority or definitive group. Instead, there are multiple discrete organizations with a national presence openly associating themselves with the broader movement, such as The Three Percenters – Original, American Patriots The III%, United Patriots 3%, and Three Percent Security Force (also known as IIISF). This does not include numerous local/regional and state-specific spin-off groups, many of which have broken away from larger nationwide organizations, such as American Constitution Elite III%, Confederate States III%, and Rhode Island Patriots III%, among others.

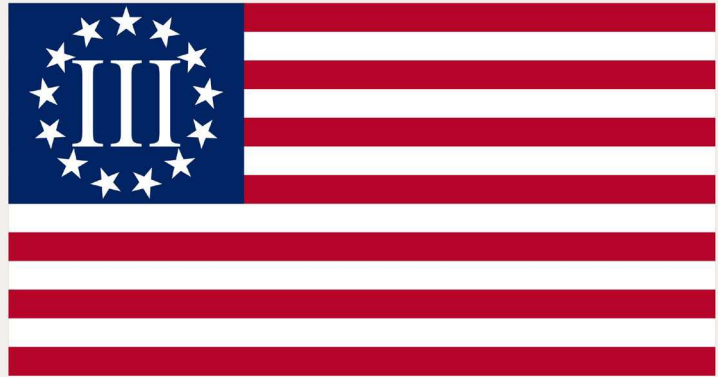
The Three Percenter movement was founded in late 2008. Like much of the resurgent anti-government movement, it arose in reaction to, among other things, the election of President Barack Obama<sup>22</sup> as president of the United States.<sup>23</sup>

The movement’s origins began with Michael Brian Vanderboegh,<sup>24</sup> a former far-leftist<sup>25</sup> of Pinson, Alabama, who later became a well-known anti-government militia extremist during the 1990s while writing publications advocating violence against the U.S. federal government.<sup>26</sup> Vanderboegh also became a member of the Oath Keepers (created in April 2009), a group that the Three Percenters “remain loosely allied with and who publicized the movement on his blog ‘Sipsey Street Irregulars’ beginning November 2008.”<sup>27</sup>



## Nyberg Flag of the Three Percenters Movement

The flag of this movement is named after Gayle Nyberg who created the flag. The movement's name comes from an unsubstantiated claim that only about 3 percent of American colonists picked up arms to fight for independence from Britain.



Source: Alex Microbe, Creative Commons

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### Use of Historical Narratives and Imagery

One discrete organization associated with the Three Percenter movement, The Three Percenters – Original, claims the movement's name "Three Percenters" (also often written as "III%ers") represents the number of active forces in the field that fought against British tyranny during the American Revolution.<sup>28</sup> As they state on their website:

*an idea was coined of having "Minutemen" available at a moment's notice should the King's tyranny show up in their town, on their streets, or at their door. These Minutemen would meet, train, and prepare to defend themselves, their family, and their townships from an ever-encroaching empire. It is from these Minutemen where the 3% name originated. It is a rough estimate that only 3% of the colonists were actively fighting in the field against British forces at any given time. Today we recognize with this 3% in being that we will be the last defense to*

*protect the citizens of the United States if there ever comes a day when our government takes up arms against the American people.*<sup>29</sup> (emphasis added)

This assertion has never been substantiated by historical evidence or the opinions of professional historians of the American Revolution.<sup>30</sup> Regardless, the historical narrative, imagery, and analogy are clear. Three Percenters claim to be today's modern "minutemen": ever-vigilant, armed, trained, and ready at a moment's notice to mobilize against today's tyrants-in-waiting, namely the U.S. federal government. One of the most popular symbols of Three Percenters is the Nyberg flag, named after creator Gayle Nyberg, which is a Betsy Ross Flag with a Roman numeral "III" inside the circle of 13 stars representing the original 13 U.S. states.

Like other actors within the militia and broader anti-government movements, Three Percenter movement supporters share a political vision that advocates a return to the original American

Republic, as they envision it. According to The Three Percenters – Original's website, "We intend to provide a framework and guidance that 'The People' can use to make positive change in restoring the founding principles of our Constitutional Republic."<sup>31</sup>

A 2016 document intended as a guide for would-be activists and supporters articulates this historical imagery further and bridges its message to the present moment to tell a crisis story: "The Constitution has been metaphorically shredded in many states, and our rights have become a mere shadow of what the Founding Fathers envisioned. We need to restore America to the Republic she once was."<sup>32</sup>

### Movement Activities

This deep political anxiety and sense of impending crisis is reinforced by niche websites, chat boards, and social media accounts that discuss and generate a steady stream of moral outrage over a wide range of issues including anti-fascists ("antifa"), Black Lives Matter, "fake news," and





perceived corrupt politicians; fears of economic collapse; enacting their vision of a constitutionally constrained government; concerns over the loss of Second Amendment rights via firearms laws and regulations; anger at perceived unjustified police raids; predictions of mass civil unrest; and stories about Islamist terrorism.

It also fuels the persistent paramilitary, firearms, and other combat skills training activities associated with involvement in the Three Percenter and wider anti-government militia movements. Three Percenters encourage each other to conduct firearms and paramilitary training as individuals and in units with other movement supporters. They often participate in joint, often regularly scheduled, field training exercises with other Three Percenter and militia actors.

Consistent with the broader militia movement's efforts to engage in armed protection of constitutional rights and maintaining traditions of civil activism, protest and counter-protest activity is encouraged within the Three Percenter movement. It is not uncommon to find individuals who openly identify as Three Percenters (e.g., wearing clothing or carrying flags with the "III%" and similar symbols) attending pro-gun rights rallies, engaged in lawful open carry of firearms, and wearing tactical gear. In more extreme cases, however, Three Percenters have engaged in armed political protest involving threats of violence toward law enforcement and other government officials to further their ideologically driven goals. Several movement

supporters actively participated in the 2014 Bunkerville, Nevada, standoff, the 2016 takeover of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in Oregon, and other land-use disputes involving mining in Montana and Oregon. They have also been visible at pro-Trump and other right-leaning political rallies across the country since at least 2016, often claiming to act as "security."<sup>33</sup>

Most Three Percenters do not openly advocate offensive violence and deny embracing anti-government beliefs. Instead, they tend to frame their paramilitary, firearms, and other combat skills training in defensive terms. According to Vanderboegh, these and other activities conducted by actors claiming to be Three Percenters must be governed by four principles: moral strength, physical readiness, no first use of force, and no targeting of innocents.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless several actors who self-identified as Three Percenters have committed criminal activity, including attempting unprovoked, ideologically motivated violence, as well as engaging in armed protests directed at their perceived enemies.

In fact, the above-mentioned 2014 standoff in Bunkerville, Nevada, and 2016 militia takeover of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in Burns, Oregon, are two examples of Three Percenter involvement in armed provocations that they and other anti-government extremists viewed as justifiable defensive actions against a perceived overreaching and tyrannical government. Moreover, other rhetoric from Vanderboegh himself may have informed plots of non-defensive

violence. For example, allegedly inspired by Vanderboegh's violent militia fantasy novel "Absolved," in 2011 a group of four Georgia-based militia extremists were arrested for conspiring to commit terrorist attacks in Atlanta using explosives and the deadly biological agent ricin.<sup>35</sup>

As we will discuss in the next section, the Three Percenters' perceived enemies are not limited to the federal government. They, and many other segments of the wider militia movement, have broadened their list of adversaries in recent years to include Muslims, antifa, and immigrants unlawfully present in the United States ("illegals"). This incorporation of anti-Muslim hate into militia extremists' narratives has coincided with armed public protests and attempts at ideologically motivated violence against American Muslim faith-based institutions.

## **Incorporating Anti-Muslim Hate into Anti-Government Extremist Narratives and Target Sets**

While the contemporary U.S. anti-government extremist movement is primarily mobilized by fear and loathing toward the federal government, it is important to note its historical origins were substantially influenced by a type of white supremacy called "Christian Identity."<sup>36</sup> As the movement evolved over several decades, anti-government extremists largely eschewed overt bigotry. Nevertheless, much of their rhetoric and key narratives contain strong racial/antisemitic undertones



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**“Before conspiracy narratives became prevalent among prominent militia movement supporters, anti-Muslim extremists had propagated those theories for several years.”**

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and tend to closely parallel those of white supremacists, but often without their explicit hatred.<sup>37</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that although they represent two distinct segments of the broader U.S. far-right milieu, white supremacist and anti-government movements continue to frequently overlap in terms of supporters.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the federal government, additional targets of many militias' anxieties included multiple minority groups, largely expressed in code words, such as Jews (“Federal Reserve,” “Bankers/Financiers,” or “George Soros”), African-Americans (“inner city gangs” or “Black Lives Matter”) and Latinx (“National Council of La Raza,” “MS-13,” or “illegals”). For Muslims, this is expressed in both coded (“Muslim Brotherhood” or “Islamists”) and explicit bigotry (fears of “shariah” replacing the U.S. constitution and other laws).

Three factors appear to have facilitated militias' increasing fixation on and hostility toward Muslims, including activities such as armed protests outside of Muslim houses of worship and attempted acts of ideologically motivated violence.

First, after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks by al Qaeda, some political commentators<sup>39</sup> and public officials<sup>40</sup> explicitly made

associations between all Muslims, including those in the North America and Europe, and the violent extremist fringe of individuals claiming to act in the name of their faith. Second, a network of political and financial profiteers emerged in the post-9/11 socio-political climate to effectively exploit, amplify, and mainstream public fear of Islam and Muslims.<sup>41</sup> Often referred to as the “Counter-Jihad” movement by supporters<sup>42</sup> but dubbed the “Islamophobia network”<sup>43</sup> by critics, its rhetoric has not only enjoyed a certain level of public mainstream currency for several years, but also made its way into the discourse of the U.S. far-right militia extremist movement. Before conspiracy narratives became prevalent among prominent militia movement supporters, anti-Muslim extremists had propagated those theories for several years. Lastly, these narratives are reinforced among militia movement actors,<sup>44</sup> including the Three Percenters,<sup>45</sup> by the presence of current and former military personnel within the movement, including veterans returning from conflict zones in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The result has been a Muslim fear variant on older anti-government extremist narratives.<sup>46</sup> One illuminating example is an essay written by anti-government extremist Matthew Bracken called, “Tet, Take Two: Islam’s 2016

European Offensive.” His essay espouses a more anti-Muslim version of the earlier mentioned “New World Order” and “Civil War” narratives. This version, often referred to as the “Red-Green Axis” by its proponents, broadly argues that far-leftists and Islamists are conspiring together to undermine the foundational socio-political norms and institutions of Western nations.

Similar to the broader “civil war” narrative, some versions describe it as a slow-moving, ongoing set of events often characterized by ideological conflict as much as physical violence.<sup>47</sup> Other versions, like Bracken’s, see it as a forthcoming violent apocalyptic event enabled by the “political correctness” of “cultural Marxists.” Comparing it to the 1968 Tet offensive during the Vietnam War, Bracken states:

*The 1968 Tet Offensive involved approximately 80,000 armed Viet Cong infiltrators sneaking into Vietnamese cities and towns, (unnoticed by the “experts” in intelligence, I will add.) How many of the almost a million muhajirun [lit. “migrants,” but referring here to refugees] now loose in Europe will take up arms for the cause, after the first initiating wave of Tet 2016 terror attacks? [...]*



A member of the Georgia Security Forces (GSF) takes part in a military drill with group members of III% Georgia Security Force in Flovilla, Georgia in November 2016. The group is a part of a wider movement called “The Three Percenters (III%)” scattered across the U.S. (MOHAMMED ELSHAMY / Getty Images)

*Historians will study how this mass hijra invasion, and the consequent Tet 2016 and European Civil War came to happen. The truth is it was an inside job by the traitor class, the cultural Marxist open-border international socialists. First, they numbed and dulled their own compatriots into apathy, before opening the gates to the Islamist barbarians. They injected the paralyzing curare of multi-cultural political correctness into their own societies, in order to render them unable*

*to defend themselves from the planned attack.<sup>48</sup>*

The incorporation of anti-Muslim hatred into the militia movement’s core beliefs and conspiracy narratives coincides with an increased targeting of American Muslim communities and institutions. This increased targeting comes in two forms: mostly lawful, but intimidating, armed protests outside of mosques and faith-based nonprofits; and unlawful, ideologically motivated violence. An FBI Intelligence Bulletin dated May 28, 2015, titled, “Militia

Extremists Expand Target Sets to Include Muslims,” describes in detail how increasingly violent speech from militia movement supporters has the potential to lead to “additional harassment of or violence against Muslims” in the United States.<sup>49</sup>

The graphic on the next page provides several illustrative examples of Three Percenters targeting American Muslim institutions and communities.





# Three Percenter Anti-Muslim Armed Protests and Terrorist Plots

The actors listed are identified as part of the Three Percenter movement who either engaged in armed protest outside of a Muslim house of worship or else planned or carried out a terrorist attack.

Date	Actor's name (age) or organization	Plot/Incident	Plot/Incident Summary
Sun., Nov. 22, 2015	<b>Bureau on American-Islamic Relations</b>	Armed Participation in Protest	A militia extremist group calling itself the Bureau of American Islamic Relations (BAIR), a group associated with the wider Three Percenter movement <sup>50</sup> , conducted an armed protest outside of a Sunni Muslim mosque in Irving, Texas. <sup>51</sup>
Sat., April 2, 2016	<b>Bureau on American-Islamic Relations</b>	Armed Participation in Protest	The Bureau of American Islamic Relations (BAIR) conducted an armed protest outside of a Nation of Islam mosque in South Dallas, Texas. <sup>52</sup>
Mon., Aug. 1, 2016	<b>Georgia Security Force III%</b>	Armed Participation in Protest	In protest of a local zoning hearing to discuss the proposed construction of a mosque, a group called the Georgia Security Force III% filmed a video of themselves outside a church, while armed, expressing their opposition to the mosque. <sup>53</sup>
Fri., Oct. 14, 2016	<b>Patrick Stein, 47 Curtis Allen, 49 Gavin Wright, 49</b>	Terrorist Plot	A trio of militia extremists calling themselves “the Crusaders” were arrested by FBI agents for attempting to carry out a terrorist attack against Muslims living in Garden City, Kansas. <sup>54</sup> Despite denials from Chris Hill, national leader of the group Three Percent Security Force (IISF), an investigation by the Southern Poverty Law Center strongly suggests that Stein may have previously affiliated himself with the Kansas chapter of IISF. <sup>55</sup>
Fri., Nov. 11, 2016	<b>Unnamed Three Percenter supporters</b>	Armed Participation in Protest	Individuals on motorcycles and in pickup trucks circled the Dallas office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, an American Muslim advocacy group, while displaying signs affiliated with the Three Percenter movement. <sup>56</sup>
Sat., Aug. 5, 2017	<b>Michael Hari, 47 Michael McWhorter, 29 Joe Morris, 22</b>	Terrorist Plot	Three extremists belonging to the “White Rabbit Three Percent Militia,” attacked a mosque in Bloomington, Minnesota, with a pipe bomb. No casualties were reported from the incident. <sup>57</sup> Three months later, they attacked an abortion clinic in Champaign, IL, before their eventual arrest. <sup>58</sup>
Sat., April 21, 2018	<b>Michigan United Patriots Three Percent Ohio III Percent Security Force</b>	Armed Participation in Protest	A coterie of far-right provocateurs held an “anti-Sharia” rally in Dearborn, Michigan, a city with a large Muslim population. Several armed extremist groups acting as event “security” were among the attendees, including at least two groups identifying with the Three Percenter movement. <sup>59</sup>
Tues., Jan. 22, 2019	<b>Brian F. Colaneri, 20 Vincent R. Ventromile, 19 Andrew C. Crysel, 18 Nicholas Pheilshifter, 16</b>	Terrorist Plot	Four individuals plotted to attack Islamberg, a hamlet in upstate New York. <sup>60</sup> At least one of the plotters, Ventromile, had supported the Three Percenter movement on social media before his arrest. <sup>61</sup> Far-right conspiratorial paranoia made Islamberg subject to three annual protests from far-right actors, including Three Percenter groups. <sup>62</sup> In 2015, a Tennessee man was arrested for trying to assemble a strike team of militia extremists to attack the hamlet. All plotters pled guilty <sup>63</sup> and received prison sentences ranging from four to 12 years. <sup>64</sup>

It is important to point out here that, given the focus of our brief, this list is limited to Three Perceners and does not include cases of other militia extremists or other far-right (e.g., white supremacists or violent anti-Muslim single-issue extremists) acts of violence and armed protest.



## Forecast

Through 2021 and up to at least 2024, we expect militia extremists, including Three Percenters, to continue their efforts to recruit and radicalize target audiences as well as mobilize existing movement supporters.

In an earlier Terrain Assessment published by the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, formerly the Center for Global Policy, we noted that the recent surge in armed U.S. far-right mobilization was associated with several national-level factors: deepening socio-political polarization, the public health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic downturn caused by COVID-19 and public health responses, and the multifaceted issues fueling the anti-racism protests. We also pointed out that the policy challenges posed by the resurgent armed far-right mobilization were further complicated by heated rhetoric from national elected officials, counter-violence from far-left actors, and the poor quality of intelligence from local/regional fusion centers.<sup>65</sup>

We also observed all these associated factors have not abated; in some cases, they have intensified. Our ongoing analysis of the current socio-political climate leads us to believe this remains the case. Therefore, we maintain the view that America is facing an elevated risk of social upheaval, including political violence, for several years to come.

Our conclusion is based on the following reasons, including lingering tensions associated with the results of the 2020 presidential election, an additional spike in coronavirus infections that may roll back efforts to reopen the economy, continued post-election far-left violence,<sup>66</sup> evidence of ongoing disinformation efforts related to COVID-19 protective measures, and fear about mounting civil unrest spreading to rural, predominately white sections of the country.

Against this tumultuous backdrop, some far-right actors – including Three Percenters and groups/individuals associated with the broader militia extremist movement – may be encouraged and/or enabled by the more permissive socio-political environment to plot and attempt acts of ideologically motivated targeted violence against their perceived enemies. We believe this elevated risk extends to Muslims, and those perceived to be Muslim (e.g., Sikhs), because of four additional factors:

### ■ The “QAnon” anti-government conspiracy movement’s increased association with anti-Muslim hate:

QAnon, a once-fringe movement, was politically ascendant and entering into parts of mainstream political discourse until presidential powers peacefully transitioned from Trump to President Joseph Biden. While ascendant, the movement had embraced medical conspiracy narratives about COVID-19, several of which included Muslims.<sup>67</sup> For example, an internet meme circulating widely among anti-government extremist communities shows an imagined

timeline in which mask-wearing public health mandates eventually lead to imposition of religious full-body coverings (burqas).<sup>68</sup> In the run-up to the 2020 U.S. presidential election, QAnon became more popular among militia extremists – many of whom have notable histories of anti-Muslim activities<sup>69</sup> – and at least 78 QAnon supporters ran for congressional office,<sup>70</sup> two of whom won. One of these candidates, U.S. Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), is particularly notable because she openly embraced anti-Muslim hate, antisemitic tropes, and anti-Black racism<sup>71</sup> while managing to win support from several high-profile political figures,<sup>72</sup> including Trump.<sup>73</sup>

Although at least some supporters of the wider QAnon movement appear to be fracturing and exiting from it, others appear to be maintaining their belief in the larger conspiracy, while others still appear to be targets of recruitment from neo-Nazis and other white supremacists.<sup>74</sup> Regardless of the QAnon movement’s trajectory, it has created an additional conspiratorial avenue for anti-Muslim bigotry to enter into extremist movements closely associated with violence.

### ■ The importance of anti-Muslim animus in online disinformation efforts amid recently demonstrated public vulnerability to false rumors during anti-racism protests:

Anti-Muslim hate has been a substantial component of past disinformation efforts.<sup>75</sup> The current socio-political climate provides a ripe environment for any actors, foreign or domestic, to engage in further “fake news” propagation. A recent example of these two factors converging



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**“An investigation ... found one anti-government group with ties to the Three Percenter movement used its Facebook page to coordinate surveillance on 10 houses of worship and faith-based institutions throughout the U.S. Southeast, northern Great Plains, and northern Rocky Mountains.”**

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is a viral social media post that falsely claimed a Muslim “shariah patrol force,” in partnership with antifa actors, will hit the streets of Minneapolis once the city’s police department is dissolved.<sup>76</sup> This comes against the backdrop of a recent study by social media analysis firm Graphika, suggesting Russian foreign actors had shown interest in boosting QAnon content.<sup>77</sup> Such efforts are likely to intensify if another “trigger” event precipitating another shock occurs, like George Floyd’s killing did for the recent nationwide anti-racism protests.

■ **Anti-government extremists’ recent history of involvement in surveilling Muslim communities and faith-based institutions:**

The earlier-mentioned May 28, 2015, FBI report also noted that “multiple sources with varying levels of access report conducting surveillance in diverse locations including Alaska, Arizona, Indiana, Montana, New York, North and South Carolina, Utah, and Texas.”<sup>78</sup> Our review of open sources suggests such activities remain ongoing. An investigation published in April 2019 by the Southern Poverty Law Center found one anti-government group with ties to the

Three Percenter movement used its Facebook page to coordinate surveillance on 10 houses of worship and faith-based institutions throughout the U.S. Southeast, northern Great Plains, and northern Rocky Mountains.<sup>79</sup>

Another group we identified<sup>80</sup> – which explicitly propagates the “Red-Green Axis” narrative, openly supports the far-right crypto-fascist group Proud Boys,<sup>81</sup> and displays a large Three Percenter image on its website’s homepage – claims one of its founders covertly visited and gathered information on several U.S. mosques, Islamic centers, and Muslim businesses<sup>82</sup> for several years. The founder’s surveillance included in-person activity as recently as June 5, 2020.<sup>83</sup> While the purpose of these visits appears to be research aimed at perpetuating anti-Muslim fear, it may inspire others to conduct similar activities, but toward more violent ends.

■ **The need for the anti-government militia movement to identify new objects of fixation:**

Anti-government militia extremists are constantly in search of new narratives to justify their political relevance<sup>84</sup> and flashpoint events/

issues to exploit.<sup>85</sup> As noted earlier, their ideology and narratives are malleable enough to adopt new perceived enemies and issues of interest. In past five years, this growing antagonism, sometimes violent, toward Muslims, antifa, and “illegals.” Most recently, this has also included intense demonstrations of opposition, often armed and sometimes violent, to COVID-19 public health measures (e.g., mask-wearing and shutdowns), Black Lives Matter, and the recent 2020 national election results.

We expect militia attention to shift again as the Biden administration takes power, elements of the QAnon movement fracture due to its apocalyptic predictions failing to come true,<sup>86</sup> and the prevalence of COVID-19 eventually waning due to ongoing mass vaccination efforts. As far-right actors are likely to feel threatened by the new administration’s perceived progressive outlook – including symbolically by its diverse staff and Cabinet picks<sup>87</sup> – we assess that Muslims may once again become an increasingly attractive target of rhetorical and physical attacks from supporters of the militia movement, including Three Percenters.





## Policy Recommendations

To mitigate the risk of violence and marginalize movements promoting extremism and hate, we offer the following recommendations to policymakers in government and decisionmakers in civil society, respectively:

### **First, increase public awareness and understanding of the potential threats the Three Percenter movement and the broader U.S. far right pose, in terms of their associated extremism, hate, and violence, to local communities.**

For government policymakers, this means investing further in academic and scholarly research to increase understanding of the phenomenon. According to a bipartisan panel of experts convened by the Stimson Center, the U.S. government has spent an estimated \$2.8 trillion on counterterrorism between FY 2002 and 2017.<sup>88</sup> Comparatively little has gone toward research that generates further scholarly and empirical insights that can be used to combat ideologically motivated violence. For example, a database search of research grants on terrorism given by the U.S. Justice Department’s National Institute of Justice revealed a total of 77 awards amounting to \$69,592,368 were declared and/or distributed between 1999 and 2020.<sup>89</sup>

In a similar vein, a 2019 fact sheet from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Office of University Programs states its efforts are responsible for directly providing \$140 million to its

“Centers of Excellence,” university-based entities conducting research that advance homeland security-related scientific research.<sup>90</sup> The fact sheet also states that these centers have attracted “over \$420 million in additional funding from external sources for homeland security research, development, and education.”<sup>91</sup>

For non-governmental actors, especially local citizen activists and other members of civil society, this means drawing upon best practices to raise awareness of and marginalize ideologically driven voices of violence, extremism, and hate. Several organizations have produced resources containing detailed strategies,<sup>92</sup> model campaigns,<sup>93</sup> and useful principles<sup>94</sup> for elected officials, communities, and grassroots advocates to use. In the words of veteran civil rights advocate Ken Toole, one of the goals “should be to inform the public and to call into the question the premises that underlie extremist movements – in the process, initiating meaningful community discussion of pluralism, tolerance, and the values necessary to the conduct of public business in a free society.”<sup>95</sup>

For law enforcement agencies and supporting policymakers, this means significantly investing in training for patrol officers, analysts/investigators, academy instructors/field trainer staff, and executives/managers on domestic ideologically motivated violence. Unfortunately, in times of budget constraints, quality officer training<sup>96</sup> – which is crucial for effective policing – is typically one of the first items to get slashed.<sup>97</sup>

However, even in years when agencies were not typically facing budget shortfalls, critical programs like State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training (SLATT) were in danger of not receiving funding due to congressional neglect.<sup>98</sup> (SLATT is a federally funded training program established after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing to teach local, state, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies about various terrorist threats they may encounter from across the ideological spectrum.)<sup>99</sup> To the extent possible, law enforcement executives are urged to not slash funding for training. However, we also advocate that federal policymakers, including members of Congress, allocate increased funding for research-informed programs like SLATT, which offer terrorism awareness trainings at no cost<sup>100</sup> to law enforcement.

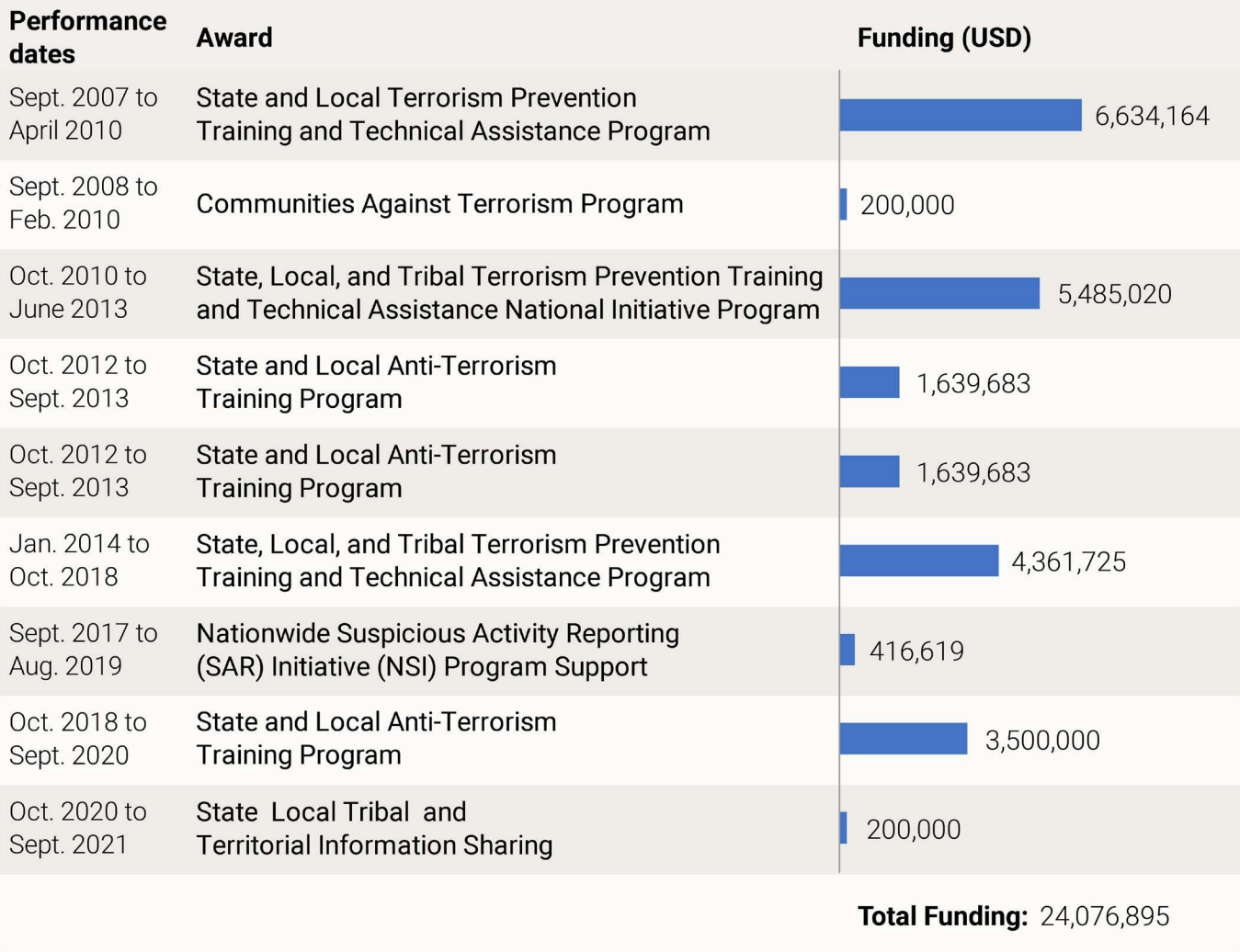
### **Second, before proposing additional federal domestic terrorism statutes related to penalty enhancements, officials must rigorously enforce existing federal and state laws and carefully study their effects.**

As Americans’ public awareness of domestic terrorist actors increased over the past several years – especially after the violence associated with the Aug. 12, 2017, “Unite The Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia – there has been a heated debate over whether<sup>101</sup> or not<sup>102</sup> additional federal domestic terrorism statutes are needed to curb a widely perceived resurgence of far-right extremist violence in the United States. At the same time, an August 2019 report by the Brennan



# State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training (SLATT) Funds Awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)

From federal funding accounts for the DOJ's SLATT Program awarded to the Institute for Intergovernmental Research



Source: Authors' analysis of data taken from [usaspending.gov](https://www.usaspending.gov)

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Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law identified 73 federal laws, including predicate offenses related to terrorism, hate crimes statutes, and other criminal violations, that can be used to prosecute perpetrators of far-right ideologically motivated violence in America.<sup>103</sup>

A June 2020 study by the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection (ICAP) at the Georgetown University School of Law found that every state in the country has "at least one constitutional or statutory provision that applies to [legally proscribing] the type of paramilitary and private militia activity that may arise at

future rallies similar to the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville."<sup>104</sup> In total, the ICAP report identified 116 state laws<sup>105</sup> that address at least one of the following issues: "(1) constitutional provisions requiring the subordination of the military to civilian authorities; (2) statutes restricting unauthorized private militia activity;



(3) anti-paramilitary-activity criminal laws; and (4) prohibitions on the false assumption of the uniform or duties of a peace officer or member of the military.”<sup>106</sup> Finally, an April 2018 article published in the *UCLA Law Review* comprehensively surveying local and state laws as well as federal court case precedent found that “state and local officials have significant latitude to enact and enforce laws that restrict the intimidating display of firearms at public demonstrations. Instead of inhibiting constitutional rights, these laws protect people’s rights to speak freely and to peaceably assemble.”<sup>107</sup>

These studies collectively suggest that ample legal authorities and latitude already exist to prosecute criminal offenses often associated with Three Percenter and broader anti-government militia movements. To the extent any new laws may be needed, state and local governments may wish to consider statutes and ordinances that prohibit bringing firearms to public demonstrations and prohibitions on paramilitary activities where none currently exist. Regarding the latter set of authorities, ICAP points out that only 29 of 50 U.S. states have anti-paramilitary laws. The lack of anti-paramilitary laws in a neighboring state could cause some groups, depending on their location, to simply cross state lines to avoid legal troubles.<sup>108</sup>

However, it bears re-emphasizing that enforcing existing laws must also remain a priority. For example, Michigan has all four categories of laws described in



**A girl waves a Confederate battle flag during an August 2018 Richmond Virginia protest against recommendations to remove a Jefferson Davis statue. Protesters include the Virginia Task Force of Three Percenters. (CHIP SOMODEVILLA / Getty Images)**

the ICAP report, yet it continues to have a longstanding and robust anti-government militia scene. This includes several groups, including ones that identified as Three Percenters, that showed up armed to an April 2018 “anti-shariah” rally in Dearborn, Michigan, a heavily Arab and Muslim municipality.<sup>109</sup> More recently, in what some analysts now see as a prelude to events at the U.S. Capitol complex on Jan. 6, 2021, Michigan is also where several armed militia men stormed the state capitol building on April 30, 2020,<sup>110</sup> and where law enforcement prevented a plot by several other anti-government extremists attempted to kidnap Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) in October 2020.<sup>111</sup>

That said, any proposed domestic terrorism statutes related to delineating roles and responsibilities among federal agencies<sup>112</sup> are somewhat of less concern from a privacy, civil

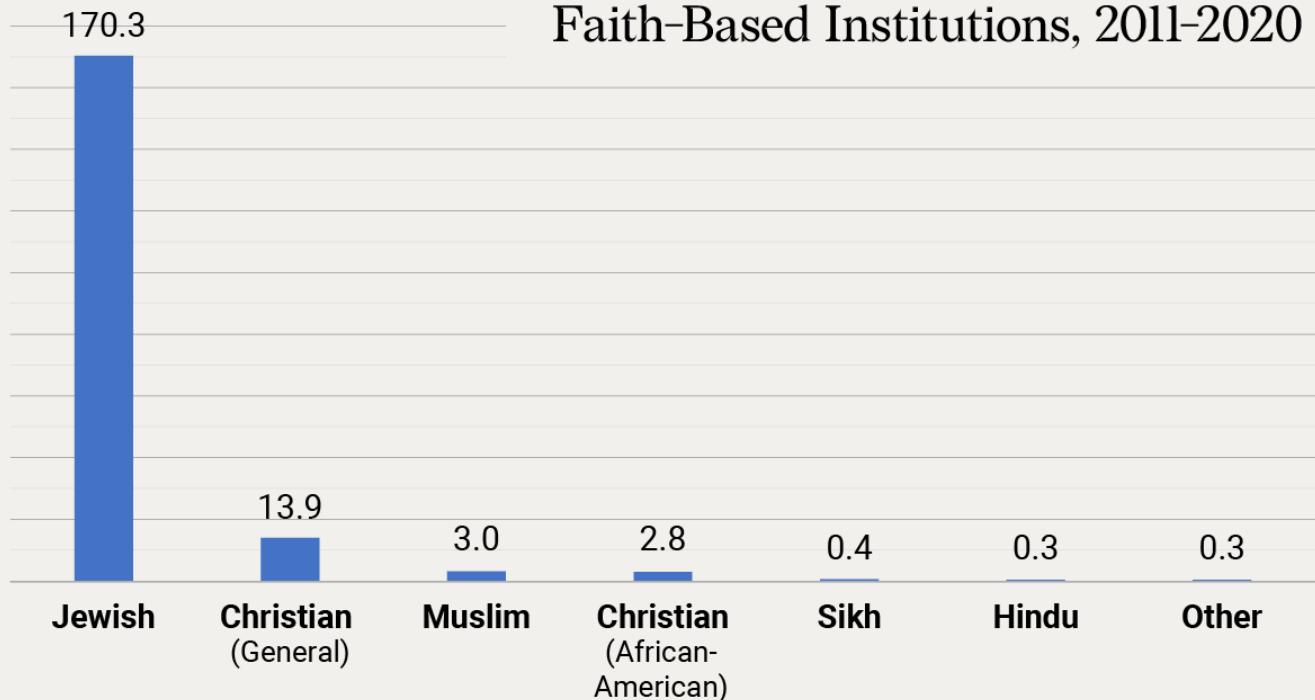
rights, and civil liberties standpoint, and may be needed to enhance coordination and government efficiency. Nevertheless, we also recommend a close re-examination, and where appropriate, updating of these legislative proposals. For example, one widely cited bill<sup>113</sup> contains language about creating new structures within these agencies, including a Domestic Intelligence Executive Committee, which at minimum warrants caution and careful scrutiny to avoid government overreach. Moreover, the same bill only explicitly mentions mandating an assessment of threats posed by white supremacists, including infiltration of law enforcement and military entities, but no mention of the same thing for activities conducted by anti-government extremists or other far-right actors. We find this to be a significant oversight considering that entire organizations (e.g., Oath Keepers) and sub-sections (“Constitutional





## NSGP Sub-Grants Awarded to Faith-Based Institutions, 2011-2020

MILLIONS USD



Source: Authors' analysis of data taken from [usaspending.gov](https://usaspending.gov)

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Sheriffs”) of the wider far-right anti-government movement are specifically dedicated to recruitment of law enforcement and military personnel.

We also recommend, however, careful study and systematic empirical evaluation of what legal authorities are most effective and where any gaps may exist, particularly at the federal level. Unfortunately, as the Brennan Center has pointed out, court data published by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) through its Legal Information Office Network System is often unreliable because it frequently gets misreported.<sup>114</sup> The issue is further compounded by domestic terrorism prosecution data getting published without including the court case docket numbers that would allow third-party researchers

to connect DOJ records to the court cases themselves.<sup>115</sup> We recommend Congress ameliorate this issue by passing legislative relief that requires the DOJ to publish the docket numbers alongside their data.

### **Third, enhance physical security for nonprofits and places of worship that are often the object of fixation or targeted violence by militia extremists.**

Examples like the ideologically motivated shootings in Halle, Germany,<sup>116</sup> and Jeffersontown, Kentucky,<sup>117</sup> show how physical security measures prevented assailants from entering houses of worship and inflicting catastrophic loss of life on their congregations. For many houses of worship and faith-based nonprofits, especially those that operate on a tight

budget, paying for training and physical security enhancements – such as camera systems, locks, lighting, intrusion detection, alarms, access control systems – could be too costly.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offers security training assistance and grants to pay for physical security upgrades to facilities through its Non-Profit Security Grant Program (NSGP). Unfortunately, this help is not reaching several underserved faith communities that also happen to comprise predominantly people of color. Amid resurgent far-right activity across the nation, we assess many of these same underserved communities to be in a state of elevated vulnerability (e.g., Muslims and those often perceived to be),<sup>118</sup>



Members of the Kentucky Three Percenters talk with supporters of the NFAC (Not F---g Around Coalition), an all-black militia during an NFAC rally in Louisville, Ky. in July 2020. (JEFF DEAN / AFP via Getty Images)

and/or to have long histories of being violently targeted (e.g., African-American churches).<sup>119</sup> For example, using data available through USA Spending.gov, our analysis of FEMA's NSGP, which provides sub-grants to faith-based institutions for security upgrades, found that Muslims and those often perceived to be Muslims (e.g., Sikhs and Hindus), received just under \$3.8 million out of approximately \$189.2 million awarded to faith-based institutions since 2011.<sup>120</sup> (For more on our analysis of NSGP grant funds, including how we define "faith-based," see Appendix B.)

Our analysis of the data, and the funding asymmetries it reveals, is consistent with prior investigations

and reporting by The Forward,<sup>121</sup> Times of Israel,<sup>122</sup> and Jewish Telegraphic Agency.<sup>123</sup> The reasons behind the disparities are complicated and varied. Some of this, as a 2011 investigation by The Forward shows, can be explained by a coalition of well-resourced organizations effectively educating local communities about the grant process, providing them with technical assistance, and lobbying their elected officials.<sup>124</sup> Not all communities, especially ones that are predominantly of color, may have those same levels of internal resources at their disposal. Attempting to apply for federal funds is an often complicated and time-consuming process that few communities with limited time and material resources can afford.

A December 2019 report on the NSGP by DHS' Homeland Security Advisory Council sheds further light on the matter, pointing to additional structural and bureaucratic obstacles affecting prospective applicants. For example, it stated that "there is not a consistent approach to preparing and training FBOs [faith-based organizations] for the security of their communities."<sup>125</sup> It also noted that, "The FEMA Nonprofit Security Grant Program is a vital source of funding for FBOs to bolster their security, but the funding level is insufficient, and the application process is complex, opaque, and long."<sup>126</sup>

We concur with the report's findings that there needs to be a standardized approach, led by DHS, to help train faith-based institutions with security protocols. We also concur with the report's recommendations to expand funding for the NSGP and establish an office with DHS to help under-resourced institutions navigate the technical demands of the federal grants process.<sup>127</sup>

In addition to that, we recommend that DHS take steps to ensure that the NSGP is not tied to programs that may have the effect of extending government surveillance into houses of worship without evidence of specific criminal wrongdoing. For example, this fiscal year's Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) contains language not seen in previous fiscal years' NOFOs that goes beyond strictly enhancing the physical and training capacities of sub-awardees and includes making "intelligence and information sharing" a priority.<sup>128</sup> This has elicited concern



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“...the government’s response to known connections of law enforcement officers to violent racist and militant groups has been strikingly insufficient.”

Former FBI agent Michael German

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from at least one American Muslim organization, resulting in a statement that may discourage potential Muslim grant seekers from applying for funds.<sup>129</sup>

If, per the recommendations of 2019 Homeland Security Advisory Council report, NOFO language regarding intelligence and information sharing has to do with informing local communities that are the potential targets of ideologically motivated violence, then this is an encouraging development. However, if this sharing means connecting the NSGP to measures that would put local communities under surveillance with no evidence of any specific illicit activity, as others contend, then we strongly recommend program officials and policymakers revert to standards set forth in earlier years. At minimum, we strongly recommend clarifying what this new priority entails.

**Fourth, law enforcement, military, and intelligence community leaders need to implement stricter measures and policies to purge militia extremists, Oath Keepers, and Three Percenters from their ranks.**

Protecting the First Amendment, including the expression of views many find to be unpopular or distasteful, is of paramount

importance and central to the health of a democracy. At the same time, U.S. case law has consistently recognized that freedom of expression is not absolute and that under extremely specific circumstances there are compelling reasons to carefully circumscribe the otherwise unencumbered exercise of this right. One of these circumstances has been to allow law enforcement entities to reprimand and, when necessary, terminate the employment of individuals for expressing themselves in ways that erode public confidence in the organization’s mission, such as explicitly racist speech – while on or off duty.<sup>130</sup>

Despite the existence of this legal latitude, an August 2020 report written by former FBI agent and far-right terrorism expert Michael German noted that, overall, “the government’s response to known connections of law enforcement officers to violent racist and militant groups has been strikingly insufficient.”<sup>131</sup> The report largely focused on examples of officers expressing explicit racism and/or having ties to white supremacist groups and ideologies. However, it also documented cases of law enforcement agencies taking actions against officers expressing support for far-right groups/movements that eschew explicit racism such as the Three

Percenters, other militia movement actors, and the Proud Boys.<sup>132</sup>

We recommend the following measures to remove extremists from public safe/security agencies, including:

- Enforcing or expanding existing prohibitions and programs banning active participation in anti-government militia extremist groups, Oath Keepers, and Three Percenters, not just hate groups; and
- Taking administrative action(s), such as:
  - Moving extremist-affiliated staff from operational positions to administrative jobs;
  - Downgrading or eliminating security clearances and/or access to classified or sensitive information; and/or
  - Terminating employment, if an employee’s behavior violates department policy, seriously erodes trust within the communities they serve, and/or engages in potential criminal conduct.

Further, departments and agencies should screen police officer applicants/candidates for membership in militias or other extremist groups as part of their hiring process. Recruiters and background investigators should ask applicants/candidates if they have ever been affiliated with a





militia group or related activities as well as establish constitutionally consistent departmental policies on expressions of militia and other far-right anti-government extremism such as tattoos, social media/online postings, patches, and insignias, among other things.<sup>133</sup>

## Conclusion

The recent history of violent threats against perceived enemies, ranging from various targeted groups that include American Muslims, to the

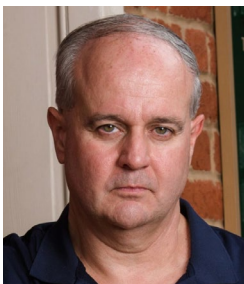
Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol illustrates the growing threat from far-right extremists. This includes supporters of the anti-government movement who appear to have taken a prominent role in the violence that day. Unfortunately, the Capitol riot is merely one of the most recent violent acts carried out by these extremists. It will not be the last.

For these reasons, it is incumbent upon our publicly elected officials, law enforcement actors and members of the intelligence

community to finally recognize the severity of this threat, gain a sense of urgency about it, and begin the formulation of useful strategies, policies, and countermeasures to appropriately address it. The attack on the U.S. Capitol is not the end of far-right extremism. Rather, as we forecast, until necessary policy measures are taken, this incident – the culmination of years-long rhetoric and activities gone largely unchecked – has the potential to usher in a new, more dangerous phase of far-right extremist violence in the coming years. □



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*The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not an official policy or position of the Newlines Institute for Strategy & Policy.*



## Appendix A: Beyond “Militias” – A Broader Snapshot of the U.S. Far-Right Anti-government Movement

As noted earlier, the U.S. far-right anti-government movement is not limited to militias. Militias are one of six dominant sub-movements that constitute the broader anti-government movement. Below is a brief description of each of these other sub-movements

■ **Violent tax protesters:** Not to be confused with left-wing “tax resisters,” violent tax protesters believe violence is often an acceptable response to U.S. federal government efforts to levy taxes on its citizens, which they perceive to be invalid, and use a wide range of pseudo-legal theories to advocate for their views.<sup>134</sup> One of their most common pseudo-legal arguments is that the 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which allows the U.S. federal government to collect income taxes from its citizens, is invalid because it was never properly ratified. Courts have consistently rejected these and other such claims.<sup>135</sup>

■ **Sovereign citizens:** Similar to tax protesters, and heavily overlapping with them in movement supporters at this time,<sup>136</sup> sovereign citizens believe many, if not most, federal, state, and local laws – beyond issues of taxation – do not apply to

them. Many of them believe elected county sheriffs are the highest legally valid form of government currently in existence. They also use a variety of other pseudo-legal theories to justify their views. Unlike most other parts of the anti-government movement and broader far-right, sizable numbers of minorities, such as many African-American sovereign citizens who identify as “Moors,” and women are part of this sub-movement.<sup>137</sup>

■ **Constitutional sheriffs:** They believe elected county sheriffs have the legal authority to refuse to enforce and “nullify” laws they deem to be against the U.S. Constitution. Their most high-profile advocate is Richard Mack, a former sheriff who founded the anti-government group Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association.<sup>138</sup>

■ **Far-right survivalists/ “preppers”:** Survivalist and “prepping” lifestyles are not

inherently far-right; in fact, there are some who self-identify as left-wing.<sup>139</sup> However, its emphasis on hyper-individualism, weapons training, and constant fears of societal collapse can make the lifestyle an entry point into far-right belief systems and conspiracy narratives, an observation that other survivalists/ “preppers” have openly acknowledged.<sup>140</sup>

■ **Conspiracy propagandists:** These are actors whose central organizing principle involves consuming and spreading conspiracy narratives. Within the context of the anti-government movement, these are social movements without a defined organizational leadership or membership such as QAnon and Birtherism, as well as discrete organizations with a leadership hierarchy and defined membership, such as the conspiracy-oriented website Infowars.



## Appendix B: Analyzing and Categorizing the NSGP Funds

To provide a window into the distribution of funds from the Non-Profit Security Grant Program (NSGP), the authors downloaded data from USAspending.gov into an Excel spreadsheet. The data, downloaded on Aug. 12, 2020, contains 2,332 entries on sub-awards given between 2008 and 2020.

We categorized the data into 13 categories, seven of which are “faith-based.” For the purposes of this publication, we adopted, with slight modification, Wolfgang Bielefeld and William Cleveland’s definition of a faith-based organization: A nonprofit/not-for-profit civil society entity whose provision of services – political advocacy, social work, mental health, poverty alleviation, religious work, medical care, etc. – is influenced through a religious lens by means of organizational control, expression of religious identity/values, and/or program implementation.<sup>141</sup>

Entities whose organizational mission or values statement met this definition were sorted into one of the seven faith-based categories. Those that did not were placed in the other six non-faith-based categories. Below are the 13 categories we created to sort the NSGP data:

### Faith-Based Categories

#### 1. Faith-based (Jewish):

NSGP funds awarded to U.S.-located Jewish faith-based organizations.

#### 2. Faith-based (Christian):

NSGP funds awarded to U.S.-located non-predominantly African-American Christian faith-based organizations.

#### 3. Faith-based (African-American Christian):

In America’s history of coping with terrorism, like other Black civic/political institutions, African-American churches have been longstanding targets of ideologically motivated violence. Therefore, they merit specific attention as a unique category of analysis in the context of this publication. This category is defined as NSGP funds awarded to U.S.-located Christian faith-based organizations that are institutionally affiliated with historically-predominant African-American Christian denominations (e.g., African American Episcopal; Church of God in Christ) or institutions in theological communion

with predominantly white Christian denominations, but whose organization-specific congregants and/or staff are demographically majority-African-American (e.g., a Black-majority church affiliated with the United Methodist Church).<sup>142</sup>

#### 4. Faith-based (Muslim):

NSGP funds awarded to U.S.-located Muslim faith-based organizations.

#### 5. Faith-based (Sikh):

NSGP funds awarded to U.S.-located Sikh faith-based organizations.

#### 6. Faith-based (Hindu):

NSGP funds awarded to U.S.-located Hindu faith-based organizations.

#### 7. Faith-based (Other):

NSGP funds awarded to U.S.-located faith-based organizations that do not fit into one of the above-mentioned categories.

### Non-Faith-Based Categories

**8. Medical:** NSGP funds awarded to a U.S.-located non-faith-based organization whose primary function is to provide medical care, broadly defined.

**9. Higher education:** NSGP funds awarded to a U.S.-located non-faith-based organization whose primary function is to provide higher education, broadly defined.

**10. State government:** NSGP funds awarded to a U.S. state government entity (e.g., a state law enforcement agency; a state land commission).

**11. Local government:** NSGP funds awarded to a sub-state-level U.S. government entity (e.g., a county or municipal agency).

**12. Other entity:** NSGP funds awarded to a U.S.-located entity that is not faith-based, a U.S. state or local actor, and whose primary organizational function is to provide medical care or higher education, broadly defined.

**13. Foreign entities:** NSGP funds awarded to an entity that is not located in the United States.





## Endnotes

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was a largely regional group whose affiliated supporters, group members, and organizational leaders were significantly involved in other entities that made national impacts. For example, TPR leaders simultaneously led another far-right organization, called the National Coalition of Constitutional Patriotic Americans, which was responsible for coordinating nationwide gun rallies on April 14, 2018.

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