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White Supremacist and Anti-Government Extremist Groups in the US

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User Journeys in Online Extremist Groups

This project by the Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET) looks at the user journeys of individuals who enter and participate in the online spaces of extremist communities. A user journey here refers to the distinct path a user may follow to reach their goals when accessing and using an online space belonging to extremist communities.

User journeys are particularly important in offering insights into the rationale and motivations of users on the one hand, and to the inner workings of extremist online communities on the other. This is vital for understanding their goals and objectives.

In selecting the ideologies for this project, we drew upon extremist communities – rather than extremist and terrorist organisations or groups – including those actors that participate in the extremist milieu and share ideas but do not necessarily operate in concert. These ideologies include those of formal and well-defined extremist organisations of White supremacist and anti-government extremist groups in the United States, supporter networks of Islamic State (IS), and looser communities of extremist actors including accelerationists, incels and chan site members who operate on shared platforms, congregating around common beliefs but without the connection of formal membership.

This project is a response to the growing interest in understanding how individuals enter and participate in online spaces of extremist communities. A core goal of the project was to understand the role of algorithms in leading users to extremist communities, including the changes in algorithmic recommendations that lead users to more extreme content online. However, examining these changes proved impossible due to the precautions taken by the expert contributors to the project, such as the use of separate technology and VPNs throughout their research.

The project also highlights the distinct posting behaviour and operational security protocols of different groups, usually along ideological lines.

Executive Summary

This report is the second in a series of short reports of user journeys of individuals in extremist communities. The selected communities include formal and well-defined extremist organisations, beginning with White supremacist and anti-government extremist groups in the United States. This overview provides a snapshot of the current operating behaviours that the public can readily access, including acting as the first sites of exposure to extremist content.

White supremacist and anti-government groups in the US are adept at manipulating events and societal developments, usually for the purposes of radicalisation, recruitment and offline mobilisation of the public, as part of their core ideological narrative. It is worth noting that these narratives are prevalent in both their online and offline activities. This report highlights their characteristics, platform use, violence and attacks, and gendered dimensions.

The study uses a repository of current and historical data on the social media activity of extremist groups, conspiracy movements and disinformation. Through big data collection and ethnographic monitoring of more than 600 channels and groups, we analysed the interconnectedness of the following White supremacist and anti-government extremist groups: White Lives Matter (WLM), Patriot Front, Proud Boys, Aryan Freedom Network and Nationalist Social Club-131 (NSC-131).

Some of the key findings from this report, which focuses on *White supremacist and anti-government* extremist groups, are as follows:

- WLM, Patriot Front and Proud Boys among others continue to engage in offline ideologically motivated activities in the US and in some cases abroad, while maintaining a prominent presence online.
- These groups mostly manipulate events and social developments for the purposes of fostering radicalisation, recruitment and offline mobilisation.
- Telegram is their most preferred platform, through which they share propaganda.
- Some of these groups have female members and a few purport to allow women in their organisations, while every group promotes neo-traditionalism which subjugates women.

The activities of these groups continue to pose a threat to society given the ideological narratives that underpin them.

Contents

Executive Summary	2
1 Overview	4
White Supremacist and Anti-Government Extremist Groups in the US	4
2 Methodology	6
3 Public Activities of White Supremacist and Anti-Government Groups in the US	7
Group Characteristics	7
Platform Use	8
Violence and Attacks	10
Gendered Dynamics	11
4 Private Activities of White Supremacists and Anti-Government Extremist Groups in US	13
5 Conclusion	15

1 Overview

This report provides insight into the interconnectedness of prominent White supremacist and anti-government extremist groups that have engaged in ideologically motivated activities offline in the US since early 2022. Researchers analysed the interrelations and similarities between the following White supremacist and anti-government extremist groups: WLM, Patriot Front, Proud Boys, Aryan Freedom Network and NSC-131. These extremist groups were selected because they have a prominent online presence and have engaged, and continue to engage, in offline activities in the US. The choice to focus on White supremacists is informed by their dominance, their recognition compared with similar communities in the literature, and the continued threat they pose.

This analysis was informed by a data repository detailing the historical and current use of social media by extremist groups, conspiracy theorists and disinformation actors, through big data collection and ethnographic monitoring of more than 600 channels and groups (both affiliated and unaffiliated with extremist organisations).¹

White Supremacist and Anti-Government Extremist Groups in the US

Since January 2021, researchers and the US Government have tracked an increase in offline extremist activities^{2,3}, and hate crimes⁴ targeting marginalised groups, including LGBTQI+,⁵ Jewish,⁶ and non-White communities⁷ throughout the US. These activities, which include demonstrations, propaganda displays,⁸ vandalism and violence, seek to publicly promote their beliefs, radicalise and recruit members of the public, and inflict harm on targeted communities.

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- 1 While the groups may have private accounts and groups on social media, researchers limited their analysis to publicly available information.
 - 2 "Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2022," Anti-Defamation League, March 23, 2023, <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/audit-antisemitic-incidents-2022>.
 - 3 "UPDATE | Fact Sheet: Anti-LGBT+ Mobilization on the Rise in the United States," Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), November 23, 2022, <https://acleddata.com/2022/11/23/update-fact-sheet-anti-lgbt-mobilization-in-the-united-states/>.
 - 4 Sarah Lynch, "Hate Crimes in US Surged 11.6% in 2021, Fueled by Racial, Ethnic Bias," *Reuters*, March 13, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/hate-crimes-us-surged-116-2021-2023-03-13/>.
 - 5 Elise Thomas, "Colorado Spring Shooting: The Latest in a Transnational, Upward Trend of Anti-LGBTQ Hate," Institute for Strategic Dialogue, November 22, 2022, https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/colorado-springs-shooting-the-latest-in-a-transnational-upward-trend-of-anti-lgbtq-hate/.
 - 6 Steven Santana, "Helotes Police say 81 Antisemitic, White Supremacist Flyers Turned in by Residents," *My San Antonio*, February 17, 2022, <https://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local/article/antisemitic-flyers-helotes-16926804.php>.
 - 7 Laura Laughead, "Racist Sign, Swastikas Painted on Building in Ensley," *CBS42*, March 20, 2023, <https://www.cbs42.com/news/racist-sign-swastikas-painted-on-building-in-ensley/>.
 - 8 Propaganda displays include, but are not limited to, banner drops, hanging flyers or posting stickers in public locations, and the distribution of leaflets or pamphlets to the public, either by handing them out or distributing them in people's driveways or at their homes. Propaganda distributed often features the groups' logos, various slogans and links to their respective websites.

Alongside this apparent surge in activity, researchers have also observed the continued spread of hate,⁹ conspiracy theories¹⁰ and violent rhetoric¹¹ directed towards marginalised communities online across mainstream and alternative platforms. Offline extremist activities are often motivated by the narratives proliferated by online hate movements.¹²

9 "Understanding Antisemitism on Twitter after Musk," Institute for Strategic Dialogue, March 30, 2023, https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/understanding-antisemitism-on-twitter-after-musk/.

10 NPR, "A New Take at an Old Conspiracy: 'In This Iteration, 'They' Are Going to Make You Eat Bugs'," Institute for Strategic Dialogue, April 2, 2023, <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-in-the-news/a-new-take-at-an-old-conspiracy-in-this-iteration-they-are-going-to-make-you-eat-bugs/>.

11 Ciaran O'Connor and Melanie Smith, "It Is (Still) Shockingly Easy to Find Terrorist Content on TikTok," Institute for Strategic Dialogue, March 15, 2023, https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/it-is-still-shockingly-easy-to-find-terrorist-content-on-tiktok/.

12 Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, "'The Great Replacement': The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism," Institute for Strategic Dialogue, July 2019, <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Great-Replacement-The-Violent-Consequences-of-Mainstreamed-Extremism-by-ISD.pdf>.

2 Methodology

Using a repository of current and historical data on the social media activity of extremist groups, conspiracy movements and disinformation, through big data collection and ethnographic monitoring of more than 600 channels and groups, we analysed the interconnectedness of the following White supremacist and anti-government extremist groups: WLM, Patriot Front, Proud Boys, Aryan Freedom Network and NSC-131. These groups have engaged, and continue to engage, in offline ideologically motivated activities in the US (and in some cases, abroad) and have a prominent online presence.

This project received ethics clearance from King's College London.

Through qualitative analysis, researchers identified several similarities between the groups, which can inform our understanding of their ability to translate online engagement to online action:

- The “us vs. them” dichotomy is prominent in the groups’ narratives, pushing the belief that they are under attack from Jewish, liberal, non-White and/or LGBTQ+ communities, as well as the US government and law enforcement. The targeting of these outgroups is often intersectional with their collective and overarching metanarratives and conspiracy theories.
- The groups are adept at manipulating events and societal developments for purposes of radicalisation, recruitment and offline mobilisation. Recent issues and events used include LGBTQI+ rights, immigration, abortion, vaccines and incidents of violence against White people. These posts frequently frame divisive political issues as threats to their supporters and White and/or conservative communities.
- Telegram is the most frequently used platform for recruitment and publicly sharing propaganda. Each group has also had its content amplified by other, non-group affiliated channels, increasing their reach to broader audiences online.
- While none of the groups were observed planning violent attacks online, members have encouraged and/or engaged in street violence at protests or marches, posted images of firearms online or attended protests while wearing tactical gear and holding firearms, and/or shared content referencing violence against perceived enemies on social media and privately owned websites. At least one member, purportedly acting alone, has committed a targeted attack in the last year.
- While some groups have female members, only two of the groups – WLM and Aryan Freedom Network – purport to allow women in their organisations. Women have been observed engaging in offline action with the groups; however, this activity is infrequent.

3 Public Activities of White Supremacist and Anti-Government Groups in the US

Group Characteristics

WLM, Proud Boys, Patriot Front, Aryan Freedom Network, and NSC-131 espouse White supremacist and anti-government narratives to varying degrees. Though their membership numbers vary, each organisation operates local chapters across the US, with the exception of NSC-131, which has chapters in the New England region of the northeast of the US. These nationwide chapters provide a means of manoeuvrability, allowing them to engage in offline actions in various locations and quickly mobilise around events in regions where members reside, such as anti-LGBTQ+ demonstrations at drag queen performances.¹³ WLM and the Proud Boys have international chapters in Canada, Europe, Australia and elsewhere, providing transnational reach.

Ideology

The narratives promoted by the five groups seek to use fear to radicalise, recruit and mobilise the public. Each of the groups uses rhetoric to suggest that their (usually White and/or conservative community) way of life is under attack from outside forces, often by Jewish, liberal, non-White and/or LGBTQI+ communities, as well as the US government and law enforcement. These claims suggest that without the group's action, White communities will be harmed. Rhetoric around these claims often mentions children and families.

These narratives are prevalent in the groups' online and offline activities. For example, NSC-131 has featured these narratives prominently through banner drops and leaflet distributions.¹⁴ Examples of narratives shared publicly since October 2022 by the group include "DEFEND WHITE COMMUNITIES", "YOU ARE BEING REPLACED... ORGANIZE AND RESIST" and "WE DESERVE BETTER END BLACK TERROR".¹⁵ These narratives are subsequently shared through images of the offline activities posted to Telegram and Gab, increasing their reach. Patriot Front uses comparable rhetoric, with slogans such as "RECLAIM AMERICA" and "STRONG FAMILIES, STRONG NATIONS" to suggest their country is at risk. Similarly, Patriot Front posts images from its offline activities, such as banner drops and sticker placement, to Telegram and a privately operated website.¹⁶

¹³ Laura Italiano, "The Proud Boys Seditious Conspiracy Trial is Underway. But the New Leadership Has Moved on from the 2020 Election to LGBTQ Issues," *Business Insider*, February 14, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/proud-boys-2022-break-records-anti-lgbtq-protests-extremism-watchdog-2023-1>.

¹⁴ Liz Hardaway, "Police: Flyers from Neo-Nazi Group Found in Newington Neighborhoods," *CT Insider*, January 9, 2023, <https://www.ctinsider.com/news/article/Neo-Nazi-flyers-Newington-CT-17705324.php>.

¹⁵ Observed in posts to NSC-131's Telegram channel between October 1, 2022 and May 2, 2023.

¹⁶ Observed in posts to Patriot Front's primary Telegram channel in 2023.

Inflection Points

These groups are adept at manipulating events and societal developments to fit their beliefs. Content posted online by the groups in April 2023 includes politically divisive events and news related to the LGBTQI+ community, immigration, abortion, vaccines and incidents of violence against White people, most frequently by non-White individuals. The posts frequently frame these issues as threats. Notably, at least one of the groups, NSC-131, has directly stated in a post on Telegram that it seeks to use these issues to help Nazism appeal to mainstream audiences and aid recruitment, stating:

It is only through matching our enemies in this totalizing polarization that we can bring the collective awareness and collective power of our people to bear against them. We become less fringe with every successful action, our presence normalizes the impossible ... It is Nazism to oppose Drag Queen Story Hour and Critical Race Theory. It is Nazism to oppose the rampant violence against people in the streets of our cities, and Nazism to oppose the rampant corruption in our highest institutions.¹⁷

As of 2 May 2023, the post was viewed approximately 16,500 times.

In addition to external events, Patriot Front, NSC-131 and Proud Boys have used the arrests of members to push anti-government narratives and/or elicit donations from supporters. Between 1 and 30 April 2023, the Proud Boys posted approximately 12 times about individuals arrested for actions on 6 January 2021 (approximately 32% of posts in April).¹⁸ The groups have also used their profiles to solicit donations for legal fees for their cases. Both NSC-131 and the Proud Boys have requested donations through the donation platform GiveSendGo, a Christian crowdfunding site.¹⁹

Platform Use

All the groups use social media to share propaganda and recruit new members. While the type of content shared varies, Telegram is the dominant platform used by these groups. However, accounts on Truth Social, Gab, Twitter, TikTok and Instagram were also identified. On these platforms, the groups publicly update on offline activities, share propaganda, provide instructions on how to join or engage in real-world activities, push ideological beliefs through media content, and recruit new members.

Dominance of Telegram

Each of the five groups uses Telegram to publicly share propaganda and recruit new members. Telegram offers a combination of public and private channels and direct messaging,²⁰ and has looser moderation policies compared to larger platforms, making it advantageous for extremists, giving them the ability to post content that might otherwise

¹⁷ Posted to NSC-131's Telegram channel on March 6, 2023.

¹⁸ According to posts observed in the Proud Boys' primary Telegram channel in April 2023.

¹⁹ Jason Wilson, "Proud Boys and Other Far-Right Groups Raise Millions via Christian Funding Site," *The Guardian*, April 10, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/10/proud-boys-far-right-givesendgo-christian-fundraising-site>.

²⁰ "Telegram FAQ", accessed May 1, 2023, <https://telegram.org/faq#q-what-is-telegram-what-do-i-do-here>.

be removed. Channels and accounts associated with the groups – both locally and nationally focused – were also found on alternative platforms, including Gab and Odyssey

Accounts are also identified on mainstream platforms, including Twitter and Instagram; however, the groups have more significant followings on Telegram. For example, WLM’s “global” Twitter profile has 2,471 followers, compared to 17,044 subscribers on Telegram.²¹

In addition to sharing content on their respective Telegram channels, the groups had content or group mentions shared in other public channels unaffiliated with any groups, often with significant followings. For example, in March 2023, a neo-Nazi Telegram channel shared a WLM official post featuring a PDF download of its manual to nearly 26,000 subscribers. These shares provide an additional avenue for individuals to access the content of these groups. Similarly, in the last year, all five groups had content or mentions shared in the channel known as “The Western Chauvinist”, a channel with more than 5,100 subscribers, which shares a broad range of extremist and conspiratorial content. Some of the groups, such as the Proud Boys and NSC-131, have also featured in posts made by other groups, such as Rinaldo Nazzaro, the founder of the neo-Nazi accelerationist group, The Base.^{22, 23}

The groups have also expressed support for one another on Telegram, and in some cases, this has reflected offline collaboration. In December 2022, the Proud Boys posted an image to Telegram of two hats featuring the respective logos of Proud Boys and NSC-131, with the comment, “We do a little networking”, suggesting that members of the groups met offline. The post was subsequently shared in the NSC-131 Telegram channel. Similarly, in April 2023, WLM posted an image of the group’s calendar used to make monthly announcements of days of offline action, thanking “online and offline allies”, including the Proud Boys and NSC-131. Groups have also appeared alongside one another at protests against LGBTQI+ events, some carrying firearms and wearing tactical gear.,

Social Media Use

While all the groups use Telegram, the appearance of posts and the type of content shared vary. WLM and Patriot Front primarily share images and videos from offline activities performed by local chapters. Proud Boys, Aryan Freedom Network and NSC-131 share a broader mix of content, such as media reporting that supports their worldview, images and footage from offline activities, upcoming events and commentary on societal developments.

- **WLM:** The group operates a primary Telegram channel (17,049 subscribers) and posts daily. The posts typically feature images and videos from state chapters’ offline activities, such as posting flyers in public locations. Other content shared includes media

²¹ Follower count as of May 2, 2023.

²² C Mandler, “Ohio Drag Queen Storytime Canceled Amid Armed Protests by Far-Right Groups,” *CBS News*, December 4, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ohio-drag-queen-storytime-event-canceled-amid-armed-protests-proud-boys-patriot-front/>.

²³ James Bickerton, “Neo-Nazis Shout ‘There Will Be Blood’ at Ohio Drag Event for Children,” *Newsweek*, March 14, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/neo-nazis-protest-ohio-drag-event-children-1787614>.

used to radicalise others, such as the White supremacist film “Europa: The Last Battle”, and scheduled dates for monthly “days of action”, or dates on which members are encouraged to engage in real-world activities. State and international chapters also operate their own Telegram channels. Similar content is posted to Twitter (2,471 followers), albeit less frequently.

- **Proud Boys:** The group operates a primary Telegram channel (17,326 subscribers), while some local and regional groups have their own channels. The Proud Boys post weekly, although at times they have posted more frequently, often around events. The group’s content is a mix of memes, links to articles or commentary about societal developments or news such as transgender rights, and content related to the ongoing trials of members of the group for activities related to the 6 January 2021 insurrection.
- **Patriot Front:** Posts to the group’s primary Telegram channel (15,629 subscribers) often feature images from in-person activities, and are regularly branded with Patriot Front imagery. The posts often describe the location and type of activity – such as a protest – that the group engaged in. The group also operates two smaller Telegram channels devoted to videos, featuring the group and propaganda posted in public locations. The channels have 5,586 and 1,756 subscribers respectively. Patriot Front also operates a website featuring the group’s “manifesto” and an application form for joining the group.
- **Aryan Freedom Network:** The group posts almost daily to its Telegram channel (2,157 subscribers). Similar to the Proud Boys, the group posts a mix of content, such as forwarded content from various White supremacist Telegram channels, details of upcoming group events known as “Meet and Greets”, and recruitment details. The group also operates a website that features extensive ideological materials.
- **NSC-131:** The group operates a Telegram channel (4,500 subscribers) and most frequently posts images and footage from in-person events, often labeling the post with the city the action was performed in. NSC-131 posts weekly. The group also posts content discussing the group’s ideology and an ongoing civil suit against members of the group.²⁴ Some of the posts link to the group’s Gab (3,130 followers) and Odyssey accounts.

Violence and Attacks

Violence is infrequently discussed in public channels by the groups analysed, probably, in part, to avoid law enforcement scrutiny and the removal of their public-facing social media accounts. However, there were incidents of incitements to violence against specific individuals, most often individuals perceived to be anti-fascists (antifa). These posts often describe or feature images from incidents of street violence or conflict (for example, an image posted to Telegram featuring a member of NSC-131 engaged in a fist fight with a “commie”)²⁵ involving

²⁴ “Enforcement Actions Filed Against Hate Group for NH Civil Rights Act Violations in Portsmouth,” New Hampshire Department of Justice, January 17, 2023, <https://www.doj.nh.gov/news/2023/20230117-enforcement-actions.htm>.

²⁵ Posted to NSC-131’s Telegram channel on April 14, 2023.

purported members of antifa, vague calls for violence against antifa, or attempts – both successful and unsuccessful – at doxxing individual members. Antifa was mentioned in content posted by WLM, NSC-131, Aryan Freedom Network and the Proud Boys.

Though mentions of specific plans of violence or attacks were not observed in any of the public channels, several of the groups have posted content featuring images of weapons or vague references to violence. Aryan Freedom Network regularly uses incendiary rhetoric on Telegram – for example, self-describing as “the Commies worst nightmare in Texas” “on the Hunt”.²⁶ The group has posted images of firearms and edged weapons alongside ideological imagery, such as Hitler and the Totenkopf, with a caption that mentions winning a “Racial Holy War by any means possible”.²⁷

Group members have appeared at demonstrations targeting the LGBTQI+ community while carrying firearms and/or wearing tactical gear to intimidate event participants.²⁸ In December 2022, Patriot Front and Proud Boys members displayed these tactics while gathering outside the Red Oak Community School’s “Holi-Drag Storytime” in Columbus, Ohio. The event was cancelled in response to the demonstration.²⁹ Similarly, in June 2022, 31 members of Patriot Front were arrested in Idaho on a charge of conspiracy to riot at a Pride event. According to police, group members were carrying shields, riot gear, and had paperwork suggesting they had a “master plan to riot”.³⁰

At least one member of the group engaged in violence, although at this time there is no indication that he was working on behalf of the organisation. In March 2023, a member of WLM was arrested for using Molotov cocktails to attack a church planning to host two drag performance events.³¹

Gendered Dynamics

Each of the groups promote neo-traditionalism – the desire to reject modernity and return to a traditional way of life, in which a woman’s role is to care for the family and home. This anti-feminist belief is reflected in the groups’ recruitment, or lack of recruitment, of women. Aryan Freedom Network and WLM actively mention the recruitment of women in their propaganda. Both groups mention women in their recruitment materials, viewing woman as having an integral role in fulfilling their goals of “saving” the White race through procreation.

Aryan Freedom Network is the most active in recruiting women. The group has a female member who manages the group’s online communications regarding in-person events and recruitment, and has a branch known as the “Valkyrie Division” for female members. In February 2023, Aryan Freedom Network posted a claim that “women

²⁶ Posted to Aryan Freedom Network’s Telegram channel on April 26, 2023.

²⁷ Posted to Aryan Freedom Network’s Telegram channel on April 21, 2023.

²⁸ Tess Owen, “The Far-Right Attacked Drag Events in 4 States This Weekend,” *Vice News*, December 5, 2022.

²⁹ Mandler, “Ohio Drag Queen Storytime Canceled.”

³⁰ Odette Yousef, “31 Members of the White Nationalist Patriot Front Arrested Near an Idaho Pride Event,” *NPR*, June 12, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/11/1104405804/patriot-front-white-supremacist-arrested-near-idaho-pride>.

³¹ Antonio Planas, “Ohio ‘White Lives Matter’ Member Used Molotov Cocktails on Church in an Attempt to Stop Drag Shows, Authorities Say,” *NBC News*, April 3, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ohio-white-lives-matter-member-used-molotov-cocktails-church-attempt-s-rcna77951>.

from all across American have been joining our ranks”.³² It is not known how many women have joined the division, but the post suggests the group is growing. Content featuring women in the group's Telegram channel shows women either in traditional roles, as mothers or wives, or wearing SS uniforms. WLM also includes women in some of its recruitment materials; however, there is less focus on female recruitment compared to the Aryan Freedom Network. WLM's logo features a White man and woman and self-describes as an “apolitical and welcome White of all ages, sexes, social classes”.³³ It is not known whether there is a significant female membership; however, the group has posted images on Telegram of purported group members, with their faces concealed, featuring female individuals.

Women have at times appeared at events affiliated with the other groups. None of the groups appear to have a significant female membership, and when observed at events, there are frequently only one or two women, if any. Patriot Front and the Proud Boys explicitly self-describe as male-only groups.

³² According to content posted to the group's Telegram channel on February 17, 2023.

³³ White Lives Matter Activist's Manual 2.0, accessed via archive.org, 12.

4 Private Activities of White Supremacists and Anti-Government Extremist Groups in US

White supremacist and anti-government extremist groups in the US use a number of methods for vetting. These include invitations, which are used by far-right communities. These invitations are provided by existing members to new members and act as a recommendation or referral.

Another method used is through evidence and action. This is sometimes in the form of a request to prospective members for evidence, to establish identity, including photos to prove whiteness. These photos usually require some sort of message – such as the group name written on an arm with a date – to prevent the use of fake photos. Some groups also ask for certain angles, with requirements for background content to avoid the use of fake images. It is pertinent to note that this strategy not only demonstrates willingness and loyalty of potential members to the community, but can also be used as blackmail against the individuals in future.

Other methods include questionnaires to be completed by potential members. These questionnaires are used to gather more personal information about the potential member, and can include interviews conducted online or over the phone. The kinds of questions asked during these interviews could require the supply of extensive background information, including childhood and family. In some instances, interviewers also ask interviewees to provide geographical information – for example buildings or landmarks near their primary school – to verify responses. The purpose of these interviews, which could be in-person and in personal homes, is twofold: to confirm identity and verify motivations. Interviews conducted in personal homes are intended to check materials kept in the home, such as books on display. Vetting can also be done in-person at events.

There was a perception among community members that in-person vetting would be more secure. However, participants noted that communities were paranoid at events, falsely accusing attendees of being journalists or activists. Participants also noted a gendered aspect to in-person vetting, with women often not viewed as a potential threat to groups and thus welcomed into the community without vetting.

Potential members could also be asked to provide the results of a DNA test to prove their heritage. This are most common in White supremacist communities. Posting behaviour in private communication channels is another method used by White supremacist groups. For instance, the same memes appear in

White supremacist groups. Out-linking is also used as a method of inviting members to join other platforms and channels or to connect to material hosted on alternative platforms to avoid content moderation. Participants also noted that in far-right extremist communities, outlinking to filesharing platforms like Mega, once common, is no longer a core feature.

5 Conclusion

Since early 2022, WLM, Proud Boys, Patriot Front, Aryan Freedom Network and NSC-131 have all engaged in offline activities – at times alongside one another – that seek to radicalise and recruit members of the public, as well as harm marginalised communities. These actions have sought to harm the LGBTQI+, Jewish and non-White communities, while trying to appeal to a broader audience and increase recruitment and public support.

The similarities in the offline activities performed by these groups are reflected in their online presence. These groups are interconnected through their ideological beliefs, use of divisive political issues for their extremist causes, the application of Telegram and other social media platforms, support for violence, and views towards women. Members of the groups have also met offline, expressed support for one another on social media, and engaged in protests alongside one another.

High-profile arrests have yet to serve as a deterrent for offline action. According to Patriot Front's website, between September and October 2023, the group performed more than 1,500 in-person actions in 48 states and Washington, DC, even after 31 members were arrested in June 2022. Similarly, despite the ongoing trials of Proud Boys members related to 6 January 2021, researchers have indicated that the number of Proud Boys chapters is increasing.³⁴ NSC-131 continues to engage in offline activities, despite the ongoing civil suit.³⁵

Without online and offline accountability, these groups are likely to continue to find new ways to appeal to the public and garner mainstream support. NSC-131 has recently announced a new "grassroots" initiative with the goal of getting members elected to local office, while members of the Proud Boys have run in local elections.³⁶ Patriot Front and other groups have also responded to predominately White communities that have been victims of disasters, such as tornadoes, by providing aid alongside group propaganda. The groups will continue to work, both separately and together, to advance their agendas through both online and offline activities.

34 Aaron Morrison, "Number of Hate Groups Declined in 2021, but Proud Boys Chapters Surging, Says SPLC," *PBS*, March 9, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/number-of-hate-groups-declined-in-2021-but-proud-boys-chapters-surging-says-splc>.

35 "Enforcement Actions Filed Against Hate Group for NH Civil Rights Act Violations in Portsmouth," New Hampshire Department of Justice, January 17, 2023, <https://www.doj.nh.gov/news/2023/20230117-enforcement-actions.htm>.

36 Tim Mak, "Some Proud Boys Are Moving to Local Politics as Scrutiny of Far-Right Group Ramps Up," *NPR*, June 28, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/28/1010328631/some-proud-boys-are-moving-to-local-politics-as-scrutiny-of-far-right-group-ramp>.



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