

Executive Summary

In 2020, New Jersey’s Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness and the United States Department of Homeland Security confirmed what many members of our community already knew: White supremacist violent extremists are among the most “persistent,” “hostile,” and “lethal” threats to our State and our Nation. This report seeks to outline that threat, highlights the severe human cost of white supremacy, and calls upon all New Jersey residents to stand united against hate, actively work to dismantle white supremacy, and to hold ourselves, each other, and our institutions accountable for doing the same.

White supremacy encompasses the full spectrum of bias-based behavior – including biased attitudes, acts of bias, and systemic discrimination – that results from a belief in the superiority of white people. White supremacist violent extremism is the willingness to threaten or engage in white supremacy-motivated physical violence and crime. Both white supremacy and white supremacist violent extremism inflict trauma on the many communities they target. White supremacists target not only the Black community, but all communities of color. They target not only the Jewish community, but all faith communities. And they target community members not only based on their race or faith, but also based on their gender and sexuality.

More than 200 community members and experts participated in the listening sessions that formed the foundation of this report. Their accounts bore witness to the inescapable reach of white supremacy and the widespread trauma it inflicts. Five key themes emerged from the presentations and testimonials participants shared at the listening sessions:

First, community members’ expressions of white supremacy inflict widespread trauma on communities that are targeted by white supremacy, and especially on young people. Community members regularly subject Black people, Jewish people, and other groups to expressions of white supremacy. This exposure to white supremacy is deeply traumatic, but white community members too often dismiss or minimize the experiences of those who are targeted by white supremacy, encouraging targets to treat it as a joke, or ignoring targets’ experiences completely.

Second, through a deliberate strategy to normalize and mainstream white supremacist ideologies, extremists influence community members to promote white supremacist causes. White supremacist violent extremists have pursued a deliberate, decades-long strategy to blend into mainstream society and promote fear and false narratives to normalize and uphold white supremacy, and they are increasingly effective at leveraging social media and other online forums to maximize their impact. Mainstream white supremacist talking points, circulated widely in both traditional and social media, have enlisted community members to resist implementation of anti-bias education.

Third, some white supremacist violent extremists have pursued a deliberate strategy to infiltrate positions of authority in government and law enforcement and (mis) use their authority to harass, assault, incarcerate, and disenfranchise Black people and other people of color. As the FBI has explained, the infiltration tactics used by some white supremacists have been leveraged to seek positions of power in all levels of government,

from law enforcement agencies and state legislatures to executive offices and local school boards.

Fourth, white supremacist violent extremists and adjacent extremist groups recruit white people – especially young white people – by leveraging their insecurities to inspire them to target others. This recruitment frequently occurs online, via multiplayer games, online message boards, social media, and other internet forums, where white supremacists use memes and “jokes” that are racist, sexist, anti-LGBTQIA+, antisemitic, and otherwise hateful to normalize bigotry. Young white people who have experienced trauma are particularly vulnerable to such recruitment. Trauma does not excuse participation in white supremacy. Yet it is so often a factor in why young white people turn to white supremacist violent extremism.

Fifth, it is critical for white people to partner with communities of color and other targets of white supremacists to counter white supremacy. White community members must work closely with community members who have been targeted by white supremacy to dismantle white supremacy.

Finally, based on the presentations and testimonials of experts and community members at the listening sessions, the report identifies a set of best practices for dismantling white supremacy:

1. Listen to and learn from the experiences of those targeted by white supremacy – especially people of color.
2. Don't contribute to normalizing or mainstreaming hate – in-person or online.
3. Proactively discuss race and racism with youth.
4. Educate youth on how to avoid recruitment.
5. Recognize the risk for and signs of radicalization, and intervene early if you see them.
6. Equip youth and adults with resources and support systems for coping with and combatting white supremacy.

These best practices are crucial so that community members can protect themselves, their children, and their communities from the damage white supremacy inflicts.