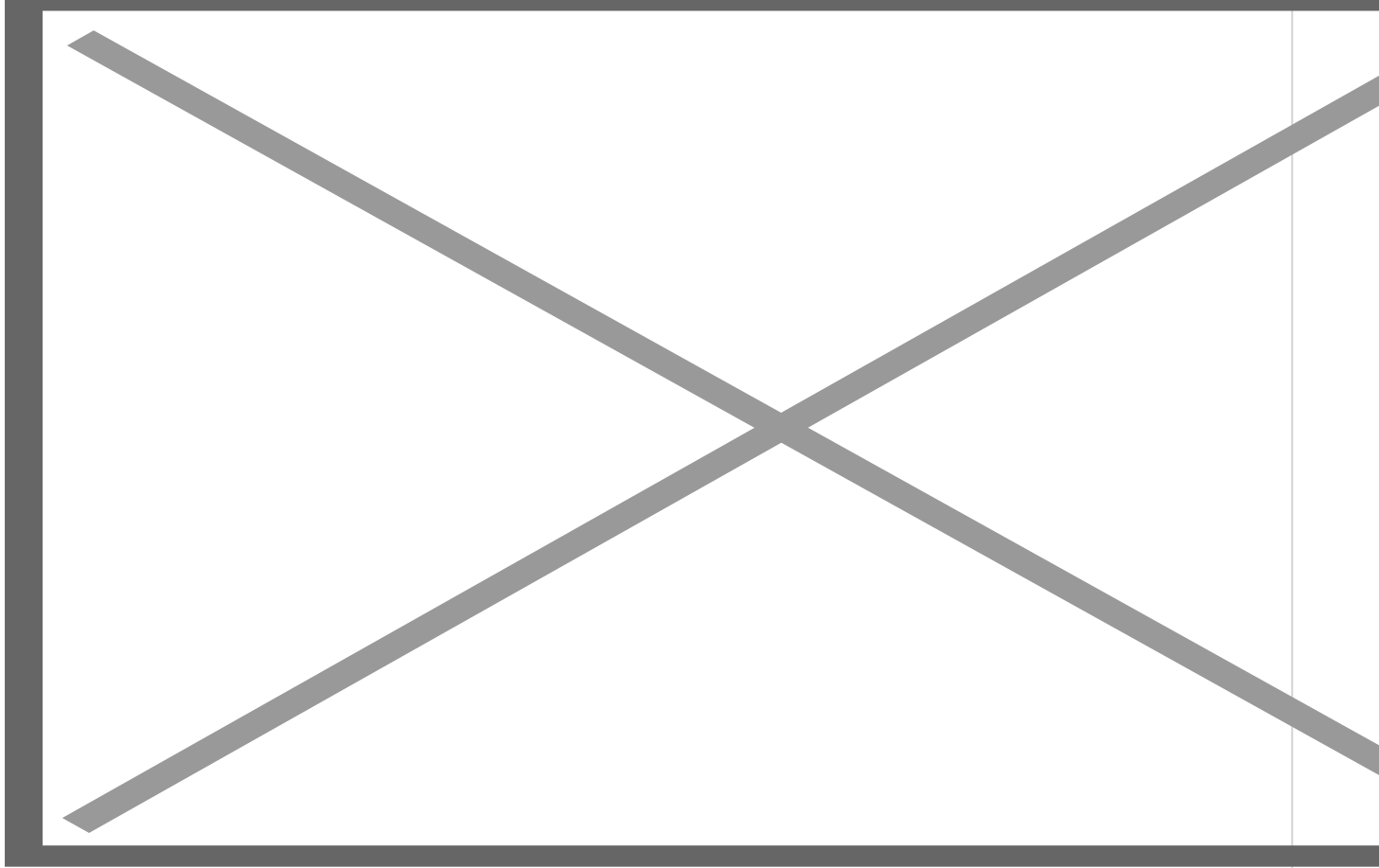


U.S. police officers fired for association with extremist groups keep their job

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A demonstrator is pepper sprayed by policemen shortly before being arrested during a Black Lives Matter protest in Portland, Oregon, on 15 October, 2020. (Photo by AP)

Washington, June 5 (RHC)-- While at least 73 law enforcement officers were terminated in the United States in the past decade for being members of white supremacist, anti-government and other extremist groups, many of them have been allowed to stay on the job, according to the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism.

A new report by the U.S.-based organization finds violent extremist groups recruiting current and former US law enforcement personnel, putting together a list of officers who are or were once associated with extremist groups since 2010.

According to the report, at least 40% of officers were allowed to remain on duty, despite facing termination, while 42% left their positions through dismissal, retirement, or resignations. It focuses on law enforcement officers who were ousted for being supporters of extremist groups but who remained on the job or were recruited by other agencies.

The fact that at least five of those arrested for storming the US Capitol building on January 6 were active law enforcement officers, the report notes, raises “serious concerns” and underscores the fact that extremists have “made their way into the ranks of law enforcement” across the country.

It comes as policemen in the US face increased scrutiny in the wake of shootings targeting African Americans and Asian Americans, especially since the killing of George Floyd by former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin last year. “We’ve been tracking the numbers and, year over year, Black people are three times more likely to be killed by police than white people,” Samuel Sinyangwe, a US-based racial justice activist, is quoted as saying by USA Today.

“When you see that officers are members of white supremacist organizations and hate groups, that’s not only troubling, but it shows that law enforcement is a system that enables people like that to be violent towards Black people,” he adds, with concern.

The report highlights a number of incidents in which law enforcement officers showed support for extremist groups and notes that 73 might not seem like many, considering there are hundreds of thousands of law enforcement officers in the country.

The researchers found three officers who were hired by another law enforcement agency after they resigned or were fired, but couldn’t compile the full list as such records are not revealed to public.

“Our findings indicate that anti-government and white supremacist beliefs are the most commonly held extremist beliefs among law enforcement. Additionally, of the officers exposed as extremists in our research, equal numbers were forced out of their jobs as were allowed to keep their jobs or reassigned with full pay. In at least two cases, officers terminated for extremism were rehired by another agency, and at least one officer who resigned amidst accusations of extremism was hired by another agency,” the report notes.

Sinyangwe said the fact that some officers kept their job reveals a lack of accountability for the people entrusted by communities with keeping everybody safe. Those officers who are exposed, who are identified, remain on the force,” he was quoted as saying. “If they continue to be allowed to have a badge and a gun and have complete impunity to go into Black and brown communities and translate those views into violence, then you have a system that is bad – not just a group of officers.”

Anti-government groups including the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters were the most common extremist organizations supported by law enforcement officers, the report found, with about 40% of the officers examined linked with these groups.

Oath Keepers are considered the largest anti-government group in the country, who are also notorious for espousing anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant conspiracy theories.

Police violence, particularly against the people of color, has seen a disturbing surge in US in recent years, mainly attributed to former US President Donald Trump’s hate-filled rhetoric.

His successor, Joe Biden, has also come under blistering criticism for failing to stem the tide of police brutalities, which have sparked popular protests across the country in recent months.

Biden in April had called for police reforms and urged Congress to pass a police reform bill in the name of George Floyd, an African-American man killed by a white police officer last year.

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