

## US policing

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# White supremacists and militias have infiltrated police across US, report says

A former FBI agent has documented links between serving officers and racist militant activities in more than a dozen states



■ Riot police move protesters after confrontations between protesters and militia members in Stone Mountain, Georgia. Photograph: Nathan Posner/Rex/Shutterstock

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**Sam Levin in Los Angeles**

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White supremacist groups have infiltrated US law enforcement agencies in every region of the country over the last two decades, according to a new report about the ties between police and far-right vigilante groups.

In a timely new analysis, Michael German, a former FBI special agent who has [written](#) extensively on the ways that US law enforcement have failed to respond to far-right domestic terror threats, concludes that US law

enforcement officials have been tied to racist militant activities in more than a dozen states since 2000, and hundreds of police officers have been caught posting racist and bigoted social media content.

[The report](#) notes that over the years, police links to militias and white supremacist groups have been uncovered in states including Alabama, California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, Washington and West Virginia.

Police in Sacramento, California, in 2018 worked with neo-Nazis to pursue charges against anti-racist activists, including some who [had been stabbed](#), according to records.

And just this summer, German writes, an [Orange county](#) sheriff's deputy and a Chicago [policeman](#) were caught wearing far-right militia logos; an Olympia, Washington, officer was [photographed](#) posing with a militia group; and Philadelphia police officers were [filmed](#) standing by while armed mobs attacked protesters and journalists.

The exact scale of ties between law enforcement and militias is hard to determine, German told the Guardian. "Nobody is collecting the data and nobody is actively looking for these law enforcement officers," he said.

Officers' racist activities are often known within their departments and generally result in punishment or termination following public scandals, the report notes. Few police agencies have explicit policies against affiliating with white supremacist groups. If police officers are disciplined, the measures often lead to protracted litigation.

Concerns about alleged relations between far-right groups and law enforcement in the US have intensified since the start of the protest movement sparked by the police killing of George Floyd. Police in states including California, Oregon, Illinois and Washington are now facing investigations for their alleged affinity to far-right groups opposing Black Lives Matter, according to the report.

This week, police in Kenosha, Wisconsin, faced intense scrutiny over their response to armed white men and militia groups gathered in the city amid demonstrations by Black Lives Matter activists and others [over the police shooting of Jacob Blake](#), a Black father of three who was left paralyzed after being shot in the back. On Wednesday, Kyle Rittenhouse, a 17-year-old who [appeared to consider himself a militia member](#) and had posted "blue lives

matter” content, was arrested on suspicion of murder after the fatal shooting of two protesters.

Activists in Kenosha say police there have responded aggressively and violently to Black Lives Matter demonstrators, while doing little to stop armed white vigilantes. Supporting their claims is at least one video taken before the shooting that showed police tossing bottled water to what appeared to be armed civilians, including one who appeared to be the shooter, the AP noted: “We appreciate you being here,” an officer said on loudspeaker.

Police also reportedly let the gunman walk past them with a rifle as the crowd yelled for him to be arrested because he had shot people, according to witnesses and video reviewed by the news agency.

The Kenosha sheriff, David Beth, has said the incident was chaotic and stressful.

German told the Guardian on Wednesday: “Far-right militants are allowed to engage in violence and walk away while protesters are met with violent police actions.” This “negligent response”, he added, empowers violent groups in dangerous and potentially lethal ways: “The most violent elements within these far-right militant groups believe that their conduct is sanctioned by the government. And therefore they’re much more willing to come out and engage in acts of violence against protesters.”

There is growing awareness in some parts of the government about the intensifying threat of white supremacy. The FBI and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have directly identified white supremacists as the most lethal domestic terrorist threat in the country. According to German’s report, the FBI’s own internal documents have directly warned that the militia groups the agency is investigating often have “active links” to law enforcement.

And yet US agencies lack a national strategy to identify white supremacist police and root out this problem, German warned. Meanwhile, popular police reform efforts to address “implicit bias” have done nothing to confront explicit racism.

The FBI did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

As the calls to defund police have grown in recent months, law enforcement alignment with violent and racist groups only adds further fuel to the movement, German said. “In a time when the effort to defund police is

getting some salience, the police are behaving in such a way as to justify that argument.”

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