Stovepiped in Silence: The Growing Threat of White Supremacy Extremism in the Pacific Northwest

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2018 was the deadliest year on record for domestic extremism violence. How does White Supremacy intersect with this, and what can the public sector do about it?

Stovepiped in Silence:
The Growing Threat of White Supremacy Extremism in the Pacific Northwest

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this practicum proposal is to address the growing threat of White Supremacy Extremism (henceforth referred to as “WSE”) in the Portland Metro region and explore the barriers to identifying WSE and obstacles with information sharing. By understanding current conditions and leaning forward with proactive and holistic approaches to education and information sharing, on a local and regional level we may be able to interrupt the cycle of proliferation and interdict future bias and hate crimes in our communities.

The Regional Disaster Preparedness Organization (RDPO) is one of several local agencies that could potentially serve as a possible venue for supporting solutions and becoming a regional platform proponent. The RDPO provides a holistic regional clearinghouse of diverse groups, leadership, and members to better work together to solve common problems with innovative solutions. The mission of the RDPO is to “build and maintain regional disaster preparedness capabilities in the Portland Metropolitan Region through strategic and coordinated planning, training and exercising, and investment in technology and specialized equipment” (RDPO, 2019).

Domestic terrorism prevention is inherently a part of any regional capability and preparedness assessment, and yet, remains an underfunded, understudied, and underutilized capability. In 2018, every single extremist killing in the United States had ties to right-wing extremism and often, by extension, WSE (Anti-Defamation League, 2019). This proposal examines the current nature of WSE and the barriers to understanding the current threat assessment. By obtaining a more accurate assessment of the real-time proliferation and threat of WSE in the Portland Metro
Region, a case can be made for better educating and empowering law enforcement, the intelligence community, and first responders on recognizing and interdicting this growing threat.
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Section One: What is White Supremacy Extremism (WSE)?

To begin to understand the problem of WSE and the accompanying violent conditions, we first need to try and identify what the definition of WSE is. As it turns out, this is one of the crux issues of the WSE research and mitigation. There is no one definition of WSE.

The Department of Homeland Security gives this definition:

Violent White Supremacist Extremists (WSE) are defined as individuals who seek, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence, to support their belief in the intellectual and moral superiority of the white race over other races. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may be constitutionally protected activities (Department of Homeland Security, 2019).

The Anti-Defamation League defines white supremacy as “a term used to characterize various belief systems” central of which is the tenet that whites are the dominant, prevalent culture in our society and must be maintained as such. In this view, white culture is superior to all cultures, and is threatened by ideas of multiculturalism and inclusiveness. The ADL asserts that white supremacists today believe that “the white race is in danger of extinction due to a rising “flood” of non-whites, who are controlled and manipulated by Jews, and that imminent action is needed to “save” the white race” (Anti-Defamation League, n.d.).

Researchers at the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and the Responses to Terrorism (START) define White Supremacy Extremists as “actors who enable the execution of violence indirectly through assistance” (Beutel, 2017). This viewpoint again asserts that white
culture is the dominant and superior culture, including intellectually and morally. Unlawful violence towards the federal government, different ethnic, racial, and religious groups is considered part and parcel of the movement in this definition. START researchers further break down this narrative by breaking this into three distinct categories:

Violent White supremacist extremist narratives are based in at least one of three types of arguments:

1. Pseudo-scientific (e.g., there is an “inherent” biological basis for these beliefs),

2. Socio-cultural claims (e.g., Whites are “civilized,” while non-Whites are not), and

3. Religious—which include racist interpretations of established religious traditions such as Christianity and Norse Paganism/Germanic Hedonism, as well as racist New Religious Movements (e.g., Cosmotheism and Creativity) (Beutel, 2017).

The definition of WSE also at times is interchangeably used with “White Nationalism,” which has more political undertones. The Southern Poverty Law Center gives the following context for White Nationalism:

Adherents of white nationalist groups believe that white identity should be the organizing principle of the countries that make up Western civilization. White nationalists advocate for policies to reverse changing demographics and the loss of an absolute, white majority. Ending non-white immigration, both legal and illegal, is an urgent priority — frequently elevated over other racist projects, such as ending multiculturalism and miscegenation — for white nationalists seeking to preserve white, racial hegemony. White nationalists seek
to return to an America that predates the implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.).

Each of these organizations has a distinct and powerful descriptor of what WSE is and isn’t, and none of them are wrong—but this also illustrates one of the challenges in discussing and moving intel about cases and individuals that may be linked to WSE. The challenge of creating a universal definition is beyond the scope of this paper. This paper adopts the following key concepts in discussing WSE and associated extremists:

1. White Supremacy Extremists believe in dominance of the white race.
2. While there are differences in exact definition, there is an incontrovertible overlap between WSE and White Nationalism.
3. WSE exists in the condition that its adherents believe they are under threat from a variety of factors, which may or may not include:
   a. Biological conditions and race mixing/dilution.
   b. Religious threats (particularly the Jewish religion).
   c. Conditions of political persecution.

It is through the lens of these above concepts that we will examine a very brief history of WSE in the Pacific Northwest, the current status of WSE both within the Portland Metro Region and beyond, and how (even if) we effectively share the information and intelligence of local WSE and work on mitigation strategies.

There is no clear consensus among law-enforcement and intelligence organizations as to the definition of “White Supremacy Extremism.”
Section Two: Problem Statement

PROBLEM STATEMENT:
White Supremacy Extremism has a long and storied history in the Pacific Northwest and the Portland Metro region. While there are a variety of agencies working on this statistically-proven growing threat, there are barriers to collaboration for prevention, mitigation, and interdiction.

White Supremacy Extremism is widely acknowledged to be a historically longstanding problem in the Pacific Northwest, and within the last few years, has shown a renewed surge of growth. While there are myriad organizations tasked with interfacing with this issue, silos exist, and both understanding the problem and communicating information and intelligence can be challenging.

In 2018, every single extremist killing in the United States had ties to right-wing extremism and often, by extension, WSE (Anti-Defamation League, 2019). Indeed, Oregon has a long history of racism, anti-government activity, and extremism, with hate crimes and WSE showing a rising trend since 2016 (Berman & Sullivan, 2016). City, local, regional, and state law enforcement agencies all have mechanisms to investigate and report such activities, but the sharing of information, despite the existence of a State Fusion Network, is marginal. As a Washington County officer reported (he requested to remain anonymous), “There’s just not the incentive in it for different agencies to share information. We can’t even communicate on a common reporting system.” Furthermore, nearly all the professionals interviewed were uncomfortable with going
“on the record,” especially when it came to identifying problematic relationships and communication. This warrants the questions: What barriers to collaboration for prevention, mitigation, and interdiction exists? How do we, as a region, break the silos and create meaningful conversation of the scope, nature, and solutions to the problem of proliferating WSE?

For demonstrated context of this issue on both a regional and national scale, Appendix A and Appendix B contain charts that demonstrate the rise of WSE-related proliferation in the Pacific Northwest and neighboring states. Appendix C is a comparison of reported hate crimes in selected cities across the United States.

Section Three: Objectives

The History of the WSE Threat and Current Conditions

The Pacific Northwest, and Oregon in particular, has a long history of racism.

The Portland metro region, and Oregon as a whole, is no stranger to WSE; there’s a storied history of racism in Oregon that tends to be overlooked. While Oregon banned slavery in 1844, it became a “sundown state”—where African-Americans could “not let the sun set on them” and where by 1857 the State Constitution forbade African Americans from entering the state: “no free Negro or mulatto not residing in the state at the adoption of this constitution shall come, reside or be within this state or hold real estate, or many contracts therein” (Coalition of
Communities of Color, 2014). Extremists have sadly always found a niche within Oregon, and researchers and law enforcement have noticed a marked surge in anti-government and extremist groups since the election of Barack Obama in 2008, and then another uptick in the election cycle of 2016 (Berman & Sullivan, 2016). With the Malheur Wildlife Refuge occupation by the Bundy family, Oregon’s reputation as a haven for extremists captured national attention (Wiles, 2018). Professor and WSE researcher Kathleen Belew states eloquently, “Knowledge of the history of white power activism is integral to preventing future acts of violence and to providing vital context to current political developments” (Belew, 2018).

Not every extremist, anti-government, or para-military organization operating in the state is White Supremacist. However, the overlap between these groups and the ties that feed back into “white power” reach back to the Vietnam war era and were solidified in the decades after into a social movement (Belew, 2018). Oregon, and more specifically, the Portland metro region, have shown this correlation to be true. Open source social media mapping reveals ties between self-identified sovereign citizens, (supposedly former) Klansmen, current WSE gang members, and groups like Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys. The line between WSE, sovereign citizens, gang members, and far-right nationalists is blurring, making both the tracking and interdiction of these groups difficult without effective mechanisms and political will to share information.

The Portland metro region’s dedicated and talented law enforcement and intelligence professionals have the skills and knowledge to fight this growing problem, but the conduit for a common operating picture and platform for effective communication and open information-sharing is lacking. The RDPO has the potential to be a convergence zone of capabilities, and a
unifying force in taking on an issue that hits at the heart of the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) terrorism nexus as well. With the City of Portland’s recent decision to leave the Joint Terrorism Task Force (Templeton, 2019), this regional coordination becomes even more imperative.

Is There a Nexus to Terrorism Funding?

WSE, by any definition, is a form of terrorism. One of the challenges in studying and interdicting WSE however stems from the national level. Under the Obama administration, grants were administered under the Office of Community Partnerships for countering violent extremism, both jihadi and white supremacist (Beinart, 2018). While the Trump administration has increased the overall Department of Homeland Security budget by over 11%, the Office of Community Partnerships saw it’s staffing cut by over half, and its funding cut to under ¼ of what it had previously been. Political Science Professor Peter Beinart attributes it to this:

The cuts stem instead from two biases. First, in keeping with their law-and-order mentality, Trump officials would rather empower the police to arrest suspected terrorists than work with local communities to prevent people from becoming terrorists in the first place, as the Office of Community Partnerships did. Second, they believe the primary terrorist threat to Americans is jihadism, not white supremacy. The Office of Community Partnerships committed the sin of working on both (Beinart, 2018).

However, the overarching evidence point to the fact that that “FBI concluded that white supremacists killed more Americans from 2000 to 2016 than “any other domestic extremist
movement” (Beinart, 2018). This trend has continued, and without top down support from the President’s administration, finding sources of funding for understanding the nexus of WSE to the overarching picture of terrorism becomes even more important. This is where regional organizations may come into play. Groups like the Portland Metro-region RDPO, or the Statewide Terrorism Intelligence and Threat Assessment Network (TITAN) fusion network offer more grassroots opportunities to explore funding options and may be useful in creating pathways for information sharing and general awareness on a regional and state level.

**Problems in Information Sharing**

One thing that became increasingly clear during research and speaking with different agencies was that while many are conducting some level of surveillance, monitoring, and data accumulation (within their respective rights and roles), despite the structure of the TITAN Fusion Network, there were serious gaps in information sharing. When speaking with law enforcement representatives from Washington County, the City of Portland, Clackamas County, City of Beaverton, and State Intelligence Analysts, not one person or agency would go on official record with what they perceived as “problems” in information sharing.

However, there was overlap in several conversations. While there are many issues surrounding information sharing, the following were common to at least three or more agencies, introduced in Figure One:
Figure One: Barriers to Information Sharing

- Territorialism: agencies are gathering the information, but not sharing. One individual stated, regarding the relationship of area law enforcement agencies with the FBI, “they want our information, but they are not willing to give anything in return.” (anonymous, 2018).
- Lack of interest/caring in the problem.
- Lack of awareness.
- “Someone else’s problem” (anonymous, 2018): We know it exists, but it doesn’t concern us.
- “A Portland problem” (anonymous, 2018): this is a Portland issue, and is minor outside of the metro area.
Section Four: Potential Solutions

Figure Two: Potential Solutions

Option One: Maintain the Status Quo

Do nothing. Accept the fact that regionally and nationally this is an increasing problem and continue to respond with reactive measures. Any protective and predictive modeling will remain within the specific agencies, and information sharing will continue to be on an as-needed, as-requested basis. The TITAN Fusion Center will continue to function as an information network, at the same level agencies are contributing and presently coordinating.

Option Two: Educational Outreach

There are existing training modules available on extremism and signs of radicalization. For example, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) released a course in 2017 titled “Community-led Action in Response to Violent
Extremism” (CARVE). Described as a “a 4-hour self-paced online course designed for a U.S.-based audience to provide community-focused, rigorously researched, and academically-informed instruction on Countering Violent Extremism (National Consortium START, 2017), this course is available to anyone with a FEMA student ID. This course delivers research-based information about extremism and exposes students to a social-science theory of violent radicalization. More localized offerings are available, including the RDPO Law Enforcement group training, taught by RDPO Intelligence Analyst Courtney Ramsey. Neither of these courses, as examples, are specifically focused on WSE, although Mr. Ramsey’s case studies center on several cases relevant to WSE. What they do provide, however, are lessons in awareness—signs and symptoms—that point to radicalization. Per Courtney Ramsey, these include, but are not limited to (Ramsey, 2019):

- Violent rhetoric and/ or online postings
- Detachment
- Encouraging others to “join the cause”
- New interest in weapons and/or military-style training

Option Three: Regional Symposium

With various agencies all doing different work in mitigation, prevention and response of WSE, what would happen if a forum was provided to bring all willing entities under one roof—not just virtually, but physically? As of this paper, there are no identifiable specific examples of conferences or symposiums anywhere in the United States. The Department of Homeland Security has started to move the language of extremism from “Countering Violent Islamic
Extremism” the more all-inclusive “Countering Violent Extremism”, and even has developed a “Countering Violent Extremism and Active Shooter Web Portal” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2018), but as of this paper, no physical gathering or presentation for information sharing. While there are local, regional, and state law enforcement conferences throughout Oregon, a focus on WSE (or any far-right radicalization) has been held to a single plenary session at best.

Option Four: Synergize Educational Outreach and a Regional Symposium

This option takes a two-pronged approach to developing a regional lexicon and base for mitigating the proliferation of WSE. First, participating agencies would commit to adopting a formalized training platform, something preferable within the scope of a ½ day or less completion time. Then, after a set time period for participating agencies to become complaint, a regional symposium would be held to bring all interested players to the table for information sharing and face-to-face collaboration. An agency such as the RPDO would be ideal for hosting a symposium, with a broad swath of participating agencies and a mission for coalition-building regional capabilities.
Section Five: Analysis of Options

Figure Three: Analysis of Options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status Quo</td>
<td>• Pros: Easy to maintain, no cost, no institutional discomfort.</td>
<td>• Cons: Complicity in continuing acts of violence and hate in our communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Outreach</td>
<td>• Pros: Structure and essentials class is already in place (Courtney Ramsey class on recognizing signs of radicalization).</td>
<td>• Cons: Does not address accountability and silos of information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Symposium</td>
<td>• Pros: Removes boundaries and brings people face to face, can be built into existing conference.</td>
<td>• Cons: Expense, territorialism, coordinating schedules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergize: Education &amp; Symposium</td>
<td>• Pros: The most thorough approach that brings education and accountability to the forefront, creates information sharing pathways, collaboratively defines the problem.</td>
<td>• Cons: Expensive, time-consuming, requires agencies to step outside their comfort zone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By maintaining the status quo, the course remains that the current state of affairs, intelligence and interdiction is acceptable. This is revenue-neutral and may be the only available option at the time of this paper. As of May 1st, 2019, the City of Portland has continued to cut the police budget, particularly in areas of intelligence and inter-agency coordination. With the prior-mentioned condition of withdrawal from the JTTF, it’s important to acknowledge that before any regional movement on this subject can be accomplished, it must first be determined what our “new normal” is. The City of Portland is the largest single-entity police agency in the state and needs to be included and involved in any regional process that examines addressing WSE.
Educational outreach is already in existence—whether it’s through larger national platforms like FEMA and START (National Consortium START, 2017), or locally via targeted outreach like the law-enforcement outreach UASI Analyst Courtney Ramsey is delivering (Ramsey, 2019), there is existing infrastructure. There is a modest cost associated with a more regional or localized approach, but the personalization that this approach could offer may result in bringing more people and agencies to the table. With a collaborative learning structure, there’s also the benefit of trust-building, with the hope of increasing information sharing potential in the future. Another access point to this approach would be to hopefully bolster the usage and utility of the TITAN Fusion Network.

A regional symposium has the benefit of removing boundaries, be they are real or imagined, and bringing the players together under one roof. The mostly-anonymous interviews all revealed a pattern of distrust and “what’s in it for me,” and by bringing people face-to-face and using both plenary educational sessions and small-group work, we have the greatest potential to strip the barriers and silos that exist and restrict the flow of information. While cost is an issue to this approach, as well as coordinated scheduling, there are options to be explored:

- Leveraging on an existing conference as a one of half-day session
- Obtaining grant money
- An existing organization like RDPO partially or fully sponsoring the symposium
- Seeking legislation to make a face-time information sharing session something that is an annual or bi-annual component of the TITAN Fusion network

A stepwise approach, combining existing structures for educational outreach and awareness with the concept of a regional symposium to follow would be the most potent solution to taking a
proactive approach and lean into the existing WSE problem and proliferation. By using this approach, the educational awareness piece would already be in place, with the hope being that the resulting conversations would use common language and understanding, resulting in more robust mitigation and prevention efforts. While at the outset this would seem to have a greater cost associated, by addressing the educational piece ahead of time and creating that common ground, the resulting symposium would be more focused and potentially shorter.

**Recommendation and Call to Action**

With hate and bias crimes on the rise and increasing social tensions, it’s never been clearer that the time to act on this issue is now. Maintaining the status quo is no longer acceptable and makes public agencies complicit in the proliferation that is occurring. The law enforcement, intelligence, and public safety communities must lead the way in interdicting WSE and take a stand, starting with a commitment to increasing education and awareness of the issue, and then moving to holding a regional symposium. With existing educational structures and delivery systems in place, these initial steps are a matter of defining ownership and institutional will. A regional organization that looks at issues of terrorism and prevention and receives federal funding, such as the RDPO, would be the ideal organization to house this effort.
With the goal of holding a regional symposium within a year of a formal proposal, starting the educational component as soon as feasible would be optimal. However, it’s also important to respect that for many agencies, law-enforcement and otherwise, summertime is often the busiest season, and therefore a more realistic timeline would be formalizing the content over the summer, the intention of delivery into fall and winter of 2019. Rather than a piece-meal approach by each agency, centrally coordinating the effort would have value in efficiency. Regionally, the RDPO could conduct this sort of oversight, or for a more statewide approach, perhaps the TITAN Fusion Network.

A regional symposium requires some cost investment, even if rolled into an existing structure or added onto a scheduled conference. Also, there is a UASI grant requirement to demonstrate use of funds towards terrorist threats. While Fall of 2020 is an ambitious timeline, given the
heightened awareness of and potential for bias crimes in a presidential election year (Xu, 2019), it’s worthy of exploring an expedited effort.

Section Seven: Conclusion

While there are many names and descriptions of what it is, and tracking remains difficult, the incontrovertible truth is that WSE is on the rise. The Pacific Northwest has remained on pace with the national trend of increasing hate and bias incidents, and until we can collaboratively come to the table with an intention to learn, share, and act, our community of emergency responders, managers, and intelligence runs the risk of becoming complicit in the proliferation happening right in front of us. The national political climate and polarization of our society is daunting, and the resultant outliers of these hate crimes stand to continue to keep growing if left unaddressed and unchecked. There are a multitude of non-profit and advocacy agencies, like the Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center, working to address this issue, but it’s going to take inclusion of the public sector to move the needle forward.

The talent, political climate, and abilities of capable partnerships exist in abundance in the Pacific Northwest, and the solutions are within easy reach, if there is access and the implementation of the will to act. Existing information infrastructure can be leveraged to educate and inform, and from there, begin to break the silos that keep real and meaningful collaborative prevention and mitigation strategies from flourishing. WSE is showing no signs of fading, but here in the Pacific Northwest, there can—and must—be partnerships poised to lead the change towards making sure that WSE and associated violence become relics of the past.
References


Appendix A: Graphic Representation of WSE-Related Propaganda Events

![Incidents of WSE Propaganda Distribution](image1)


![KKK Flyer Distribution in the United States, 2014-2018](image2)

Appendix B: Charts of Hate Crimes, 2017-2018 in PNW and Adjacent Region:

Source: Anti-defamation league, 2018 https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resource-knowledge-base/adl-heat-map?fbclid=IwAR05PHLXoFXxOiHg7OfjHbw1I-qge7yribj9CtINFJYn_yukGP9r3RCGrTY

https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resource-knowledge-base/adl-heat-map?fbclid=IwAR05PHLXoFXxOiHg7OfjHbw1I-qge7yribj9CtINFJYn_yukGP9r3RCGrTY
ADL Hate Crime Breakdown: Idaho, 2017-2018

- Extremist Murders
- Terrorist Plots/Attacks
- Extremist/Police Shootouts
- White Supremacists Events
- White Supremacists Propaganda
- Anti-Semitic Events

https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resource-knowledge-base/adl-heat-map?fbclid=IwAR05PHLxOFxOiHg7OjIbHbw1l-qge7yriq9CtlnFhYn_yukGP9r3RCGrTY

ADL Hate Crime Breakdown: California, 2017-2018

- Extremist Murders
- Terrorist Plots/Attacks
- Extremist/Police Shootouts
- White Supremacist Events
- White Supremacists Propaganda
- Anti-Semitic Incidents

https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resource-knowledge-base/adl-heat-map?fbclid=IwAR05PHLxOFxOiHg7OjIbHbw1l-qge7yriq9CtlnFhYn_yukGP9r3RCGrTY
Appendix C: Graph of Reported Hate Crimes in Selected Cities, 2015-2017: