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# White Supremacy—Could the Terrorism Label do More Harm Than Good?

Cielita Maguddayao, Volunteer Reporter

Following the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. declared a War on Terror which disproportionately targets Muslim and Arab communities, demonstrating the U.S.'s failure to reckon with the word "terrorism." This year's Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, made up of a predominantly white crowd, has brought the word back on our radar. Many politicians and activists were quick to label the mob of Trump supporters as "domestic terrorists," pushing us to reconsider what terrorism actually is.

The FBI's definition of domestic terrorism is "violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature."

This criteria describes the events of Jan. 6. But is the violence caused by white supremacists enough to raise concern?

Rep. Max Rose, D-N.Y., stated his thoughts about the domestic terrorist crisis in a 2019 joint hearing for Meeting the Challenge of White Nationalist Terrorism at Home and Abroad.

"White nationalist terrorists have killed more people in recent years than any other type of domestic extremist. We also know that 78% of extremist-related murders in the United States last year were attributed to those adhering to a white nationalist ideology," Rose said.

Despite the FBI stating that terrorism investigations are its first priority, the growing threat of white supremacy is not treated as domestic terrorism by the Justice Department. Prosecutors in these cases prefer to press charges for possession of deadly weapons rather than for crimes motivated by white supremacist ideology.

Rose also identified the different ways that the Federal Government deals with terrorism based on identity groups.

"Today, if an American citizen swears allegiance to ISIS or another FTO [Foreign Terrorist Organization] and spreads their message of terror, there are several and significant resources available to the Federal Government and there are significant consequences for those actions.

However, if that same American citizen swears allegiance to a white supremacist group based overseas and spreads their message of terror, the Federal Government does not have access to those same tools," Rose mentioned.



We can't rely on the system that continues to fail Black and brown communities. Branding white supremacy as terrorism will ultimately lead to amplified policing of Black and brown people. This is the opposite of the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement's call to defund the police.

We already know that law enforcement targets Black and brown people excessively compared to white people. Why should we give institutions that criminalize Black and brown communities more power and resources to do so?

Hatem Abudayyeh, executive director of the Chicago-based Arab American Action Network, shared his thoughts on this issue with *In These Times*.

"If more funding goes to the feds, that expansion of the state is going to go after us. It's going to come down on our communities—Arab, Muslim, Latinx, Black, [and] Native," Abudayyeh said.

White supremacists think they're invincible because, to some extent, they are. Many Jan. 6 rioters didn't even bother to hide their faces to avoid identification because they knew that they wouldn't experience the same brutal policing as peaceful BLM protests. White supremacists must not be further enabled to abuse the system that unjustly singles out Black and brown people.

Ultimately, throwing the "terrorism" label around will only further obscure our perception of it. Are we willing to risk the safety of Black and brown communities in pursuit of bringing the hammer down on terrorism? Rather than focusing on semantics, our energy should be shifted to protecting those that continue to be affected most by these biased policies.