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“Safer Web = Safer America”

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After Capitol Insurrection - Domestic Terrorists Still Hiding in Plain Sight on Social Media Platforms To Recruit, Organize, and Terrorize

New Report by Coalition for a Safer Web & Digital Citizens Alliance Finds Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram Fail to Put Action Behind Their Public Vows to Crack Down on Extremists

WASHINGTON, DC, April 19, 2021 – Social media platforms are enabling domestic extremists that peddle incitement to violent action to organize, recruit, and plan, according to a new [investigative report](#)—*The Domestic Extremist Next Door* -- from the Coalition for a Safer Web (CSW) and Digital Citizens Alliance (DCA) issued on the 26th anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombings.

Despite public vows to crack down on extremist activity – especially after the January 6 Capitol Insurrection social media platforms still seem to be unable or unwilling to stop many militant groups from new activity or remove older videos and posts promoting militia activities.

As reported in today’s [Washington Post](#) the Report details how evasive strategies have been deployed, which hashtags and accounts are camouflaged to evade BigTech interceptions, and why social media companies – with all of their vaunted content moderation assets – are outmatched, outgunned, and outwitted by extremist groups.

The Report also discloses how QAnon (an FBI designated terrorist organization), Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and other white extremist/anti-Semitic groups have developed savvy technology workarounds to remain active, attract new recruits and donors, and embed messages on videos uploaded onto YouTube.

Extremist and militia groups have proven to be savvy marketers across the mainstream social media platforms, even high jacking seemingly innocuous terms and hashtags like "SavetheChildren" and "Patriots" to spread misinformation used to indoctrinate and radicalize followers.

Examples the researchers found include:

- A YouTube message from an Oath Keepers chapter leader titled "The Coming Civil War? Part 1";
- A blank COVID vaccine card shared amongst Proud Boys via Telegram with "anyone who needs it";
- Three Percenter sharing videos of military-like exercises, followed by comments in discussions from interested potential members;
- A Boogaloo Bois video called "Hostage Taker" demonstrating how someone could potentially take a hostage.
- YouTube explosive and gun making instructional videos accessed by extremist groups.

Amb. Marc Ginsberg, President of CSW stated:

"No other report since the seditious violence at the Capitol on January 6 so explicitly details the failures of social media companies prevent the very groups that attacked the Capitol to continue to operate with impunity. The charade of social media executives' pledges to stop the extremist contagion will only end when Congress and the public insist on tech and policy reforms that BigTech must adopt but will never do so voluntarily."

As also detailed in the Report, QAnon followers circumvent the ban on QAnon accounts by putting images on tweets containing terms related to the crackpot conspiracy theories in uploaded videos – just one more illustration how YouTube's management has failed in every respect to be held to account by Congress for its evasion of reasonable content moderation requirements.

Militias appear to have some awareness that less violent, more socially acceptable posts would have a longer shelf life on the best-known platforms - particularly YouTube and Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. But on platforms like TikTok and Telegram, militias shared more extremist and alarmist messages. On TikTok and Telegram, researchers were more likely to find domestic extremists sharing a capacity for violence and taking more aggressive political positions.

It is one of the reasons why CSW filed twin lawsuits against Apple & Google in January, 2021 to compel them to remove Telegram from their App stores.

"Last month, the CEOs of Google, Facebook, and Twitter testified before Congress that they were taking steps to address extremism on their platforms. They made it sound like they got this," said Eric Feinberg, vice president of content moderation at CSW. "The platform's technologies are either inept, or the companies are just choosing to ignore a lot of content that promotes extremist behavior and thinking."

The Report outlined three core recommendations for reducing the ability for extremists to hide in plain sight:

- **Hire More Humans** -- There are militia group members that trick the platform's A.I. (artificial intelligence). A human being trained to spot deceptive photos and search through hashtags can understand nuance and delineate between a dangerous militia member hijacking the term "patriot" from someone who is a New England Patriots fan.
- **Consistent Platform Enforcement** -- There is no industry standard or consistency when blocking domestic extremist channels and pages. A QAnon follower may be active on Facebook but blocked on YouTube. Militias channels set up years ago might still be up on YouTube and Twitter but blocked for recent activities on Facebook and Instagram. The social media platforms must identify complex organizations and ensure their pages come down across the Internet, rather than coming down on one platform but finding refuge on another.

CSW has advocated the creation of a Social Media Standards Board (SMSB) as well as a new Social Media Early Warning System (SMEWS) to compel social media companies to adopt a new industry standard for defining extremist content and enabling independent researchers to monitor compliance with this new harmonized standard and alert law enforcement to urgent account interceptions.

So far, no social media company has expressed a willingness to support either proposal because each would require BigTech to be accountable to an independent monitoring organization they cannot ignore. The ongoing threat illustrates again how little BigTech's Global Internet Forum for Countering Terrorism (GIFCT) has achieved to block foreign and domestic extremist groups from contaminating America's social media platforms.

- **Congressional Action** – Domestic terrorism is defined in federal law but carries no unique penalties. Congress must enact new penalties for engaging in domestic terrorism.

About the Coalition for a Safer Web

The Coalition for a Safer Web is a non-partisan, not-for-profit 501(c)(3) advocacy organization whose mission is to promote new public/private partnerships to facilitate the expeditious removal of extremist & terrorist incitement and instruction content from social media platforms. Visit us at coalitionsw.org. CSW uses technology from The Global Intellectual Property Enforcement Center (GIPEC).

About Digital Citizens Alliance

The Digital Citizens Alliance is a nonprofit, 501(c)(6) organization that is a consumer-oriented coalition focused on educating the public and policymakers on the threats consumers face on the Internet. Based in Washington, DC, the Digital Citizens Alliance counts among its supporters: private citizens, the health, pharmaceutical and creative industries, as well as online safety experts and other communities focused on Internet safety. Visit us at digitalcitizensalliance.org.