



ASPEN TECH
POLICY HUB

PROJECT



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Combating Domestic Terrorism

Empowering witnesses to fight white supremacist extremism while protecting civil liberties

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to thwart mass gun violence caused by white supremacy extremists, witnesses must take action. An FBI study on active shooters shows that there were on average three distinct witnesses who observed concerning behaviors about the suspect prior to their attack. Unfortunately, nearly 60 percent of witnesses did not report their concerns to the police, resulting in many missed opportunities to save lives. This low reporting rate can be solved through the use of a digital reporting escrow. Witnesses can report concerning behaviors into an escrow, and their report stays locked until a credible threshold of risk is met. This system motivates witnesses to report suspicious behavior while protecting the civil liberties of the accused.



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THE PROBLEM

White supremacist extremism is a global threat that affects the United States. Furthermore, the ubiquity of guns in the U.S. increases the lethality of terrorist attacks. Multiple witnesses often see concerning behaviors before mass gun violence. Over half the time, witnesses observe the perpetrator communicate violent intent. Yet nearly 60 percent do not report to police. Reasons for failure to report include a distrust of law enforcement, loyalty to the perpetrator, self-doubt of their own assessment, and a desire for confidentiality.



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THE SOLUTION

Most behaviors in isolation are not concerning enough to create suspicion of a terrorist attack. Yet in combination with reports by one or more witnesses, these behaviors tell a more complex story about a looming threat of violence. Increasing witness reporting will require a confidential way to report, assurance that witness actions will remove guns from potential terrorists, and a selection of reporting options that result in a calibrated response. An online cryptographic reporting escrow, powered by a nuanced risk model, meets all of these requirements. This project offers a domestic terrorist risk model for witnesses to use, for the FBI to adopt, and for civil liberties groups to endorse. The model aims to identify national security risks while also protecting the suspect's civil liberties.

ABOUT THE HUB

The Aspen Tech Policy Hub is a Bay Area policy incubator, training a new generation of tech policy entrepreneurs. We take tech experts, teach them the policy process, and support them in creating outside-the-box solutions to society's problems.

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