



# NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR COUNTERING DOMESTIC TERRORISM

JUNE 2021

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON



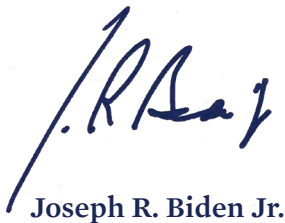
Too often over the past several years, American communities have felt the wrenching pain of domestic terrorism. Black church members slaughtered during their bible study in Charleston. A synagogue in Pittsburgh targeted for supporting immigrants. A gunman spraying bullets at an El Paso Walmart to target Latinos. It goes against everything our country strives to stand for in the world, and it poses a direct challenge to America's national security, our democracy, and our national unity. This National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism lays out a comprehensive approach to addressing the threat while safeguarding bedrock American civil rights and civil liberties – values that make us who we are as a nation.

Americans hold a wide array of beliefs. That is part of what makes the United States such a diverse and extraordinary nation. Preserving and safeguarding constitutionally protected expression and freedom of association are national security priorities. Our rights and our historic liberties are an intrinsic part of what makes America strong. So this Strategy is narrowly tailored to focus

specifically on addressing violence and the factors that lead to violence – violence that violates the law, threatens public safety, and infringes on the free expression of ideas.

We cannot ignore this threat or wish it away. Preventing domestic terrorism and reducing the factors that fuel it demand a multifaceted response across the Federal Government and beyond. That includes working with our critical partners in state, local, tribal, and territorial governments and in civil society, the private sector, academia, and local communities, as well as with our allies and foreign partners. We have to take both short-term steps to counter the very real threats of today and longer-term measures to diminish the emerging threats of tomorrow.

This is a project that should unite all Americans. Together we must affirm that domestic terrorism has no place in our society. We must work to root out the hatreds that can too often drive violence. And we must recommit to defend and protect those basic freedoms, which belong to all Americans in equal measure, and which are not only the foundation of our democracy— they are our enduring advantage in the world.



Joseph R. Biden Jr.



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# INTRODUCTION

Domestic terrorism is not a new threat in the United States. It has, over centuries, taken many American lives and spilled much American blood – especially in communities deliberately and viciously targeted on the basis of hatred and bigotry. After the Civil War, for example, the Ku Klux Klan waged a campaign of terror to intimidate Black voters and their white supporters and deprive them of political power, killing and injuring untold numbers of Americans. The Klan and other white supremacists continued to terrorize Black Americans and other minorities in the decades that followed. In recent years, we have seen a resurgence of this and related threats in one horrific incident after another: the shooting and killing of 23 people at a retail store in El Paso; the vehicular killing of a peaceful protestor in Charlottesville; the shooting and killing of three people at a garlic festival in Gilroy; the arson committed at a mosque in Victoria, Texas; the appalling rise in violence and xenophobia directed against Asian Americans; the surge in anti-Semitism; and more.

Domestic terrorist attacks in the United States also have been committed frequently by those opposing our government institutions. In 1995, in the largest single act of domestic terrorism in U.S. history, an anti-government violent extremist detonated a bomb at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people – including 19 children – and injuring hundreds of others. In 2016, an anti-authority violent extremist ambushed, shot, and killed five police officers in Dallas. In 2017, a lone gunman wounded four people at a congressional baseball practice. And just months ago, on January 6, 2021, Americans witnessed an unprecedented attack against a core institution of our democracy: the U.S. Congress.

Some aspects of the Federal Government’s response also are not new. During Reconstruction, the U.S. Department of Justice was created and immediately focused on prosecuting and convicting hundreds of Klan members in connection with their vicious campaign of domestic terrorism. In the 1980s, Joint Terrorism Task Forces, now a nationwide staple of Federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement cooperation against all forms of terrorism, were created to maximize information sharing and address the full range of terrorism threats, both domestic and international. While domestic terrorism’s roots and elements of our response may be longstanding, domestic terrorism is both persistent and evolving – and, according to



the U.S. Intelligence Community and law enforcement, “elevated” in the threat it now poses. This National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism provides an overarching approach to address today’s manifestation of the domestic terrorism threat as well as the evolving forms that the threat may take in the years ahead.

The intelligence and law enforcement communities have articulated publicly the threat posed by domestic terrorism today. That articulation draws on the comprehensive assessment of the threat that President Biden requested on his first full day in office. That assessment was conducted by appropriate elements of the U.S. Government and provided to the President. It was also released publicly in summary form on March 17, 2021 (see page 10). Today’s domestic terrorists espouse a range of violent ideological motivations, including racial or ethnic bigotry

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and hatred as well as anti–government or anti–authority sentiment. They also take on a variety of forms, from lone actors and small groups of informally aligned individuals, to networks exhorting and targeting violence toward specific communities, to violent self–proclaimed “militias” who, despite legal prohibitions in all fifty states against certain private militia activity, assert a baseless right to take the law into their own hands. Across violent ideologies, individuals and small groups – both formal and informal – have been galvanized by recent political and societal events in the United States to carry out violent attacks. Among that wide range of animating ideologies, racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (principally those who promote the superiority of the white race) and militia violent extremists are assessed as presenting the most persistent and lethal threats.

We are taking on this complex and evolving domestic terrorism threat landscape with an approach that honors and protects both America’s security and America’s values, especially our cherished civil rights and civil liberties. Addressing domestic terrorism effectively, responsibly, and sustainably demands forging a government–wide effort while protecting the rule of law and distinctive law enforcement prerogatives. That involves policies that protect the independence and integrity of the Department of Justice, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation; bolstering efforts that address domestic terrorism across the Federal Government and renewing partnerships with state, local, tribal, and territorial governments as well as civil society, the private sector, and beyond; and focusing specifically on terrorist



violence and the factors that contribute to it while safeguarding constitutionally protected activity. Doing so will propel the United States toward the ultimate goal of stopping acts of domestic terrorism. It will also help us to reduce the factors contributing to incitement to domestic terrorism online that exacerbate the spread of calls to violence. It will, moreover, guide the United States toward achieving the resilience that can prevent domestic terrorists from gaining traction and adherents in the first place.

This Strategy is organized around four pillars – the core elements of how the U.S. Government will tackle the threat posed by domestic terrorism today. First are efforts to understand and share information regarding the full range of domestic terrorism threats. Second are efforts to prevent domestic terrorists from successfully recruiting, inciting, and mobilizing Americans to violence. Third are efforts to deter and disrupt domestic terrorist activity before it yields violence. Finally, the long-term issues that contribute to domestic terrorism in our country must be addressed to ensure that this threat diminishes over generations to come.

We must be clear-eyed about this challenge: the unlawful violence that constitutes domestic terrorism is the result of a complex, multi-layered set of societal dynamics. We cannot – and



**OUR APPROACH HONORS AND PROTECTS BOTH AMERICA’S SECURITY AND AMERICA’S CHERISHED CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES.**

will not – ignore those dynamics, such as racism and bigotry that perpetuate the domestic terrorism threat. That is why this Strategy’s fourth pillar lays out long-term visions for addressing them. At the same time, this is a Strategy specifically focused on the terrorist violence that, all too often, turns those broad dynamics into particular loss and heartache. Even

as we look to address these underlying dynamics over the long term, we must focus intensely – as this Strategy does – on the threat of violence that faces us right now.

All told, today’s domestic terrorism threat poses a danger to Americans, our democratic society, and our national security that we must counter aggressively, comprehensively, and responsibly. Doing so will make America not just safer, but also stronger – and more unified. What follows is America’s first government-wide national Strategy to do so.



# TODAY'S THREAT

Domestic terrorism poses a serious and evolving threat. A provision of Federal law defines “domestic terrorism” as “activities that involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State; appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States.” Over time, domestic terrorism threats in the United States have ebbed and flowed, reflected different motivating ideologies, and demanded varying governmental responses. Today’s domestic terrorism threat, as assessed comprehensively by America’s intelligence and law enforcement professionals in early 2021, involves a complex mix of elements.

According to this assessment, one key aspect of today’s domestic terrorism threat emerges from racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists and networks whose racial, ethnic, or religious hatred leads them toward violence, as well as those whom they encourage to take violent action. These actors have different motivations, but many focus their violence towards the same segment or segments of the American community, whether persons of color, immigrants, Jews, Muslims, other religious minorities, women and girls, LGBTQI+ individuals, or others. Their insistence on violence can, at times, be explicit. It also can, at times, be less explicit, lurking in ideologies rooted in a perception of the superiority of the white race that call for violence in furtherance of perverse and abhorrent notions of racial “purity” or “cleansing.”

Another key component of the threat comes from anti-government or anti-authority violent extremists. This significant component of today’s threat includes self-proclaimed “militias” and militia violent extremists who take steps to violently resist government authority or facilitate the overthrow of the U.S. Government based on perceived overreach; anarchist violent extremists, who violently oppose all forms of capitalism, corporate globalization, and governing institutions, which they perceive as harmful to society; sovereign citizen violent extremists, who believe they are immune from government authority and laws; or any other





individual or group who engages in violence – or incites imminent violence – in opposition to legislative, regulatory, or other actions taken by the government. Other domestic terrorists may be motivated to violence by single–issue ideologies related to abortion–, animal rights–, environmental–, or involuntary celibate–violent extremism, as well as other grievances – or a combination of ideological influences. In some cases, individuals may develop their own idiosyncratic justifications for violence that defy ready categorization.

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“ **DOMESTIC TERRORISTS HAVE OFTEN BEEN LONE ACTORS OR SMALL GROUPS OF INFORMALLY ALIGNED INDIVIDUALS.**

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Domestic terrorists have – particularly in recent years – often been lone actors or small groups of informally aligned individuals who mobilize to violence with little or no clear organizational structure or direction. These individuals often consume material deliberately disseminated to recruit individuals to causes that attempt to provide a sense of belonging and fulfillment, however false that sense might be. Their ideologies can be fluid, evolving, and overlapping. And they can, in some instances, connect and intersect with conspiracy theories and other forms of disinformation and misinformation. The often solitary and, at times, rapid nature of such mobilization to violence poses a particularly acute challenge to law enforcement and others seeking to prevent, disrupt, and deter domestic terrorism.

These elements combine to form a complex and shifting domestic terrorism threat landscape and create significant challenges for law enforcement. Especially on Internet–based communications platforms such as social media, file–upload sites, and end–to–end encrypted platforms, all of these elements can combine and amplify threats to public safety. This is the domestic terrorism threat America faces today – one with the distinctive imprint of today’s digital age as well as longstanding roots in domestic terrorism challenges throughout our country’s history. Tackling that threat comprehensively and persistently demands appreciating both its historical lineage and its distinctively modern form.



# ASSESSMENT OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENT EXTREMISM THREAT

*March 2021*

The Intelligence Community (IC) assesses that domestic violent extremists (DVEs) who are motivated by a range of ideologies and galvanized by recent political and societal events in the United States pose an elevated threat to the Homeland in 2021. Enduring DVE motivations pertaining to biases against minority populations and perceived government overreach will almost certainly continue to drive DVE radicalization and mobilization to violence. Newer sociopolitical developments—such as narratives of fraud in the recent general election, the emboldening impact of the violent breach of the U.S. Capitol, conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and conspiracy theories promoting violence—will almost certainly spur some DVEs to try to engage in violence this year.

The IC assesses that lone offenders or small cells of DVEs adhering to a diverse set of violent extremist ideologies are more likely to carry out violent attacks in the Homeland than organizations that allegedly advocate a DVE ideology. DVE attackers often radicalize independently by consuming violent extremist material online and mobilize without direction from a violent extremist organization, making detection and disruption difficult.

The IC assesses that racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (RMVEs) and militia violent extremists (MVEs) present the most lethal DVE threats, with RMVEs most likely to conduct mass-casualty attacks against civilians and MVEs typically targeting law enforcement and government

March 2021 Threat Assessment

personnel and facilities. The IC assesses that the MVE threat increased last year and that it will almost certainly continue to be elevated throughout 2021 because of contentious sociopolitical factors that motivate MVEs to commit violence.

The IC assesses that U.S. RMVEs who promote the superiority of the white race are the DVE actors with the most persistent and concerning transnational connections because individuals with similar ideological beliefs exist outside of the United States and these RMVEs frequently communicate with and seek to influence each other. We assess that a small number of US RMVEs have traveled abroad to network with like-minded individuals.

The IC assesses that DVEs exploit a variety of popular social media platforms, smaller websites with targeted audiences, and encrypted chat applications to recruit new adherents, plan and rally support for inperson actions, and disseminate materials that contribute to radicalization and mobilization to violence.

The IC assesses that several factors could increase the likelihood or lethality of DVE attacks in 2021 and beyond, including escalating support from persons in the United States or abroad, growing perceptions of government overreach related to legal or policy changes and disruptions, and high-profile attacks spurring follow-on attacks and innovations in targeting and attack tactics.

DVE lone offenders will continue to pose significant detection and disruption challenges because of their capacity for independent radicalization to violence, ability to mobilize discretely, and access to firearms.





# OUR APPROACH

Addressing domestic terrorism effectively, responsibly, and enduringly requires moving swiftly but sustainably; creatively but carefully; and decisively but deftly. Our approach will protect both the nation and the civil liberties of its citizens.

We will forge a government-wide effort while safeguarding distinctive law enforcement prerogatives, such as those that belong to the Department of Justice, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and safeguarding critical patient provider relationships like those maintained by the Department of Veterans Affairs providers with veterans. Particular investigatory and prosecutorial decisions are for law enforcement alone, unaffected by and insulated from any political influence or bias. At the policy level, this Strategy demands that the broader Federal Government coordinate and collaborate on programmatic aspects of countering domestic terrorism, such as information sharing, training, prevention, and intervention efforts. It thus sets a pathway for a unity of effort at the policy level, while protecting the specific work of law enforcement that must be left wholly to appropriate law enforcement entities, whether Federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial.

We will also build a community to address domestic terrorism that extends not only across the Federal Government but also to critical partners. That includes state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, as well as foreign allies and partners, civil society, the technology sector, academia, and more. Domestic terrorism and the factors that contribute to it pose a challenge best tackled by a set of interlocking communities that can contribute information, expertise, analysis, and more to addressing this multifaceted threat. With the right orientation and partnerships, the Federal Government can energize, connect, and empower those communities – communities whose input was critical to the formulation of this Strategy itself.

Furthermore, we will focus specifically on violence and factors which contribute to it while respecting civil rights, civil liberties, and privacy protections, and while recognizing and maximizing the positive benefits of modern communications technologies such as the Internet. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, as well as other U.S. law, protects a wide range



of expression – even expression that many might disagree with or find abhorrent, and even expression that certain foreign allies and partners of the United States prohibit and criminalize under their own laws. Ours is a distinctively American tradition of robust speech; and it is a tradition we cherish. Violence and its incitement, however, are generally neither tolerated nor protected; indeed, violence is generally criminal, as are incitement to imminent violence and true threats of violence. This Strategy focuses specifically on unlawful violence that poses a threat to public safety, to national security, and to the genuine free expression of ideas – indeed, to our democracy. Our country and its laws leave wide open the space for political and ideological views and their articulation, including through peaceful protest. But they leave no room for unlawful violence. This Strategy is designed to preserve the former while preventing the latter.

It is critical that we condemn and confront domestic terrorism regardless of the particular ideology that motivates individuals to violence. The definition of “domestic terrorism” in our law makes no distinction based on political views – left, right, or center – and neither should we. We must disrupt and deter those who use violence to intimidate racial or religious

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minorities, who have so often been the victims of hateful extremists. So too must we disrupt and deter those who launch violent attacks in a misguided effort to force change in government policies that they view as unjust. In a democracy, there is no justification for resorting to violence to resolve political differences.

We will do all of this with a singular goal: stopping acts of domestic terrorism. Domestic terrorism has taken the lives of too many Americans in recent years, injuring still more and leaving behind grieving families and friends. The overarching goal of this Strategy is preventing, disrupting, and deterring that violence. Pursuing that goal

includes reducing the factors contributing to domestic terrorism. Those factors have multiple dimensions, including incitement to imminent violence online, some transnational linkages, and certain self-proclaimed private “militia” activity that, to varying degrees, is prohibited by the laws of all 50 states. Addressing these factors contributing to domestic terrorism is, in part, a means to achieving the first objective of preventing the violence itself and handling the threats we face today; but it must also be its own objective, as reducing the contributing factors can make a difference in diminishing the threat we might otherwise face tomorrow.



Additionally, pursuing the goal of preventing, disrupting, and deterring acts of domestic terrorism means achieving the type of resilience that can prevent domestic terrorists from gaining traction and adherents in the first place. Resilience can take many forms. It can mean raising public awareness of how terrorists deliberately seek overreaction, which can help to avoid precisely that overreaction and instead thwart terrorists' own strategies. And it can mean, broader still, cultivating the type of digital literacy that can empower the American public to resist those who would use online communications platforms and other venues to recruit, radicalize, and mobilize to violence. Fostering and ultimately attaining these and other forms of resilience is a third goal, and one whose achievement would strengthen the United States against domestic terrorism as well as other threats to U.S. national security.



# STRATEGIC PILLARS

Today’s domestic terrorism threat is complex, multifaceted, and evolving. There is no single action or single part of the U.S. Government that can address the entirety of that threat. The following four pillars, implemented in an integrated manner across relevant parts of the Federal Government and in close coordination with non-Federal partners, will guide the U.S. Government’s response to the threat summarized above. As noted above, implementation of this Strategy will proceed in parallel with, and be complementary to, the work of law enforcement to investigate suspected criminal activity and prosecute those who break our laws.

## **PILLAR ONE | UNDERSTAND AND SHARE DOMESTIC TERRORISM-RELATED INFORMATION**

### **STRATEGIC GOAL 1.1: ENHANCE DOMESTIC TERRORISM-RELATED RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS.**

Addressing any threat effectively requires understanding it thoroughly. For today’s shifting and diverse domestic terrorism threat, that task is imperative. The Federal Government continues to augment and improve how the domestic terrorism threat is analyzed and understood. Analyses of key trends and trajectories are now regularly generated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, with support from the National Counterterrorism Center and others as appropriate, and then shared widely across the Federal Government. These analyses benefit from the continued tracking of domestic terrorism-related investigations and prosecutions across Federal law enforcement and nationwide and, moreover, will benefit from increased exploration of publicly available, threat-related information, consistent with applicable law and guidelines. Additionally, a comprehensive understanding of the domestic terrorism threat landscape requires facilitating a systematic provision of information and data to the appropriate parts of the Federal Government from state, local, tribal, and territorial partners who often identify and disrupt manifestations of the domestic



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“ **THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO AUGMENT AND IMPROVE HOW THE DOMESTIC TERRORISM THREAT IS ANALYZED AND UNDERSTOOD.**

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terrorism threat, even if they do not always use the same labels to describe it. That is why the Federal Government is enhancing its ability to receive and analyze domestic terrorism threat information provided by state, local, tribal, and territorial partners, as well as improving its coordinated dissemination of that information. Doing so will inform more fully not only executive branch officials, but also the Congress and the American people as they seek to understand the domestic terrorism threat facing the nation today.

Maximizing the Federal Government’s understanding of this particular threat also means supporting and making appropriate use of the analysis performed by entities outside the government that bring to bear relevant expertise and doing so in a structured way that provides a channel for such analysis while also avoiding bias or improper influence – or even the appearance of it. To that end, and consistent with civil liberties and privacy protections, the Department of Homeland Security will introduce a new systematic approach for utilizing pertinent external, non–governmental analysis and information that will provide enhanced situational awareness of today’s domestic terrorism threat. That includes, where appropriate, specialized areas and types of analysis, including ways in which gender–motivated violence can have implications for domestic terrorist threats.

**STRATEGIC GOAL 1.2: IMPROVE INFORMATION SHARING ACROSS ALL LEVELS WITHIN, AS WELL AS OUTSIDE, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.**

With this enhanced domestic terrorism–related research and analysis, the Federal Government must continue to improve information sharing on domestic terrorism threats across the government to ensure that all relevant Federal partners are equipped to take appropriate measures with this knowledge. Consistent with legal and policy limitations on the sharing of sensitive law enforcement information, we will continue sharing information widely across the Federal enterprise, including, as noted above, through new efforts focused specifically on the domestic terrorism threats that can be identified from open–source information.





In addition, the Federal Government must constantly update and advance its efforts to share relevant information externally, as some of the first to identify a potential threat of domestic terrorism are often state, local, tribal, or territorial partners, or those in their communities. That is why we have already increased our focus on information sharing with those partners, providing, at the unclassified level, more information, with more details, more quickly. This includes publishing and disseminating intelligence products that provide our partners with greater insight into the evolving threat, as well as situational awareness notifications to inform public safety and security planning efforts in advance of potential violence. That emphasis on fuller, faster information sharing will continue and expand, as we are committed to ensuring that state, local, tribal, and territorial partners receive not just warnings of specific, credible threats of violence but also, where appropriate, broader indicators and warnings that can inform our partners' level and type of preparation for potential violence.

As discussed further below, we are also developing new resources as part of our broader effort to boost support to state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement in tackling domestic terrorism, including resources that will cover relevant iconography, symbology, and phraseology used by many domestic terrorists as well as data-driven guidance on how to recognize potential indicators of mobilization to domestic terrorism.

### **STRATEGIC GOAL 1.3: ILLUMINATE TRANSNATIONAL ASPECTS OF DOMESTIC TERRORISM.**

In today's interconnected world, very little remains wholly within a single country's borders, and domestic terrorism is no exception. Terrorists and their supporters increasingly connect with each other via Internet-based communications platforms, recruit and encourage mobilization to violence across international boundaries, and point to ideologically similar foreigners as inspiration for their acts of violence. Some domestic violent extremists have sought ties and connections to individual violent extremists overseas. Aspects of the domestic terrorism threat we face in the United States, and in particular those related to racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism, have an international dimension. Identifying, confronting, and addressing that international dimension must be part of a comprehensive approach to tackling the domestic terrorism challenge.

The Department of State, in consultation with the Department of the Treasury, is working with other components of the Federal Government and with our foreign allies to assess whether additional foreign entities linked to domestic terrorism can, under the relevant statutory criteria, be designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations or Specially Designated Global



Terrorists. That includes analyzing the latest intelligence to inform those considerations through a process that will continue as more foreign intelligence is collected and disseminated by various agencies. Doing so would bar U.S. persons from supporting these foreign entities or receiving training from them. Moreover, the Department of the Treasury, in coordination with law enforcement and other interagency partners, is exploring ways to enhance the identification and analysis of financial activity associated with domestic terrorists and their foreign counterparts, as well as enhancing engagement with financial institutions on domestic terrorist financing, including through existing provisions of the Bank Secrecy Act. Appropriate elements of the intelligence and law enforcement communities have already identified, and are now implementing, more robust information exchanges with foreign partners regarding the foreign connections to the U.S. domestic terrorism threat and those partners' own experiences addressing any comparable threats within their countries. The U.S. Government has thus prioritized obtaining from foreign partners credible intelligence and law enforcement information regarding international support for domestic terrorism in the United States, capturing it in written reporting, and sharing that intelligence and information appropriately across the Federal Government. That effort complements an increased emphasis on the sharing of relevant information with foreign partners, where appropriate, on aspects of the domestic terrorism threat of international relevance. We can also learn from our international partners' challenges and successes in disrupting plots and responding to attacks, integrating that expertise into our own planning and operations.

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“ WE HAVE ALREADY INCREASED OUR FOCUS ON INFORMATION SHARING WITH STATE, LOCAL, TRIBAL, AND TERRITORIAL PARTNERS BY **PROVIDING MORE INFORMATION, WITH MORE DETAILS, MORE QUICKLY.** ”

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Additionally, the intelligence and law enforcement communities will enhance the government's understanding of how foreign malign influence operations and the dissemination of disinformation, including by foreign governments, relate to the domestic terrorism threat we face. These efforts complement the U.S. Government's coordinated activities to recognize, understand, and counter terrorist propaganda and disinformation. In addition, the Department of State will leverage public diplomacy programs and messaging to serve as a preventative measure to raise awareness in the short-term and shift sentiments over the long-term. Such efforts can also be used to counter messages from adversaries who use racially motivated violent incidents in America to attempt to erode U.S. credibility.



Finally, illuminating the transnational context relevant to aspects of today’s domestic terrorism threat can, in appropriate circumstances, allow us to bring to bear relevant authorities and tools specifically focused on international terrorism. When domestic terrorism threats become international through connectivity to foreign actors or otherwise, the full range of tools applicable to understanding international terrorism threats become potentially available, such as intelligence collection tools. We will apply such tools, where the facts and law support their use, in an ideologically neutral, threat-driven manner.

All told, a better, more holistic, and coordinated understanding of and information sharing on today’s threat will allow a more effective and comprehensive response. That response will address not just current and imminent incarnations of the domestic terrorism threat but also its contributing factors before they can generate still more violence in the future.

## **PILLAR TWO | PREVENT DOMESTIC TERRORISM RECRUITMENT AND MOBILIZATION TO VIOLENCE**

### **STRATEGIC GOAL 2.1: STRENGTHEN DOMESTIC TERRORISM PREVENTION RESOURCES AND SERVICES.**

While those who break the law in furtherance of domestic terrorism must face investigation and prosecution for their crimes, it is equally important that the Federal Government engage in efforts to prevent individuals from being drawn into the grip of domestic terrorism in the first instance. That means reducing both supply and demand of recruitment materials by limiting widespread availability online and bolstering resilience to it by those who nonetheless encounter it, among other measures. It also means reducing access to assault weapons and high-capacity magazines and enforcing legal prohibitions that keep firearms out of dangerous hands. Such prevention efforts must be pursued while safeguarding civil rights and civil liberties, including privacy protections, and while avoiding discrimination, bias, and stereotyping.

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**“ WE CAN LEARN FROM OUR INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS’  
CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES IN DISRUPTING PLOTS AND  
RESPONDING TO ATTACKS, INTEGRATING THAT EXPERTISE  
INTO OUR OWN PLANNING.”**

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Past U.S. Government prevention efforts have had a mixed record. We need to do better – better at protecting rights and freedoms while still pursuing the goal of preventing individuals from harming their fellow Americans through terrorism or other criminal activity. We have already begun this work: the White House and relevant departments and agencies are consulting extensively with stakeholders nationwide to understand what support and resources stakeholders are looking for from the Federal Government and what lessons can be learned from past prevention efforts. We will continue that engagement, including through the process of implementing this Strategy.

Grounded in existing evidence and best practices in public health–focused violence prevention, our approach to domestic terrorism prevention draws on the expertise, experience, and efforts of the entire government. A number of departments and agencies are already pursuing efforts to enhance community–level and individual–level resilience to violence, many of which help to advance the prevention of domestic terrorism. For example, the Department of Homeland Security and others are either currently funding and implementing or planning evidence–based digital programming, including enhancing media literacy and critical thinking skills, as a mechanism for strengthening user resilience to disinformation and misinformation online for domestic audiences. The Department of State and United States Agency for International Development are doing similar work globally.

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“ **GROUNDING IN EXISTING EVIDENCE AND BEST PRACTICES IN PUBLIC HEALTH–FOCUSED VIOLENCE PREVENTION, OUR APPROACH TO DOMESTIC TERRORISM PREVENTION DRAWS ON THE EXPERTISE, EXPERIENCE, AND EFFORTS OF THE ENTIRE GOVERNMENT.**

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The Department of Homeland Security has expanded its efforts to provide financial, educational, and technical assistance to those well placed to recognize and address possible domestic terrorism recruitment and mobilization to violence and will ensure that its counter–domestic terrorism prevention efforts are driven by data and informed by community–based partners. The Department of Homeland Security also has increased the grant funding available in this area in support of evidence–based programs and with transparency regarding their use. The Department of Defense, in addition, is incorporating training for service members separating or retiring from the military on potential targeting of those with military training by violent extremist actors. The U.S. Government is also developing a mechanism by which veterans can report recruitment attempts by violent extremist actors.



The U.S. Government often is not best placed to identify or address issues that will first emerge at the local level. Our approach to domestic terrorism prevention will also work to better equip individuals, families, and local communities with resources to reduce the risk from individuals who may pose a danger to themselves or others, thus assisting them and preventing potential violence. The Federal Government will make available resources and training regarding how to respond to behavior threatening an act of domestic terrorism or targeted violence and, moreover, will work to boost public awareness of such resources. We will also ensure that resources and training specifically regarding how to respond to behavior threatening an act of domestic terrorism or targeted violence are included in the Federal Government’s planning and preparation for the upcoming launch of additional resources.

Our law enforcement agencies also play a critical role in responding to reports of criminal and otherwise concerning activity. That is why the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security are working to enhance public understanding of the full range of assistance that can be provided to those in need, including how mental health experts are complementing traditional law enforcement response. Additionally, the National Counterterrorism Center, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Department of Homeland Security will release publicly a new edition of the Federal Government’s Mobilization Indicators booklet that will include for the first time potential indicators of domestic terrorism–related mobilization. These agencies are also working toward including a range of resources that the public may consult in the event of possible domestic terrorist recruitment or mobilization.

We intend to launch a new approach to aggregating, synthesizing, and publicizing information on research, grants, technical assistance and training, and other Federal resources that can help to advance domestic terrorism prevention, among other aspects of violence prevention. Led by the research and community–facing components of the Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services, Education, and Homeland Security, departments and agencies are working to develop an easily accessible and navigable one–stop website to increase the transparency and accessibility of such resources to a broad range of stakeholders, including community–based organizations, state and local partners, academics and researchers, and the broader public.

**STRATEGIC GOAL 2.2: ADDRESS ONLINE TERRORIST RECRUITMENT AND MOBILIZATION TO VIOLENCE BY DOMESTIC TERRORISTS.**

Recruiting and mobilizing individuals to domestic terrorism occurs in many settings, both in–person and online. These activities are increasingly happening on Internet–based



communications platforms, including social media, online gaming platforms, file–upload sites, and end–to–end encrypted chat platforms, even as those products and services frequently offer other important benefits. The widespread availability of domestic terrorist recruitment material online is a national security threat whose front lines are overwhelmingly private–sector online platforms, and we are committed to informing more effectively the escalating efforts by those platforms to secure those front lines.

We are addressing domestic terrorism–related online recruitment and mobilization to terrorism while respecting foundational constitutional protections for free speech and association. The U.S. Government already provides information to the private sector and other non–governmental entities in a wide array of contexts, such as cybersecurity, international terrorism, and critical infrastructure defense. Likewise, the U.S. Government provides information to assist online platforms with their own initiatives to enforce their own terms of service that prohibit the use of their platforms for domestic terrorist activities. Continuing to enhance the domestic terrorism–related information offered to the private sector, especially the technology sector, will facilitate more robust efforts outside the government to counter terrorists’ abuse of Internet–based communications platforms to recruit others to engage in violence.

Availability of domestic terrorism–related recruitment material online is almost certain to persist at some level. That is especially true on the platforms that explicitly encourage or tacitly condone such material, as well as on end–to–end encrypted platforms where such material can be harder to identify, even by those operating such platforms. Dealing with the supply is therefore necessary but not sufficient: we must address the demand too. Today’s digital age requires an American population that can utilize essential aspects of Internet–based communications platforms while avoiding vulnerability to domestic terrorist recruitment and other harmful content deliberately disseminated by malicious actors online, such as international terrorist groups like al–Qa’ida trying to incite imminent violence or hostile foreign powers seeking to undermine American democracy. Consequently, we will pursue innovative ways to foster and cultivate digital literacy and related programs, including educational materials and interactive online resources such as skills–enhancing online games. This can prove a useful component to forging the resilience that may help to stem domestic terrorism recruitment and mobilization to violence.

We will do all of this in a global, multi-stakeholder setting in which we can collaborate on addressing terrorist content online with partner governments similarly committed to freedom of expression as well as with technology companies and civil society organizations. Therefore



the United States endorses the *Christchurch Call to Action to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online*. We applaud language in the Christchurch Call emphasizing the importance of tackling the very real threat posed by online terrorist content while respecting human rights and freedom of expression. And we look forward to joining key global governmental and non-governmental partners in this important international forum as well as other fora to help shape the agenda for the continuing transnational conversation while remaining a zealous advocate for freedom of expression on the Internet.

## **PILLAR THREE | DISRUPT AND DETER DOMESTIC TERRORISM ACTIVITY**

### **STRATEGIC GOAL 3.1: ENABLE APPROPRIATE ENHANCED INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION OF DOMESTIC TERRORISM CRIMES.**

The Department of Justice, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, has long been central to the U.S. Government's efforts to address the threat of domestic terrorism, including by conducting investigations and prosecutions where the law and the facts make those steps appropriate, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation remains the lead Federal law enforcement and intelligence agency for investigating all forms of terrorism, including domestic terrorism. Beyond particular intelligence, investigatory, and prosecutorial work, Federal law enforcement serves as a critical resource for countering domestic terrorism nationwide.

Federal law enforcement is enhancing its efforts to ensure that Federal investigators and prosecutors nationwide are well positioned to tackle this escalating threat, and both the Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation are receiving additional resources to support this enhanced effort. The President's Fiscal Year 2022 Budget includes significant additional resources for the Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation to ensure that they have the analysts, investigators, and prosecutors they need to thwart domestic terrorism and do justice when the law has been broken. In the meantime, Federal law enforcement is working to identify interim measures that will allow the necessary flexibility in movement of human resources to ensure that the domestic terrorism threat is addressed not only thoroughly but also aggressively. Moreover, the Department of Justice plans to augment its provision of training and other resources to U.S. Attorney's Offices across the country to match the heightened priority already being assigned by the Department to domestic terrorism investigations and prosecutions. Furthermore, the Department of Justice and Federal Bureau



of Investigation will sustain the already robust collaboration between counterterrorism investigators and prosecutors and hate crimes investigators and prosecutors. The Department of Justice will strengthen and expand the use of the Domestic Terrorism Executive Committee to ensure nationwide interagency collaboration on countering domestic terrorism and ensure that Anti-Terrorism Advisory Councils across the country focus on the elevated domestic terrorism threat, ensuring that every U.S. Attorney's Office has the expertise, training, and guidance needed to identify and address domestic terrorism to the fullest extent of the law. The Department of the Treasury, in coordination with interagency partners, will continue to support law enforcement action against domestic terrorists and their foreign supporters through the provision of financial intelligence, information, and analysis.

Even as Federal law enforcement does critical work to protect Americans from domestic terrorism threats and a wide range of other challenges, it is often state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement that serve as the first line of defense against domestic terrorism in communities across the United States, much as they do for many other threats to public safety. Therefore, it is essential that we empower these vital non-Federal partners to effectively address today's domestic terrorism threat and to anticipate tomorrow's evolution of that threat.

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“ **THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE PLANS TO AUGMENT ITS PROVISION OF TRAINING AND RESOURCES ACROSS THE COUNTRY TO MATCH THE HEIGHTENED PRIORITY ALREADY BEING ASSIGNED TO DOMESTIC TERRORISM.** ”

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Federal law enforcement is augmenting its existing information sharing to ensure that state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement receives up-to-date intelligence and analysis regarding the current domestic terrorism threat picture. The Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Department of Homeland Security, with support from the National Counterterrorism Center, are incorporating an increased focus on domestic terrorism into current intelligence products and leveraging current mechanisms of information and intelligence sharing to improve the sharing of domestic terrorism-related content and indicators with non-Federal partners. These agencies are also improving the usability of their existing information-sharing platforms, including through the development of mobile applications designed to provide a broader reach to non-Federal law enforcement partners, while simultaneously refining that support based on partner feedback.





In addition to increased information sharing, Federal law enforcement is offering enhanced domestic terrorism–related resources and training to state, local, tribal, and territorial partners. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Counterterrorism Center, and Department of Homeland Security, for example, are developing strategies to provide enhanced training on domestic terrorism iconography, symbology, and phraseology, and information on how to recognize potential indicators of mobilization to domestic terrorism, including through the existing Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team First Responder’s Toolbox resources and the forthcoming edition of the Mobilization Indicators booklet. The Department of Justice is updating its State and Local Anti–Terrorism Training and Handbook on Law Enforcement Intelligence and determining how most effectively to support state, local, tribal, and territorial partners in ensuring their awareness of certain prosecutorial tools already available to them. We are also exploring ways to convene non–Federal partners to have open, robust exchanges of ideas on novel approaches for collaboration in addressing domestic terrorism, such as how to make better use of laws that already exist in all fifty states prohibiting certain private “militia” activity, including state constitutional provisions requiring the subordination of the military to civil authorities, state statutes prohibiting groups of people from organizing as private military units without the authorization of the state government, and state statutes that criminalize certain paramilitary activity. All of this support will increase these non–Federal partners’ capacity to identify, investigate, disrupt, and prosecute domestic terrorists who break the law.

### **STRATEGIC GOAL 3.2: ASSESS POTENTIAL LEGISLATIVE REFORMS.**

The threat posed by domestic terrorism is an urgent priority, and this Strategy explains how we are already addressing it aggressively using existing legal authorities. It also lays out how we plan to continue to improve our response while relying on those authorities.

At the same time, in grappling with today’s evolving domestic terrorism threat, we must ask the question of whether legislative reforms could meaningfully and materially increase our ability to protect Americans from acts of domestic terrorism while simultaneously guarding against potential abuse of overreach. New criminal laws, in particular, should be sought only after careful consideration of whether and how they are needed to assist the government in tackling complex, multifaceted challenges like the one posed by domestic terrorism and only while ensuring the protection of civil rights and civil liberties.

Therefore, even as we augment our approach to domestic terrorism under existing authorities, the Department of Justice is examining carefully what new authorities might be necessary and appropriate. As with the rest of this Strategy, we are ensuring that such examination is driven



by the facts and informed by the analysis of the experts who can guide our understanding of both the current authorities for addressing domestic terrorism threats and the implications for civil rights and civil liberties of pursuing any changes to those authorities. Duly informed by their analysis and by the recommendations of Federal law enforcement leadership, we will, in consultation with the Congress, consider whether seeking legislative reforms is appropriate and, if so, which to pursue.

**STRATEGIC GOAL 3.3: ENSURE THAT SCREENING AND VETTING PROCESSES CONSIDER THE FULL RANGE OF TERRORISM THREATS.**

The U.S. Government has a robust system for determining which individuals seeking sensitive accesses or employment, and which passengers seeking certain forms of travel, require, for the safety of others, additional scrutiny. That system has been refined and calibrated over time to ensure increased protections for civil rights and civil liberties as well as enhanced accuracy. To the extent that individual known or suspected terrorists meet the thresholds under that system for additional screening measures or, where appropriate, exclusion from certain activities, that system is being fully utilized. We are, moreover, ensuring that existing watchlisting mechanisms and systems are applied in appropriate cases to known or suspected international terrorists with connections to domestic terrorist threats in an ideologically neutral manner. That work includes making available the improved, robust mechanisms that are available in appropriate circumstances to those who believe that they have been improperly listed.

Pre-employment background checks and re-investigations for government employees is a critical screening process that must account for all possible terrorist threats. The United States is well served by a diverse workforce, including in the military and Federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement. Those who protect and defend this nation should reflect the nation, including its vast spectrum of experiences and viewpoints. Consistent with that, no one should be allowed to abuse or exploit the trust and responsibility or the often sensitive accesses and resources that are a part of such professions. We are working to augment the screening process for those who join the military and Federal law enforcement as well as any government employee who receives a security clearance or holds a position of trust by considering changes to the Standard Form (SF)-85, SF-85P, and SF-86 Federal employee background questionnaires, along with applicable military screening questionnaires. This effort can help to ensure that new applicants and employees undergoing re-investigations are abiding by legal obligations, including in providing candid and forthright representations, and to prevent individuals who pose domestic terrorism threats from being placed in positions of trust.



We are also improving our systems and mechanisms for identifying anyone who has already been granted a sensitive position of trust within the Federal workforce who would misuse that position in violation of law, including domestic terrorism–related activities. The Department of Defense, for example, is reviewing and updating its definition of prohibited extremist activities among uniformed military personnel, and will consider appropriate policy recommendations and options to address such activity by and among civilian employees and contractors.

Moreover, the Federal Government is developing threat assessments, resources, and training for state, local, tribal, and territorial partners aimed at enabling them to enhance their employee screening programs and prevent violence. This includes facilitating their consistent use of Federal Government databases already available to them for screening purposes. Finally, we are enhancing existing training programs and resources for those in the private sector to prevent sensitive positions – such as those at airports, seaports, chemical facilities, and other critical infrastructure sites – from being exploited by domestic terrorists.

## **PILLAR FOUR | CONFRONT LONG–TERM CONTRIBUTORS TO DOMESTIC TERRORISM**

Domestic terrorism can take many forms, inspired by a wide range of violent ideologies whose common, dangerous feature is the resort to violence rather than the peaceful expression of views and resolution of differences. Individuals subscribing to violent ideologies such as violent white supremacy, which are grounded in racial, ethnic, and religious hatred and the dehumanizing of portions of the American community, as well as violent anti–government ideologies, are responsible for a substantial portion of today’s domestic terrorism. Tackling the long–term contributors to this challenge demands addressing the sources of that mobilization to violence – with leadership from relevant domestic–facing agencies, coordinated by the White House’s Domestic Policy Council and in close partnership with civil society.

That means tackling racism in America. It means protecting Americans from gun violence and mass murders. It means ensuring that we provide early intervention and appropriate care for those who pose a danger to themselves or others. It means ensuring that Americans receive the type of civics education that promotes tolerance and respect for all and investing in policies and programs that foster civic engagement and inspire a shared commitment to American democracy, all the while acknowledging when racism and bigotry have meant that the country fell short of living up to its founding principles. It means setting a tone from the highest ranks



of government that every American deserves the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness that our Declaration of Independence recognizes as unalienable rights. And it means ensuring that there is simply no governmental tolerance – and instead denunciation and rejection – of violence as an acceptable mode of seeking political or social change.

Although the U.S. Government must do everything it can to address enduring challenges like racism and bigotry in America, the Federal Government alone cannot simply “solve” these challenges quickly or on its own. On the other hand, tackling the threat posed by domestic terrorism over the long term demands substantial efforts to confront the racism that feeds into aspects of that threat. We are, therefore, prioritizing efforts to ensure that every component of the government has a role to play in rooting out racism and advancing equity for under-served communities that have far too often been the targets of discrimination and violence. This approach must apply to our efforts to counter domestic terrorism by addressing underlying racism and bigotry.

That imperative includes ensuring that domestic terrorism threats are properly identified and categorized as such and addressed accordingly. That is a determination that must be made free of all forms of bias. All Americans deserve Federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement that approach their critical tasks without any racial bias or any other biases and in strict adherence to the law. That is why we are working to bolster efforts to ensure that law enforcement operates without bias as it identifies and responds to domestic terrorism threats and, in turn, that law enforcement provides for the public safety of all Americans.

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“ **ALL AMERICANS DESERVE FEDERAL, STATE, LOCAL, TRIBAL, AND TERRITORIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT THAT APPROACH THEIR CRITICAL TASKS **WITHOUT ANY RACIAL BIAS OR ANY OTHER BIASES.**** ”

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We are also prioritizing efforts to improve the well-being and safety of everyone who calls America their home. We have worked with the Congress to deliver immediate financial relief to millions of Americans, thus contributing to an equitable economic recovery that can counter the economic dislocation and even despair felt by many Americans. Our continued efforts will augment and accelerate the essential work of economic recovery and sustainable development, alleviating over time the sentiments that some domestic terrorists deliberately use to recruit and mobilize. Demonstrating that our government can deliver for all Americans is crucial to restoring confidence in our democracy.

These efforts speak to a broader priority: enhancing faith in government and addressing the extreme polarization, fueled by a crisis of disinformation and misinformation often channeled through social media platforms, which can tear Americans apart and lead some to violence. A hallmark of this democracy is that political change must be pursued through nonviolent means grounded in the principles upon which the United States was founded. Enhancing faith in American democracy demands accelerating work to contend with an information environment that challenges healthy democratic discourse. We will work toward finding ways to counter the influence and impact of dangerous conspiracy theories that can provide a gateway to terrorist violence.



# THE WAY AHEAD

America has seen the face of domestic terrorism before. Our country has struggled against groups and individuals who refused to accept that, as a democracy, we must settle our differences peacefully and according to the rule of law. Victims of the 1921 Tulsa massacre bore the terrible brutality of domestic terrorists of their era. Victims of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing suffered the awful inhumanity of domestic terrorists of their time. Victims in Charleston, El Paso, Pittsburgh, Poway, and even the U.S. Capitol now join this tragic history. We have seen certain communities among our diverse nation – including racial, ethnic, and religious minorities; immigrants; LGBTQI+ individuals; women and girls, as well as law enforcement officers, public servants, and government officials – who have been deliberately and most often targeted by domestic terrorists and who, in turn, often have paid the steepest price.

Today's domestic terrorism threat will not fade if we simply hope for its disappearance, let alone if we ignore it. Addressing this threat demands concerted action, coordinated implementation, and careful respect for civil rights and civil liberties. It demands synchronization with broader counterterrorism efforts that include effective responses to a continuing and dynamic threat posed by international terrorism. It also demands a strategy to unite the different elements involved in responding to this challenge.

This document represents that Strategy – a Strategy whose implementation is, already, well underway. We will be steered by it as we forge a community across the Federal Government and beyond to counter today's domestic terrorism threat and thus to make everyone in America safer and the country and our democracy stronger and more secure. We will continue to evaluate implementation of this Strategy to ensure our response evolves as the threat evolves. We will also ensure consistent and rigorous oversight and accountability. Together, we will reaffirm our country's core commitment to the peaceful expression and exchange of ideas, to equal justice under the rule of law, and to equality for all.





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