

Are federal agencies failing to find extremists in their ranks? A new inquiry by USA TODAY

It's the week in extremism from USA TODAY.



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The Pentagon appears to have failed to implement bold reforms – announced more than two years ago – aimed at stamping out extremism in the military, a USA TODAY investigation has found. Meanwhile, as things heat up at the U.S.-Mexico border, members of Congress are pressing the Department of Homeland Security on the status of its own extremism-related reforms. And a country music singer is being criticized over a song with violent lyrics and a music video filmed outside a courthouse that was home to a notorious Southern lynching and racial conflict.

It's the week in extremism.

The military's big extremism flop

More than two years ago, in the wake of the Jan. 6 insurrection, Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin announced sweeping new reforms aimed at tackling the long-known, but often-ignored problem of extremism in the US military. A USA TODAY investigation has found the proposed reforms appear largely to have stalled or been abandoned, with the most important apparently never even getting started.

Podcast: Extremism in the U.S. military, on the 5 Things podcast

USA TODAY identified 20 proposed reforms laid out by Austin and a working group he charged with assessing and tackling the military's extremism problem. Responses from the military documented only two that had been implemented.

A study commissioned by Austin to establish the extent of the problem was completed more than a year ago, but is yet to be released, USA TODAY can exclusively report.

“There’s this myopia to deal with this kind of far-right extremism in this country,” said Heidi Beirich, co-founder of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism. “It’s inexplicable. Look, people with military training show up too much in domestic terrorism plots, and they’re killing people, including killing troops.”

The big picture? An independent study by the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism concluded that being affiliated with the U.S. military is the “single

United States, according to the researchers at START. That includes 188 people charged with attacking the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 who were either serving in the military or veterans.

Congress members press DHS on extremism

The Defense Department isn't the only place with extremism concerns.

More than 65 Democratic members of Congress sent a letter this week to U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas requesting information on the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to root out extremism.

The letter references a March 2022 internal DHS report that found “the Department has significant gaps that have impeded its ability to comprehensively prevent, detect, and respond to potential threats related to domestic violent extremism within DHS.”

The Congresspeople asked dozens of questions of DHS, "in order to better understand how DHS is responding to extremism within its workforce."

The letter notes "serious concerns about the rise of paramilitary vigilante groups patrolling the U.S.-Mexico border and unlawfully intimidating, harassing, and detaining immigrants, sometimes in collaboration with, or with approval from federal agents."

The letter demands answers from DHS by July 31.

Stat of the week: \$100 million

That's the box-office total for the independent movie "Sound of Freedom," a movie about child trafficking that has been marketed on right-wing media. Reviewers say the movie itself isn't overtly political. But its star, Jim Caviezel, has long been a promoter of the ideas of QAnon, a baseless conspiracy theory that holds (in part) that Democrats are child traffickers. So the movie is seen by some as a QAnon recruiting tool. And it's sparking online misinformation along the way.

