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The 'Patriot' Movement Explodes

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The radical right grew explosively in 2011, the third such dramatic expansion in as many years. The growth was fueled by superheated fears generated by economic dislocation, a proliferation of demonizing conspiracy theories, the changing racial makeup of America, and the prospect of four more years under a black president who many on the far right view as an enemy to their country.

The number of hate groups counted by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) last year reached a total of 1,018, up slightly from the year before but continuing a trend of significant growth that is now more than a decade old. The truly stunning growth came in the antigovernment "Patriot" movement — conspiracy-minded groups that see the federal government as their primary enemy.

The Patriot movement first emerged in 1994, a response to what was seen as violent government repression of dissident groups at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, in 1992 and near Waco, Texas, in 1993, along with anger at gun control and the Democratic Clinton Administration in general. It peaked in 1996, a year after the Oklahoma City bombing, with 858 groups, then began to fade. By the turn of the millennium, the Patriot movement was reduced to fewer than 150 relatively inactive groups.

But the movement came roaring back beginning in late 2008, just as the economy went south with the subprime collapse and, more importantly, as Barack Obama appeared on the political scene as the Democratic nominee and, ultimately, the president-elect. Even as most of the nation cheered the election of the first black president that November, an angry backlash developed that included several plots to murder Obama. Many Americans, infused with populist fury over bank and auto bailouts and a feeling that they had lost their country, joined Patriot groups.

The swelling of the Patriot movement since that time has been astounding. From 149 groups in 2008, the number of Patriot organizations skyrocketed to 512 in 2009, shot up again in 2010 to 824, and then, last year, jumped to 1,274. That works out to a staggering 755% growth in the three years ending last Dec. 31. Last year's total was more than 400 groups higher than the prior all-time high, in 1996.

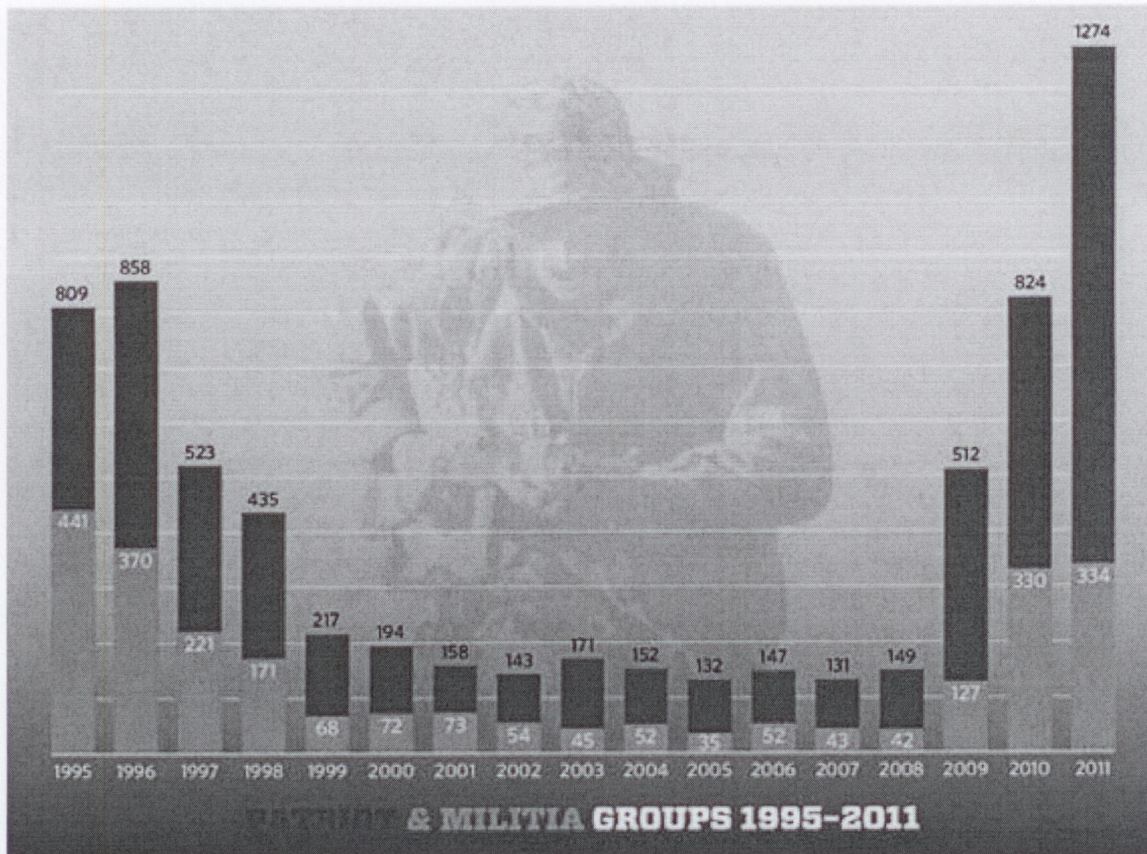
Meanwhile, the SPLC counted 1,018 hate groups operating in the United States last year, up from 1,002 in 2010. That was the latest in a string of annual increases going all the way back to 2000, when there were 602 hate groups. The long-running rise seemed for most of that time to be a product of hate groups' very successful exploitation of the issue of non-white immigration. Obama's election and the crashing economy have played a key role in the last three years.

At the same time, a third strand of the radical right — what the SPLC designates as "nativist extremist" groups, meaning organizations that go beyond normal political activism to harass individuals they suspect of being undocumented immigrants — shrank radically. After five years of sustained growth, these vigilante groups plummeted last year to 184 from 319 in 2010, a one-year drop of 42%. The decrease appears to be a product of bad press, internecine quarrels, and the co-optation of the immigration issue by state legislatures around the country passing draconian nativist laws like Alabama's H.B. 56.

Active 'Patriot' Groups in the United States in 2011

SPLC identified 1274 anti-government "Patriot" groups that were active in 2011.

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Patriot and Militia Groups 1995-2011

In some ways, it was surprising that the same deflating effect did not hit the Patriot and hate groups, as 2011 also saw many politicians and other public figures attacking Muslims, LGBT people and other minorities, effectively taking on some of the issues dear to the radical right. But there was enough of a far-right wind to fill the sails of politicians, hate and Patriot groups, and Tea Parties alike, very likely the result, in large part, of a view of Obama as a dire threat to the country. (An IBOPE Zogby survey last year found that 30% of all voters did not believe that Obama was born in the U.S. even after the release of his long-form birth certificate.)

It's hard to know how all this will play out, given the unsettled nature of the presidential campaign and, in particular, the GOP primaries. The animus toward Obama and the government may be as much rooted in economic as racial anger.

In May 2011, a scholarly study published in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* found that white Americans believe that progress in race relations since the 1950s has come at their expense, with bias against whites more of a social problem in the last decade than bias against blacks. (This comes against the backdrop of the Census Bureau's prediction that non-Hispanic whites will lose their majority, falling to under 50% of the population, by 2050.) But a Pew Research Center study this January suggested that income inequality may be even more important. The survey found that some two-thirds of Americans believe that there are "strong conflicts" between rich and poor, about a 50% increase since a 2009 survey. That sensibility also was apparent in both the Tea Parties and the Occupy Wall Street movement.

And so it is with many extremist groups.

August Kreis, a longtime neo-Nazi who in January stepped down as leader of an Aryan Nations faction after being convicted of fraud related to his veteran's benefits, told the Intelligence Report that it was all about income inequality.

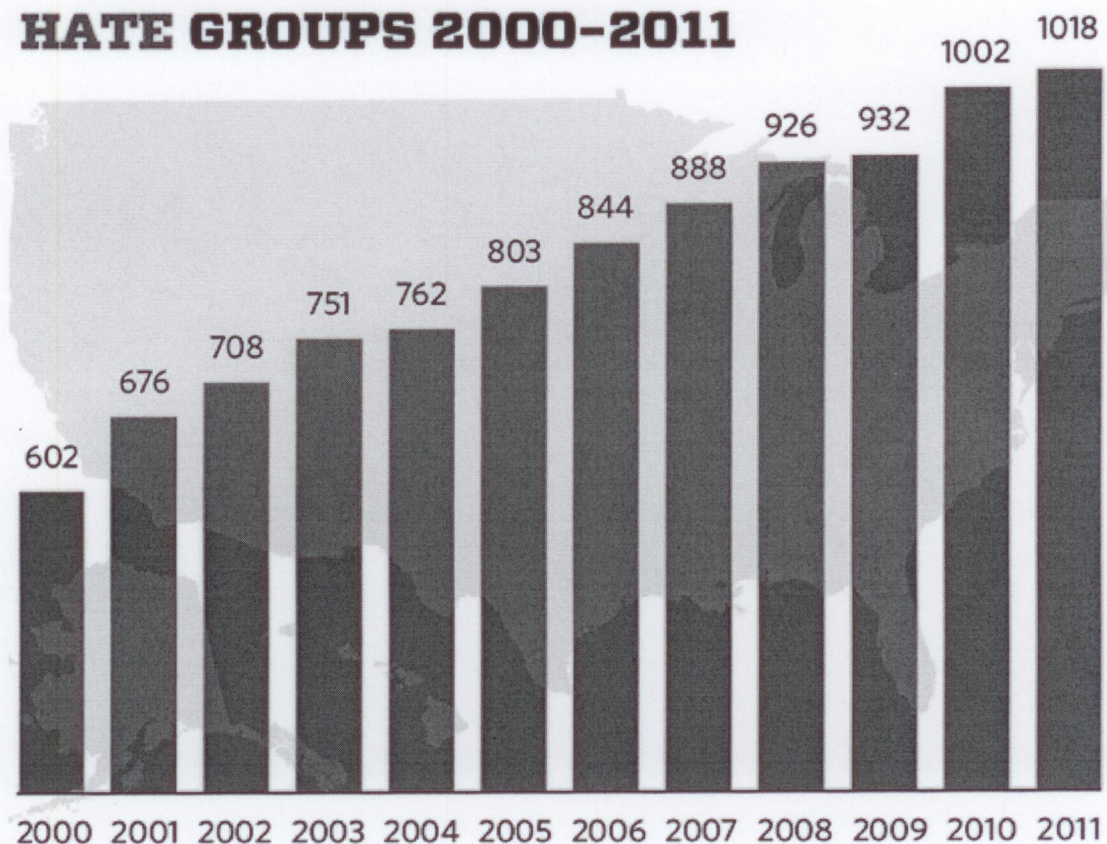
"The worse the economy gets, the more the groups are going to grow," he said. "White people are arming themselves — and black people, too. I believe eventually it's going to come down to civil war. It's going to be an economic war, the rich versus the poor. We're being divided along economic lines."

At the most macro level, the growth of right-wing radicalization — a phenomenon that is plainly evident in Europe as well as the United States — is related directly to political and, especially, economic globalization. As the nation-state has diminished in importance since the end of the Cold War, Western economies have opened up, not only to capital from abroad but also to labor. In concrete terms, that has meant major immigration flows, many of which have drastically altered the demographics of formerly fairly homogenous populations. In Europe and the U.S. both, white-dominated countries have become less so. At the same time, globalization has caused major economic dislocations in the West as certain industries and kinds of production move to less developed countries.

The sorry U.S. economy also may offer the best single explanation for the huge expansion in the so-called "sovereign citizens" movement, a subset of the larger Patriot movement. Although the size of the sovereign movement is hard to gauge — sovereigns tend to operate as individuals rather than in organized groups — law enforcement officials around the country have reported encounters. The SPLC, for its part, has estimated that some 300,000 Americans are involved.

Sovereign citizens, whose ideology first developed in white supremacist groups, generally do not believe they are obliged to pay federal taxes, follow most laws, or comply with requirements for driver's licenses and vehicle registrations. They also typically believe that filing certain documents can relieve them of debt or bankruptcy proceedings, or even bring them millions of dollars from secret government accounts. The claims are bogus, of course, but they have attracted thousands into the movement at a time of real financial hardship.

HATE GROUPS 2000-2011



Hate Groups 200-2011

Sovereigns' focus on their supposed right to drive "upon the land" without any regulation has brought them into regular conflict with law enforcement officials. That was seen most dramatically on May 20,

2010, when a father-son team of sovereigns murdered two West Memphis, Ark., officers during a traffic stop, but officials have had other encounters. Just this January, a sovereign accused of trying to shoot a police officer during a traffic stop in Hurst, Texas, went on trial.

"There is a contingent of malcontents out there who are exceedingly hostile," Rich Roberts, a spokesman for the International Union of Police Associations, told the Christian Science Monitor for an article last year on the rising number of shooting deaths of police officers. "It's a really complex phenomenon in that it's a whole combination of factors where on one end you've got people like sovereign citizens, who are actually deliberately targeting police, as opposed to your garden-variety bad guy who's carrying a gun and will not hesitate to use it."

The FBI agrees. Last September, it issued a bulletin to law enforcement officials entitled "Sovereign Citizens: A Growing Domestic Threat to Law Enforcement" that describes the movement as "domestic terrorist." The bulletin notes that sovereigns have killed six law enforcement officers since 2000 and that Terry Nichols, convicted in the Oklahoma City bombing, was a sovereign.

The largest group of organized sovereigns, the Alabama-based Republic for the United States of America (RuSA), last year took a new step toward organizing a kind of government-in-waiting by adding a "Congress" with voting representatives in 49 states. The group says it is in the process of "reinhabiting" the government.

Although it can sound threatening, RuSA has not engaged in any known violence. But that's not true of all other Patriot groups, two of which are alleged to have engendered major terrorist plots aimed at police and others last year.

In March 2011, Alaska Peacemakers Militia leader Schaeffer Cox and four followers were arrested on weapons and conspiracy charges related to an alleged plan to kill Alaska state troopers and a judge. A state court later ruled that hundreds of hours of secret recordings made by informants would not be admissible, leading to the freeing of one of Cox's followers. But Cox and the other three still faced federal weapons charges and, this January, a superseding federal indictment again charged them with conspiracy to murder. In a related development, a woman who was the militia's secretary was arrested trying to enter Canada when officials found a pistol and information about pipe bombs and the ricin toxin in her truck.

Then, last November, federal officials arrested four members of a Georgia militia. The four elderly men were accused of plotting to assassinate public officials, bomb federal buildings, and carry out mass murders in four U.S. cities by dispersing deadly ricin dust from the windows of speeding cars. Like Cox and his comrades, the Georgia men are to be tried this year.

One of the factors apparently driving the expansion of the radical right has been the spread of conspiracy theories and demonizing falsehoods. Tall tales about secret government concentration camps, for instance, have spread beyond Patriot groups into nativist organizations and others. Equally preposterous stories of plots to impose Islamic Shariah law and to "recruit" schoolchildren into homosexuality have been plugged around the country, often by well-known public figures. It seems clear that this kind of propaganda boosts membership in conspiracy-minded groups.

But what may end up affecting the American radical right more than any other single factor in the coming year is President Obama and the presidential election campaign. If the primaries generate more attacks on the nation's first black president based on complete falsehoods — that he is a secret Muslim, a Kenyan, a radical leftist bent on destroying America — it's likely that the poison will spread. And if he wins reelection next fall, the reaction of the extreme right, already angry and on the defensive as the white population diminishes, could be truly frightening.

ANTI-GAY GROUPS

The LGBT community made significant advances in 2011, with the repeal of the "Don't Act, Don't Tell" policy on gay men and lesbians in the military, the growing acceptance of same-sex marriage by Americans and the legalization of such bonds in New York state. But it was precisely these advances

that seemed to set off a furious rage on the religious right, with renewed efforts to ban or repeal marriage equality and what seemed to be an intensification of anti-gay propaganda in certain quarters. American Family Association official Bryan Fischer, for instance, said that "gays are Nazis," claimed that HIV does not cause AIDS but gay men do, and, for good measure, criticized black welfare recipients who "rut like animals." In another development, most of the religious right groups that started out opposing abortion but moved on to attacking LGBT people have recently begun to adopt anti-Muslim propaganda en masse. The gay-bashing Traditional Values Coalition, for instance, last year redesigned its website to emphasize a new section entitled "Islam vs. the Constitution," published a report on Shariah law, and joined anti-Shariah conferences. Overall, the number of anti-gay hate groups in the United States rose markedly, going from 17 in 2010 to 27 last year.

ANTI-MUSLIM GROUPS

The number of anti-Muslim groups tripled in 2011, jumping from 10 groups in 2010 to 30 last year. That rapid growth in Islamophobia, marked by the vilification of Muslims by opportunistic politicians and anti-Muslim activists, began in August 2010, when controversy over a planned Islamic cultural center in lower Manhattan reached a fever pitch. Things got worse later in the year, when Oklahoma residents voted to amend the state constitution to forbid the use of Islamic Shariah law in state courts — a completely unnecessary change, given that the U.S. Constitution rules that out. The overheated atmosphere generated by these events also helped spur a 50% jump in the FBI's count of anti-Muslim hate crimes in 2010. Then, in March 2011, U.S. Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.) held hearings on the radicalization of U.S. Muslims that seemed meant to demonize them. At the same time, there was a swelling of truly vicious propaganda like this remarkable Jan. 14, 2011, comment from columnist Debbie Schlusel: "They are animals, yes, but a lower form than the dog, as they won't learn to change their behavior for a carrot or a reward."

BLACK SEPARATIST GROUPS

The most remarkable development among radical black groups and individuals last year was the continuing spread of so-called "sovereign citizen" ideology, a set of ideas that originated in white supremacist groups of the 1970s and 1980s but has nevertheless taken off among African Americans. Sovereigns' conspiratorial beliefs generally include the claim that Americans are not subject to most tax and criminal laws, including statutes requiring driver's licenses and vehicle registrations. In the case of the black adherents, who make up only a sliver of the larger sovereign citizens movement, these ideas have been melded with selective interpretations of early black nationalists like Noble Drew Ali. Black sovereigns, like white ones, have engaged in a series of criminal acts, drawing up bogus financial instruments, harassing enemies with unjustified court filings, and even illegally seizing houses they do not own. Another noteworthy development among radical black groups was the Nation of Islam's furious defense of Libyan dictator Moammar Qaddafi, a sometimes Nation benefactor who was killed in an uprising later in the year. Nation leader Louis Farrakhan said that U.S. involvement in Libya would hasten the apocalypse. Malik Zulu Shabazz, head of the New Black Panther Party, went further, calling President Obama a "nigger police chief" leading the attack on a "black man ... on the run, named Qaddafi."

CHRISTIAN IDENTITY GROUPS

Christian Identity, a radical theology that describes Jews as biologically descended from Satan and people of color as soulless "mud people," has been declining in recent years, largely because its arcane, Bible-based doctrines seem to hold little interest for young racists. But last year that trend reversed itself, as a new Identity group, Crusaders for Yahweh, appeared with 30 chapters. The group is based in Chillicothe, Ohio, and led by Paul Mullet, a former member of the neo-Nazi Aryan Nations (whose members generally practice Christian Identity) who left that group in 2010. That year, Mullet briefly formed an organization he called the American National Socialist Party, but he has now moved on to Crusaders for Yahweh, which appears to be tied institutionally to Aryan Nations. Also last year, Identity lost one of its best-known proponents with the death at 64 of Peter John "Pete" Peters, pastor of the LaPorte (Colo.) Church of Christ. Peters, who ran an Internet and radio ministry called Scriptures for America, had inspired extremists for some four decades.

KU KLUX KLAN GROUPS

Overall, the number of Klan chapters last year fell to 152 from 221 in 2010, and the various Klan groupings were relatively quiet. But the year brought major changes in the Klan formations, with some large groups disappearing while others popped up or added large numbers of new chapters. Most notably, the second largest Klan group in America — the Marion, Ohio-based Brotherhood of Klans, with 38 chapters in almost as many states — folded when its leader, Jeremy Parker, joined the leading Aryan Nations faction. At the same time, however, the Rebel Brigade Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, based in Martinsville, Va., and inactive for several years, came back to life under leader Stan Martin with 19 chapters. The United Knights of Tennessee Ku Klux Klan, meanwhile, shot up from a single chapter in Morristown, Tenn., to 19. Two others, the True Invisible Empire Knights based in Pulaski, Tenn., and the Traditional American Knights of Potosi, Mo., merged to form the Potosi-based True Invisible Empire Traditionalist American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

NATIVIST EXTREMIST' GROUPS

The contemporary movement of "nativist extremist" groups — organizations that go beyond lobbying and other political activities meant to restrict immigration, and instead harass and confront individuals they suspect are undocumented immigrants — began in 2005, with the appearance of the first Minuteman groups. (The SPLC does not list nativist extremist groups as hate groups; only a handful of the most extreme anti-immigrant groups are listed that way.) For its first five years, the movement expanded rapidly, reaching a high point of 319 groups in 2010. Last year, that number plummeted by more than 40%, falling to just 184, for reasons that are both internal and external. Internally, the movement was disrupted by internecine quarrels and the negative publicity that was generated by a Minuteman leader's murder of a Latino man and his 9-year-old daughter in Arizona, a case that resulted in the leader's being sentenced to death last year. But what may have been even more important is the way that the movement was co-opted as state legislatures began passing draconian legislation meant to punish undocumented immigrants, effectively stealing the issue away from the nativist groups.

NEO-CONFEDERATE GROUPS

The neo-Confederate movement, whose heart is the Alabama-based League of the South (LOS), grew both smaller and more radical last year as its political efforts to organize a second Southern secession seemed to fall on bare ground. Founded in 1994 by former university professor Michael Hill, the LOS, which opposes racial intermarriage and seeks a society marked by "general European cultural hegemony," had 42 chapters in 2010, but saw that number fall to 32 last year. The drop-off came as Hill's rhetoric grew more belligerent than ever before. Last July, at his Abbeville, S.C., annual conference, Hill told LOS members that "we are already at war" and, earlier, he urged them to buy AK-47s, hollow-point bullets and tools to derail trains. Some 60 people at the conference learned how to draw down on an enemy, and Hill asked in a speech, "What would it take to get you to fight?" Meanwhile, the group's relatively strong Alabama chapter, based in Wetumpka, almost finished work on a 4,000-square-foot building that it intends to use for international conferences.

RACIST SKINHEAD GROUPS

Last March, David Lynch, leader of the Sacramento, Calif.-based American Front and one of the best-known racist skinheads on the international scene, was shot to death in his Citrus Heights home; his girlfriend was shot in the leg. Within days, police were questioning Charles Gilbert Demar III, a Lynch associate also known as "Charlie Boots" who was the lead singer of the Stormtroop 16 band, as a "person of interest." Demar was arrested when officials found crystal methamphetamine and a meth manufacturing setup in his apartment, but as of press time he had not been charged in connection with Lynch's death. Another significant event on the skinhead scene took place last June, when the decade-old Vinlanders Social Club, one of the most violent racist skinhead groups, held its first white power concert. More than 50 people came to the event in Columbus, Ohio, including Richie Meyer, president of the Confederate Hammerskins, and Forrest Fogarty, a musician and one of Meyer's more prominent followers. Their presence and friendly association with Vinlanders at the event reflected the success of

a truce between the two groups that was reached in 2007, ending what had been described as a "blood feud" between them.

WHITE NATIONALIST GROUPS

Three large groups form the core of the white nationalist movement in the United States: the Council of Conservative Citizens, an outgrowth of the old White Citizens Councils, that fights against school integration and racial intermarriage; American Renaissance, a journal that justifies white nationalism by attacking the intelligence and mental health of black people; and the American Third Position (A3P), a racist party with electoral ambitions in many states and the nation at large. Of these, it has been A3P, which only started up in 2009, that has been growing the most rapidly. It also has attracted most of the best-known white nationalists in America to its cause. Last year, Virginia Abernethy, an emeritus professor of psychiatry and anthropology at Vanderbilt Medical School, joined the A3P board of directors, as did Tomas Sunic, an American-educated Croatian who has spoken at neo-Nazi events. Others who became A3P officials earlier include Kevin MacDonald, a deeply anti-Semitic professor at California State University, Long Beach; James Edwards, host of a racist radio show based in Memphis; Don Wassall, publisher of the anti-immigrant Nationalist Times; and Jamie Kelso, once an aide to former Klan boss David Duke. A3P is headed up by Los Angeles lawyer William Daniel Johnson, a man who once sought to deport every American with any "ascertainable trace of Negro blood."

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