



FEATURES AND STORIES

Funding Hate: How extremists like the ones who attacked the Capitol are making money off the internet

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Authorities have now charged [more than 300 people](#) with crimes in connection with the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, including two men charged with assault on the police officer who was killed and at least [four dozen](#) who are affiliated with the QAnon ideology or far-right extremist groups including the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers.

But despite the arrests and a vigorous federal [investigation](#), the extremist ideologies and conspiracy theories that fueled the attack aren't going away anytime soon. In fact, extremists have exploited new digital technologies to create a broader, more decentralized movement – and a web-based infrastructure that is helping their leaders raise millions of dollars to fund their activities.

Years in the making, this movement – based on white supremacy and a rejection of our pluralistic society and democratic values – was turbocharged by Donald Trump's presidency. And, though Trump's influence has begun to wane, it will likely continue to grow more militant and spawn violence and acts of terror long after Trump has faded from the political scene.

As the federal government and anti-racist groups mobilize to combat this threat, the financing of extremists in this increasingly decentralized landscape is a major concern.

Monetizing extremist content

In the past, hate groups raised money by means such as charging dues, selling products or requiring the purchase of uniforms. The funds were then used to pay for the distribution of propaganda and other recruitment efforts. Some groups, like the antigovernment group [Oath Keepers](#), which has thousands of dues-paying members, still use this model.

Today, though, many white power groups and personalities are raising money through crowdfunding and the distribution of propaganda itself across a variety of platforms. The solicitation of donations during live video streaming, for example, is emerging as a major source of revenue.

In fact, crowdfunding and online content monetization enabled the extremists behind the “Stop the Steal” movement to make anti-democratic organizing a livelihood. Far-right activist and self-described “Stop the Steal” national organizer [Ali Alexander](#), for example, has relied on websites like GiveSendGo, an alternative to the popular crowdfunding site GoFundMe, to secure funding for his activities. [Nick Fuentes](#), a prominent white nationalist, has long earned his income from monetizing livestreams on YouTube and, later, [DLive](#), a youth-targeted gaming website that was used to livestream the Capitol invasion. Vincent James Foxx, head of the far-right media outlet Red Elephants, has used the same livestreaming platforms, as well as the mobile payment service Cashapp and content monetization platform SubscribeStar.

Some extremists who stormed the Capitol actually made money from it. [Tim Gionet](#), a longtime white nationalist personality who streams under the moniker “Baked Alaska” and who was arrested for his role in the Capitol riot, made roughly \$2,000 from his Jan. 6 livestream, while his followers commented, “HANG ALL CONGRESSMEN.”

In November, the SPLC’s Hatewatch [reported](#) that dozens of extremist figures were each earning thousands of dollars per month on DLive. As the post-election period became dominated by Trump’s false assertion that the election was fraudulent, these DLive streamers shifted to video streaming at in-person events branded with the slogan “Stop the Steal.” Not surprisingly, boosted by this new mission and purpose, streaming donations shot through the roof, and some DLive streamers received nearly \$44,000 from donations during November and December alone. Some of those same individuals ended up being featured by House impeachment managers as key perpetrators of the Jan. 6 violence when they once again used DLive to livestream the events at the Capitol.

Even when mainstream social media companies block extremists from using their services, the decentralized technology landscape too often fills the gap. YouTube, for example, has many such deplatforming strategies, including account time-outs, removal of chat features and disallowing bad actors to take donations or profit from advertising revenue. Some newer, smaller companies, however, have stepped in to provide alternative sites.

The Entropy suite of services from Cthonic Software, for example, allows extremists who have been de-monetized on YouTube to embed their video streams on its site instead. It takes a smaller percentage of the cut from donations and provides a “censorship-free” chat service. It currently provides chat and financing services to numerous radical-right video streamers, including many of the ones who had been banned previously for inciting violence and engaging in hateful conduct on more mainstream services.

Crowdfunding hate

The initial wave of “alt-tech” clones developed after the deadly white nationalist Unite the Right rally in 2017 also included alternatives to popular online fundraising platforms. Instead of Patreon, a crowdfunding site popular with artists, journalists, musicians and other creators, extremists could use sites like Hatreon, founded by antigovernment extremist [Cody Wilson](#). Holocaust denier Charles C. Johnson launched [WeSearchr](#), a site that helps white nationalists, neo-Nazis and other extremists by providing a service similar to the more project-oriented crowdfunding site Kickstarter.

Crowdfunding sites played a critical role in the Capitol insurrection, providing money to help people to travel to Washington.

BuzzFeed [identified](#) more than a dozen GoFundMe campaigns looking to cover travel expenses for the Jan. 6 rally. One campaign, which promised to “build an army to march into DC,” raised \$21,548 from nearly 300 donors. Likewise, the site GiveSendGo hosted “more than two dozen fundraisers related to protesting the outcome of the presidential election, raising travel funds to attend the protest in Washington and other right-wing causes,” [according to CNN](#). Ali Alexander started a fundraiser on the site on Jan. 12 to build a “security and administrative team,” amassing more than \$30,000 from 332 donors. “You are a threat to the powerful. We need you to help save the republic,” one donor posted on the site.

These are just a few examples of the online campaigns that have collectively raised millions to fund extremism.

A platform created by American Wolf, an armed far-right group based in Olympia, Washington, is currently hosting a campaign for Alan Swinney, a Proud Boys member with a long history of violence who is facing charges of shooting protesters with a paintball gun, spraying another with mace and drawing a firearm during demonstrations in Portland last summer.

Bellingcat, an online investigative site, [uncovered videos](#) of Swinney discussing his activities at demonstrations; in one, he describes how he wants to raise funds to buy bear mace and distribute it to his compatriots in order to attack antifascists. “People like knowing that something they donated for is the reason why those Antifa are laying on the ground and choking,” he says in one video. “They get a lot of satisfaction knowing they were responsible for that pain.” To date, Swinney has raised roughly \$1,500 on American Wolf’s platform.

Extremists are also using crowdfunding to help pay their legal defense bills.

GiveFundGo [raised](#) more than \$500,000 for Kyle Rittenhouse, the 17-year-old charged with murdering two protesters at a Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstration in Kenosha, Wisconsin. After Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrío, along with other members of the group, [destroyed two BLM signs](#) that belonged to historic Black churches at a Stop the Steal protest in Washington, D.C., in December, the site [raised more than \\$100,000](#) to fund his legal defense. A day prior to the insurrection, Tarrío was barred from D.C. He faces a misdemeanor charge of destruction of property in connection to the destruction of the BLM banners, as well as two felony counts of possessing two extended gun magazines. He has pleaded not guilty.

Crowdfunding sites can also act as a buffer between extremists and banks or online payment systems, allowing them to use their services even if they have been banned. For example, PayPal [banned the Proud Boys](#) from using its services in late 2018 after members of the group assaulted a group of antifascist activists in New York City. However, members of the group were able to use the crowdfunding site GiveSendGo, which calls itself a “Christian fundraising site” – and which used PayPal as its payment processor – in the leadup to the siege at the Capitol. PayPal [terminated GiveSendGo’s account](#) in the aftermath of the Jan. 6 attack, but the damage was already done.

Solutions elusive

Identifying the problem is the easy part. Doing something about the financing of domestic terrorism and extremism is challenging – both from a technology standpoint and a civil rights one.

Policies must be based on respect for human rights and an expectation that people deserve protection from harms online, freedom of legal expression and access to commerce online, and transparency in decision-making by governments and technology companies.

Last month, SPLC Chief of Staff Lecia Brooks [testified](#) before the House Subcommittee on National Security, International Development and Monetary Policy and presented a set of policy recommendations for technology companies and the federal government. You can read the full testimony, along with those recommendations, [here](#).

The events of Jan. 6 should serve as a wake-up call for our nation. We cannot afford to ignore it.

Photo by Jon Cherry/Getty Images

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