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Oversight

Hundreds of Oath Keepers Have Worked for DHS, Leaked List Shows

Homeland Security Secretary Says Violent Extremists Should Have “No Place” in Department

BY **NICK SCHWELLENBACH** |
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(Illustration: Renzo Velez / POGO; Photos: [Anthony Crider](#) / Flickr, CC BY 2.0; Getty Images)

*This investigation was produced in partnership with the **Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project**.*

More than 300 individuals on a leaked membership list of the far-right militia group the Oath Keepers described themselves as current or former employees of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Members were employed at DHS components such as the Border Patrol, Coast Guard, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the Secret Service, according to a review by the Project On Government Oversight (POGO).

POGO's review appears to be the first significant public examination using the leaked records to focus on employees in DHS — an agency with the mission of **countering domestic violent extremism** — and it comes only months after **the March 2022 publication of a DHS** study which found that “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.”

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“One active law enforcement official joining a militia group is one too many,” Mike German, a former undercover FBI agent who has infiltrated white supremacist and far-right extremist groups, told POGO. “This probably represents the tip of the iceberg as far as federal law enforcement officers that have been involved in or supported the activities of far-right, militant groups like the Oath Keepers.”

Lawmakers told POGO and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting

Project (OCCRP), POGO's reporting partner on this investigation, that these findings are troubling.

"Extremism within our government is always alarming, but even more so in a Department with a law enforcement and national security nexus like DHS," said Representative Bennie Thompson (D-MS), chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee and the House select committee investigating the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, in an emailed statement.



“One active law enforcement official joining a militia group is one too many.”

FORMER FBI AGENT MIKE GERMAN

“Given what we’ve learned since January 6th about the extent of extremist beliefs and membership among elected officials and other government employees, these numbers are deeply troubling, yet not surprising,” Representative Jackie Speier (D-CA) told the OCCRP. “What’s equally disturbing is the lack of transparency from the Department of Homeland Security on its methods for identifying, tracking, and eradicating this very real threat to our democracy and the rule of law.”

It is unclear if DHS has analyzed or even obtained the leaked records of Oath Keepers members. A department spokesperson did not answer POGO's questions but pointed to remarks last week by Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. During an **event** at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Mayorkas cited the March 2022 study. He said the department's work to address the study's recommendations is “ongoing,” but he did not elaborate.

Last year, Mayorkas issued a **statement** that “violent extremism has no place at DHS and we will work with urgency and focus to address it.”

Public details on the department’s progress have been scant. POGO and OCCRP have sent letters to DHS leaders since May asking a number of detailed questions about the department’s approach to tackling insiders connected to domestic violent extremism. DHS has not responded to those letters.

However, federal sources familiar with the department’s efforts, but not authorized by the DHS to talk to the press about them, told POGO and OCCRP that DHS has made headway on educating the department’s workforce on these threats. They say it is making progress on implementing guidance on identifying and responding to violent extremist activity in the workplace and on how best to engage with individuals who may be displaying indicators of extremist behavior.

Despite this, there are fears that the efforts could sputter out. “We need to hear more about how the Department plans to sustain this focus over the long term,” Thompson told POGO and OCCRP.

Law enforcement agents who have associations with groups that seek to undermine democratic governance pose a heightened threat because they can compromise probes, misdirecting investigations or leaking confidential investigative information to those groups. And they can use the skills, knowledge, and access they developed in their jobs against the government and the public they swore to protect.

Some on the leaked Oath Keepers’ list have worked in particularly sensitive roles at DHS.

For example, one individual wrote, “I am currently a 20 year Special Agent with the United States Secret Service.” The agent further wrote, “I have been on President Clinton and President Bush’s protective detail. I was a member and

instructor on the Presidential Protective Division's Counter Assault Team (CAT)." He did not respond to a request for comment, but the details he provided the Oath Keepers match those he made in a sworn affidavit filed in federal court.

POGO is not naming individuals solely for appearing on the list unless POGO has identified credible accusations of wrongdoing against them, or they have consented to being named.

Some on the leaked Oath Keepers' list have worked in particularly sensitive roles at DHS.



Among those on the membership list are some who have described themselves as supervisors, such as one man who wrote he is a "Current Supervisory Border Patrol Agent" in Southern California (he told OCCRP he has since left federal service). Another said he worked at the Transportation Security Administration's headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, as an information technology employee. Several described themselves as having training roles inside their agencies. Most of the 306 said they had retired.

Even though DHS has about a quarter million employees, it doesn't take a large number to create an insider threat, and retired agents may still have inroads at their old agencies.

The militant group's leader, Stewart Rhodes, has described Oath Keepers members inside DHS as vital to his group's efforts. "It's men like this on the inside who can and do provide information to expose what's going on," he **wrote** on his group's blog in 2009, also noting that one of his friends works at DHS.

Rhodes and another member have been convicted of seditious conspiracy and other charges in connection with the violent insurrection on January 6, 2021 aimed at keeping then-President Donald Trump in power. Other members of the group have been convicted of other felonies for their actions to block Congress's certification of President Joe Biden's election win — and even more members are in court.

The leaked list contains information on individuals who signed up for Oath Keepers membership from 2009, the year the group was founded, through 2015. As first **reported** by *The Atlantic*, the information in it was compiled by the group's deputies at recruiting events and from online sign-ups. Taken alone, however, inclusion on the list is not proof that the individuals on it believed in all or even most of the group's causes or actions. And, over time, numerous people who have signed up as Oath Keepers members have distanced themselves from the group.

On its face, the group's mission is laudable: to defend the Constitution. But in practice, the group has taken actions towards undemocratic and unconstitutional ends, and has often opposed the rule of law. An early flash point came in 2014, when the Oath Keepers faced off against federal law enforcement enforcing a court order at the Bundy Ranch in Nevada, whose owner refused to pay over \$1 million to the government for grazing cattle on federal lands.

Despite its rhetoric opposing government oppression, the group is seen by many as hostile to civil liberties and rights. It has deployed armed groups in response to protests against police brutality against Black people, such as in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014 and 2015 and at Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. Many protestors and observers saw the Oath Keepers presence as intimidating and in opposition to calls for police accountability. Several members have left the group because they felt it was too extreme, according to

several on the leaked list contacted by OCCRP and POGO. At least one prominent ex-member has decried **racism** within its ranks, even though the group's **bylaws** bar members from “discrimination, violence, or hatred toward any person based upon their race, nationality, creed, or color.”

Alejandro Beutel, who recently co-wrote a New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy report on **far-right insider threats** in the federal government, told POGO the presence of Oath Keepers in federal law enforcement is alarming.

Any credible allegation of ties to the group “potentially undermines confidence in these institutions that are so essential to the democratic rule of law,” Beutel said, “especially when we come to consider that many of these far rightists have historically targeted minority groups for violence and harassment.”

PART
1

“Freedom of Speech is





Membership in the Oath Keepers, past or current, is not evidence that an individual will or has engaged in violent extremism — and the First Amendment generally protects individuals’ rights to express themselves, including joining groups that engage in political advocacy. As the **recent DHS study** states, “the mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics does not constitute extremism and is constitutionally protected.”

But “freedom of speech is not the freedom to commit sedition,” as Jonathan Greenblatt, the head of the Anti-Defamation League, said during a congressional hearing last year.

—“—

The Oath Keepers are just one militant group among many that experts say could undertake violent actions on U.S. soil.

The individuals in the records reviewed by POGO describe varying motivations for signing up. Many said they learned about the group from conservative news sources and cited concerns about the then-Obama administration, socialism, gun restrictions, and immigration — topics often covered by those news

sources in a hyperbolic fashion.

Occasionally there are more surprising motivations provided. One now-former Border Patrol agent wrote that “I am a whistleblowing Border Patrol Agent fighting against constitutional violations taking place at our inland border checkpoints.” That concern is shared by the American Civil Liberties Union, which has **argued** that these checkpoints can violate Fourth Amendment protections against illegal search and seizure.

Some on the list made it clear that they do not want to engage in illegal acts. A member of the Coast Guard wrote, “I feel very strongly in the Oathkeepers [sic] message and I would be willing to do anything that is legal to help the cause.” But others put forward few limits. When asked what they could do for the Oath Keepers, one replied he was “pretty open to everything.” Another responded, “whatever I can.”

While many respondents did indicate that they were current DHS employees when they signed up between 2009 and 2015, the majority said they were retired. The entries are not always clear, but it appears that over 90% of those on the list indicated they were former employees of DHS components. Some said they retired from federal service even before their component became part of DHS, which was created in 2002 after the 9/11 attacks.

But that doesn’t mean they can’t pose a threat. German, the former FBI agent, said that former employees are often in contact with colleagues who still work at the agency. Through conversations or other communications with those former employees, current staff could be “wittingly or unwittingly” sharing information with the Oath Keepers or other extremist groups. The report by Beutel and former DHS intelligence analyst Daryl Johnson says government policies “need to better address security risks and threats posed by people who previously had inside access to sensitive or other classified information and may be targets of future radicalization and recruitment by extremists.”

The leaked list is also from 2015 and over seven years old. It is unclear how many other current and former DHS employees have joined the Oath Keepers since then. And the Oath Keepers are just one militant group among many that experts say could undertake violent actions on U.S. soil.



Seven individuals claiming to work or have previously worked at the Secret Service are on the leaked Oath Keepers membership list.

One former Secret Service employee, named Daniel Blackford, who appeared on the leaked list **had his security clearance revoked in 2014** from a different federal agency – the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General – for “his intentional and unauthorized disclosure of confidential” investigative records. While nothing publicly known about that case involves the Oath Keepers, and Blackford — who became a police trainer in Texas — has said he has **long disassociated himself** from the group, it underscores the risk of insiders

leaking information to militant groups.

Blackford did not respond to POGO's request for comment, but he **told** the *Daily News* in Galveston, Texas, that "when I started to see some of their emails, that led me to believe it was an anti-government group. I didn't want anything to do with it."

"I spent 20 years with the government. I am absolutely not anti-government at all," said Blackford, who also denied ever being an Oath Keepers member.

He formerly worked on the presidential protective details for Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, according to **USA Today**. (Blackford is not the Secret Service agent whose entry is quoted earlier in this story.)

When asked about the current and former Secret Service agents on the Oath Keepers list and what the agency is doing to address the issue of extremists in its ranks, an agency spokesperson emailed that "while the Secret Service had no prior knowledge of this information, we are unable to corroborate it at this time but it will be reviewed." He said, "the absolute, most important function for this agency is our no-fail mission to safeguard the continuity of the American government."

Access to sensitive information isn't the only threat if Oath Keepers or other extremist groups infiltrate the Secret Service. Another risk is to the people the agency protects: the president and vice president. In recent years, the Secret Service's ability to meet that sensitive mission has been put in doubt, in part due to intersections with the Oath Keepers.



Even the perception of a compromised Secret Service can have a significant impact.

The Oath Keepers appeared at Trump's **2017 inauguration**, as well as at **campaign rallies**, purportedly to provide security. And during the trial of Rhodes and other Oath Keepers, a former member of the group testified that Rhodes told him he had **a Secret Service contact**. NBC News has **reported** that the Secret Service has told the House select committee investigating the January 6 attack that a member of its protective intelligence division had multiple calls with the Oath Keepers in 2020.

A Secret Service spokesperson has said that “individuals from the Oath Keepers have contacted us in the past to make inquiries” but noted that it’s “not uncommon for various organizations to contact us concerning security restrictions and activities that are permissible in proximity to our protected sites.”

“It would have been unusual if the Secret Service had not been in contact with the Oath Keepers,” said Gordon Heddell, who formerly led the Secret Service’s vice-presidential protective division and later served as an inspector general at two Cabinet departments.

“Agents always need to know of the existence of private security or militia groups, in this case members of the Oath Keepers, who were armed.” However, Heddell continues, “there's no way, shape, or form that the Secret Service is going to go along with any plan to have a militant group assist them with protection.”

Even so, he said, the names of Secret Service employees appearing on a list of Oath Keepers is a real problem. “In my day, if a person belonged to a paramilitary group, that would be a concern. And it would have been a concern to the organization because it would constitute an obvious conflict of interest,”

said Heddell.

The House select committee examining the attack on the U.S. Capitol **has focused** on what the Secret Service knew about the threats to Vice President Mike Pence that day. Recently, the agency has come under suspicion for its deletion of text messages after Congress sought the preservation of records relating to January 6.

Even the perception of a compromised Secret Service can have a significant impact. One lawmaker on the January 6 committee has suggested that the Secret Service agents responsible for protecting Vice President Mike Pence might have been in on the plan to block certification of the 2020 presidential election results — a certification that required Pence to stay at the Capitol.

Pence's Secret Service detail reportedly wanted to get in a car to take him away as the Capitol was being breached by rioters.

“I'm not getting in the car,” Pence said, according to a **book** by *Washington Post* reporters Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker. “If I get in that vehicle, you guys are taking off. I'm not getting in the car.”

Pence “knew exactly what this inside coup they had planned for was going to do,” Representative Jamie Raskin (D-MD) said during an April 2022 appearance at Georgetown University.

But what those Secret Service agents actually intended remains an unanswered question to many. And, according to former Trump White House aide Cassidy Hutchison, the Secret Service **rejected** Trump's attempt to join his supporters at the Capitol on January 6 — complicating any nefarious account of the agency's role that day.

A spokesperson for the Secret Service responded to Raskin's statements. “To your question of insider threat and an alleged coup, such an assertion is simply

not true and not supported by any facts,” the spokesperson wrote in an email.



The leaked membership data points to the Border Patrol as potentially fertile ground for Oath Keepers recruitment. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) — especially its Border Patrol arm — was the second-most represented DHS component, with 40 individuals on the leaked list claiming current or former employment.

As the largest law enforcement agency in the nation, Customs and Border Protection has generated concern due to a **pattern of relative impunity** involving excessive use of force and misconduct, and the great power it claims to have over large swaths of the United States where the majority of the population lives. Its activities have expanded beyond the border and ports of entry. For instance, a Border Patrol tactical unit was **controversially deployed**

to Portland to respond to Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020 and accused of snatching people off the streets into unmarked vans and not wearing identifying insignia — the kinds of acts that occur under authoritarian governments.



“Most Border Patrol Agents are Oath Keepers, we just haven’t signed up yet.”

BORDER PATROL AGENT

Individuals in CBP with ties to extremist organizations further fuel concern about the agency’s commitment to exercising its law enforcement powers fairly and with restraint.

One agent, who said he teaches “advanced firearms and tactics,” wrote that there is widespread agreement inside his agency with the group’s aims, especially with its pro-gun rights, Second Amendment stance: “Most Border Patrol Agents are Oath Keepers, we just haven’t signed up yet.”

The agent, who requested that he not be named, told POGO that when he signed up with the group in 2014, it was based on their purported mission to protect the Constitution, but that he did little and let his membership lapse. “I never attended oath keeper meetings, or renewed membership. I am not the protesting type and that didn’t interest me at all,” he wrote in an email.

“The men and women of the US Border Patrol are naturally patriotic, more so than other federal law enforcement agencies,” he emailed POGO. “They take their oath of office seriously and feel a deep sense of protection and loyalty to

our nation.”

Certainly, groups like the Oath Keepers have preyed on and subverted patriotic fervor, often feeding on nationalism and discontent over immigration to recruit and energize members. “A lot of the far-right militant groups went to the border after 9/11,” German, the former FBI agent, told POGO.

And **many of them** reportedly coordinate with the Border Patrol. “We’re just being the eyes and ears of the Border Patrol, basically,” said a Colorado-based member of the Three Percent United Patriots group, according to journalist Shane Bauer, who **went undercover** to report on border militias. Bauer’s account describes the group regularly getting information from Border Patrol agents. There have been **several other similar** accounts.

Oath Keepers’ leadership has long expressed particular interest in the Border Patrol. In 2018, Rhodes unsuccessfully sought to send armed Oath Keepers to the U.S.-Mexico border to assist the Border Patrol, an Oath Keepers member **told the Associated Press**. According to the Anti-Defamation League, as recently as 2019 the Oath Keepers website stoked conspiracies that “antifa” is **targeting** Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials in El Paso, Texas. (“Antifa” is short for **anti-fascist** and is a term generally used to refer to left-wing militant groups.)

“The government is behind the eight-ball on this,” a former CBP official told POGO regarding the issue of employees with extremist

Former CBP official: “That a significant part of our workforce does not see themselves as accountable to democratic governance – with a lower-case ‘d’ – is a huge

affiliations, who
requested
anonymity
because he

problem.”



continues to work on agency issues. “After January 6th, the security state realized these guys are really bad.”

Steps have been made within CBP to tackle the problem of violent extremists inside the agency, including more resources for its office of professional responsibility and efforts to encourage internal reporting of extremists in the workplace, he explained, “but no one really wants to make it a bureaucratic priority.”

He said that while this is an issue for any law enforcement agency, he is most concerned with the Border Patrol, rather than CBP’s Office of Field Operations, which facilitates trade and travel at ports of entry.

“That a significant part of our workforce does not see themselves as accountable to democratic governance – with a lower-case ‘d’ – is a huge problem,” said the former official.

Customs and Border Protection has acknowledged its agents’ statements and associations can undermine its mission. Referring to a controversial post on a Facebook group rife with racist and sexist messages, one agency attorney wrote during a **disciplinary proceeding** against an agent, that their post “could cause the public to question whether agents do their jobs professionally and without bias, and that it goes directly against the professional image that the Agency strives to maintain.”

The agency told POGO that “the overwhelming majority of CBP employees and officers perform their duties with honor and distinction” and that it “takes all allegations of employee misconduct seriously, including violent extremism, and

has instituted policies pertaining to abuse of authority.”



POGO found that 184 individuals on the list identified as current or former Coast Guard servicemembers – the most of any DHS component.

Unlike the rest of DHS, the Coast Guard is considered a branch of the military.

But it is the only military service **exempted** from the Posse Comitatus Act and thus is regularly involved in domestic law enforcement — this means its employees have access to sensitive investigative information.

The Coast Guard issued a new **anti-extremism policy** this summer that notes certain activities in a military context that would otherwise “be constitutionally protected in a civilian setting.” For instance, the Uniform Code of Military Justice has on-duty restrictions on **expressing contempt** towards top U.S. government officials.

“Being members of one of the six armed services, as well as members of a federal law enforcement agency, we have a special obligation to each other and the citizens we serve,” said Captain Monique Roebuck with the Coast Guard Office of Military Policy.

The Supreme Court has ruled on multiple occasions that service members have **constrained free speech protections** because of the military’s role and need for internal discipline. Regardless of where the exact line is, military efforts that are focused on beliefs and associations rather than actions are **troubling** to civil liberties advocates.

Insider Threat Programs: “A Double-Edged Sword”



Despite the new policy, it’s unclear whether the Coast Guard is getting as much oversight as the other military services. There are signs that the Coast Guard is falling between the cracks of the DHS and the Defense Department.

The DHS study published earlier this year stated that it did not assess the issue of violent extremists within the Coast Guard because the seagoing service is covered by Pentagon rules. However, a Defense Department **watchdog report** issued this month said the Coast Guard did not report data on prohibited extremist activities in its ranks to the Pentagon because the Coast Guard is within DHS. The law mandating the watchdog’s review only applied to the Defense Department.



Previous media coverage utilizing leaked member records — made **widely available** by the Distributed Denial of Secrets, a non-profit transparency collective — have focused on Oath Keepers in local law enforcement and the military. But according to former FBI agent Mike German, infiltration of federal law enforcement is even more concerning. Employees inside federal law enforcement agencies “have access to federal intelligence that pertains to far-right military groups and therefore might have information about active investigations or personnel within the Oath Keepers,” said German, currently a fellow with New York University Law School’s Brennan Center for Justice.

That possibility has long been recognized. A **2006 FBI report** states that “the primary threat from infiltration or recruitment arises from the areas of intelligence collection and exploitation, which can lead to investigative breaches and can jeopardize the safety of law enforcement sources and personnel.”

Access at one agency can plug an employee into a vast array of confidential

“Every single one of them is an operational security concern.”



information. Often

federal law enforcement agencies work together on investigations, and there is widespread **information sharing** across these agencies.

“Every single one of them is an operational security concern,” said Daryl Johnson, a former DHS intelligence analyst who authorized a 2009 assessment on violent extremism from far-right groups, of the hundreds of current and former DHS employees on the Oath Keepers list.

But law enforcement agencies often view these affiliations from the perspective of criminality, rather than as a counterintelligence threat, he said. He said these individuals could leak sensitive information to Oath Keepers, or another extremist group, including details on physical security measures inside government buildings, which “is valuable information for targeting and attack planning.”

All it takes is one extremist-aligned employee to reveal sensitive information to groups or individuals aiming to violently overthrow the government or pursue other unlawful activities.

There’s also the “risk of government agents not fulfilling their job, because they have a bias rooted in sympathy,” said extremism expert Alejandro Beutel. He said they might ignore evidence, drag their feet, or refuse to initiate investigations.

A related concern is DHS or FBI employees with ties to far-right groups, or who sympathize with them, feeding slanted and even erroneous information into law

enforcement information sharing networks **that can skew what law enforcement focuses on.**

The FBI's Threat Within



The only intelligence component in the federal government **tasked by law** with providing intelligence to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments is DHS's Office of Intelligence and Analysis. It also is responsible for packaging intelligence from those governments into reports that get distributed across the federal government.

But DHS's Office of Intelligence and Analysis has not been immune from insider threat concerns.

Rinaldo Nazzaro was employed as an analyst at the Office of Intelligence and Analysis from **2004 to 2006**. Nazzaro would later lead the neo-Nazi group the Base. Although there is no public evidence showing that he skewed assessments, the skills and knowledge he gleaned from his time in government and working as a defense contractor may have benefited **his efforts to evade detection**—underscoring another risk from extremist recruitment and infiltration of law enforcement, military, and intelligence agencies.

Beutel noted that the operations of the Base were more sophisticated than those of similar extremist groups. He pointed to Nazzaro's experience working with the military and in intelligence collection and analysis as a possible factor.

Even when compromised insiders don't leak confidential information, they may

provide extremist groups “with ways to evade potential investigations,” Beutel said. “That will make it that much harder than before for law enforcement agencies to conduct lawful inquiries and investigations into any potential criminal wrongdoing.”

PART
6

Study

All important element of this training must be how to engage with individuals displaying early indicators of extremist behavior or may be radicalizing

Area 3: Enhance Methods to Identify and Address Violent Extremism

The working group distributed a data call to stakeholders who play a primary role in the employee vetting and review process, including OCHCO, OGC, OCSO, and A. To identify existing capabilities and resources that could be integrated into the review process of personnel. Specifically respondents



The **March 2022 DHS study** on the threat of violent extremists inside the department “identified four incidents that involved active participation or support for violent extremist activity” involving DHS employees from late 2018 through mid-2021. That study noted that this number is potentially an undercount because allegations of domestic violent extremism are not categorized as such by the numerous DHS offices that receive and investigate

complaints, such as the department's office of inspector general.

The likely undercount is related to broader shortcomings in DHS's efforts to battle insider extremists, especially in comparison with the Defense Department, which has been tackling the problem for **more than a decade**.

One of the key recommendations the study makes is better vetting and reviewing of DHS applicants and employees. Currently, this vetting takes place during background check investigations to obtain and maintain security clearances, when investigators ask individuals about their associations with groups that have engaged in terrorism or extremism, as the RAND Corporation **pointed out** in the wake of the January 6 attack.

In late November, the Office of Personnel Management **proposed changes** to a questionnaire that federal employees and applicants must fill out as part of the background investigation process to get security clearances. Some of the changes are intended to "further compel candid responses" about ties to groups that engage in violence or overthrowing the U.S. government. One of the goals is to "prevent individuals who pose domestic terrorism threats from being placed in positions of trust."

There are other ways to detect extremism within the ranks.

"What I have argued for is not trying to peer into the mind of their employees, but rather to monitor their conduct," German, the former FBI agent, told POGO. "To the extent you have people who are actively engaged with an organization that openly promotes subverting federal law enforcement, thereby having members refuse lawful orders from their chain of command, or refuse to enforce federal laws, that's problematic; that's incompatible with service."

One important
way to detect
questionable law

**"This threat didn't recede. It's
grown every year."**

enforcement



conduct is

through work colleagues who see or hear it first-hand or from others. Yet such internal reporting often doesn't happen. Or, when it does, it leads to retaliation. "Right now, it is safer to be involved in inappropriate activity with far-right groups and racist conduct than it is to report it, to report a colleague engaging in that behavior," German said.

Numerous individuals on the leaked list said they learned about the Oath Keepers from their colleagues, and many used their **government email addresses** as contact information, suggesting that they were not concerned about concealing their involvement.

If employees are openly engaging with extremist organizations at work, experts say, agencies should have pathways for colleagues to raise alarms. "That's one of the problems with the suppression of whistleblowing within these agencies, that the people working there every day know who the problems are and could easily point them out for management if they were protected," German said.

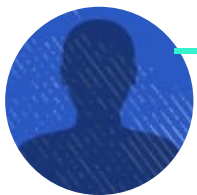
POGO has **previously reported** that local supervisors within the Border Patrol often shield favored subordinates from accountability, and there is widespread fear across DHS law enforcement agencies of retaliation for reporting problems (POGO's previous story focused on sexual misconduct and domestic violence by DHS agents). Individuals who describe themselves as supervisory Border Patrol agents in the leaked Oath Keepers membership list add to those concerns.

It's clear the DHS still has significant work ahead. According to the study, one of the department's shortcomings is that the DHS had no "authoritative definition of 'domestic violent extremist' that can be incorporated into policies, guidance, and awareness materials."

“The frustrating thing for me as a federal law enforcement officer is how all of the agents and officers involved in federal law enforcement don’t understand how these groups pose a threat to their fellow law enforcement officers,” German said. “As soon as law enforcement stands up to enforce the law against them, they become the enemy.”

“The number one thing is educating people to change their view and mindset,” said Johnson, the former DHS intelligence analyst who forecast the growing movement of far-right militants in 2009. He said law enforcement agencies are routinely dismissive of the threat from within. His 2009 DHS report generated **intense political blowback**.

“This threat didn’t recede. It’s grown every year,” he told POGO. “We’re in a much more dangerous position now, and it’s not going to abate anytime soon.”



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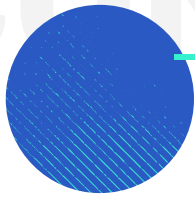
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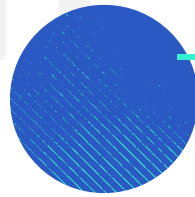
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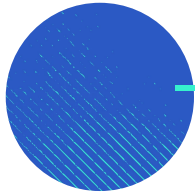
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Misconduct at CBP
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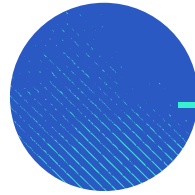
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