



Watchlisted: You're Probably Already on a Government Extremism List



John Whitehead

In a closed society where everybody's guilty, the only crime is getting caught.—*Hunter S. Thompson*

According to the FBI, you may be an anti-government extremist if you've:

- a) [purchased a Bible or other religious materials](#),
- b) used terms like "MAGA" and "Trump,"
- c) shopped at Dick's Sporting Goods, Cabela's, or Bass Pro Shops,
- d) purchased tickets to travel by bus, cars, or plane,
- e) all of the above.

In fact, if you selected any of those options in recent years, [you're probably already on a government watchlist](#).

That's how broadly the government's net is being cast in its pursuit of domestic extremists.

We're all fair game now, easy targets for inclusion on some FBI watchlist or another.

When the FBI is asking banks and other financial institutions to carry out [dragnet searches of customer transactions](#)—warrantlessly and without probable cause—for "extremism" indicators broadly based on where you shop, what you read, and how you travel, we're all in trouble.

Clearly, you don't have to do anything illegal.

You don't even have to challenge the government's authority.



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Frankly, you don't even have to care about politics or know anything about your rights.

All you really need to do in order to be tagged as a suspicious character, flagged for surveillance, and eventually placed on a government watchlist is live in the United States.

This is how easy it is to run afoul of the government's many red flags.

In fact, all you need to do these days to end up on a government watchlist or be subjected to heightened scrutiny is use certain trigger words (like cloud, pork and pirates), surf the internet, communicate using a cell phone, limp or stutter, drive a car, stay at a hotel, attend a political rally, express yourself on social media, appear mentally ill, serve in the military, disagree with a law enforcement official, call in sick to work, purchase materials at a hardware store, take flying or boating lessons, appear suspicious, appear confused or nervous, fidget or whistle or smell bad, be seen in public waving a toy gun or anything remotely resembling a gun (such as a water nozzle or a remote control or a walking cane), stare at a police officer, question government authority, or appear to be pro-gun or pro-freedom.

We're all presumed guilty until proven innocent now.

It's just a matter of time before you find yourself wrongly accused, investigated and confronted by police based on a data-driven algorithm or risk assessment culled together by a computer program run by artificial intelligence.

For instance, a so-called typo in a



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geofence search warrant, which allows police to capture location data for a particular geographic area, resulted in [government officials being given access to information about who went where and with whom within a two-mile-long stretch of San Francisco](#) that included churches, businesses, private homes, hotels, and restaurants.

Thanks to the 24/7 surveillance being carried out by the government's [sprawling spy network of fusion centers](#), we are all just sitting ducks, waiting to be tagged, flagged, targeted, monitored, manipulated, investigated, interrogated, heckled and [generally harassed](#) by agents of the American police state.

Without having ever knowingly committed a crime or been convicted of one, you and your fellow citizens have likely been assessed for behaviors the government might consider devious, dangerous or concerning; [assigned a threat score](#) based on your associations, activities and viewpoints; and [catalogued in a government database](#) according to how you should be approached by police and other government agencies based on your particular threat level.

Before long, every household in America will be flagged as a threat and assigned a threat score.

Nationwide, there are upwards of [123 real-time crime centers](#) (a.k.a. fusion centers), which allow local police agencies to upload and share massive amounts of surveillance data and intelligence with state and federal agencies culled from surveillance cameras, facial recognition technology, gunshot sensors, social media



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monitoring, drones and body cameras, and artificial intelligence-driven predictive policing algorithms.

These data fusion centers, effectively create an electronic prison—[a digital police state](#)—from which there is no escape.

Yet this crime prevention campaign is not so much about making America safer as it is about ensuring that the government has the wherewithal to muzzle anti-government discontent, penalize anyone expressing anti-government sentiments, and [preemptively nip in the bud](#) any attempts by the populace to challenge the government’s authority or question its propaganda.

As J.D. Tuccille writes for *Reason*, “[A]t a time when government officials rage against ‘misinformation’ and ‘disinformation’ that is often just disagreement with whatever opinions are currently popular among the political class, [fusion centers frequently scrutinize peaceful dissenting speech](#).”

These fusion centers are the unacknowledged powerhouses behind the government’s campaign to censor and retaliate against those who vocalize their disagreement and discontent with government policies.

It’s a [setup ripe for abuse](#).

For instance, an investigative report by the Brennan Center found that “Over the last two decades, [leaked materials have shown fusion centers tracking protestors and casting peaceful activities as potential threats](#). Their targets have included racial justice and environmental advocates, right-wing activists, and third-party



political candidates.”

One fusion center in Maine was found to have been “illegally collecting and sharing information about Maine [residents who weren’t suspected of criminal activity](#). They included gun purchasers, people protesting the construction of a new power transmission line, the employees of a peacebuilding summer camp for teenagers, and even people who travelled to New York City frequently.”

This is how the burden of proof has been reversed.

Although the Constitution requires the government to provide solid proof of criminal activity before it can deprive a citizen of life or liberty, the government has turned that fundamental assurance of due process on its head.

Each and every one of us is now seen as a potential suspect, terrorist and lawbreaker in the eyes of the government.

Consider some of the many ways in which “we the people” are now treated as criminals, found guilty of violating the police state’s abundance of laws, and preemptively stripped of basic due process rights.

Red flag gun confiscation laws: Gun control legislation, especially in the form of [red flag gun laws](#), allows the police to remove guns from people “suspected” of being threats. These laws, growing in popularity as a legislative means by which to seize guns from individuals viewed as a danger to themselves or others, will put a target on the back of every American whether or not they own a weapon.

**Disinformation eradication**

campaigns. In recent years, the government has used the phrase “domestic terrorist” interchangeably with “anti-government,” “extremist” and “terrorist” to describe anyone who might fall somewhere on a very broad spectrum of viewpoints that could be considered “dangerous.” The ramifications are so far-reaching as to render almost every American an extremist in word, deed, thought or by association.

Government watchlists. The FBI, CIA, NSA and other government agencies have increasingly invested in corporate surveillance technologies that can mine constitutionally protected speech on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in order to identify potential extremists and predict who might engage in future acts of anti-government behavior. Where many Americans go wrong is in naively assuming that you have to be doing something illegal or harmful in order to be flagged and targeted for some form of intervention or detention.

Thought crimes programs. For years now, the government has used all of the weapons in its vast arsenal—surveillance, threat assessments, fusion centers, pre-crime programs, hate crime laws, militarized police, lockdowns, martial law, etc.—to target potential enemies of the state based on their ideologies, behaviors, affiliations and other characteristics that might be deemed suspicious or dangerous. It’s not just what you say or do that is being monitored, but how you *think* that is being tracked and targeted. There’s a whole spectrum of



behaviors ranging from thought crimes and hate speech to whistleblowing that qualifies for persecution (and prosecution) by the Deep State. It's a slippery slope from censoring so-called illegitimate ideas to silencing truth.

Security checkpoints. By treating an entire populace as suspect, the government has justified wide-ranging security checkpoints that subject travelers to scans, searches, pat-downs and other indignities by the TSA and VIPR [Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response] raids on so-called "soft" targets like shopping malls and bus depots.

Surveillance and precrime programs. Facial recognition software aims to create a society in which every individual who steps out into public is tracked and recorded as they go about their daily business. Coupled with surveillance cameras that blanket the country, facial recognition technology allows the government and its corporate partners to warrantlessly identify and track someone's movements in real-time, whether or not they have committed a crime.

Mail surveillance. Just about every branch of the government—from the Postal Service to the Treasury Department and every agency in between—now has its own surveillance sector, authorized to spy on the American people. For instance, the U.S. Postal Service, which has been photographing the exterior of every piece of paper mail for the past 20 years, is also spying on Americans' texts, emails and social media posts.

Constitution-free zones. Merely



living within 100 miles inland of the border around the United States is now enough to make you a suspect, paving the way for Border Patrol agents to search people's homes, intimately probe their bodies, and rifle through their belongings, all without a warrant. Nearly 66% of Americans (2/3 of the U.S. population, 197.4 million people) now live within that 100-mile-deep, Constitution-free zone.

Vehicle kill switches. Sold to the public as a safety measure aimed at keeping drunk drivers off the roads, "vehicle kill switches" could quickly become a convenient tool in the hands of government agents to put the government in the driver's seat while rendering null and void the Constitution's requirements of privacy and its prohibitions against unreasonable searches and seizures. As such, it presumes every driver potentially guilty of breaking some law that would require the government to intervene and take over operation of the vehicle or shut it off altogether.

Biometric databases. "Guilt by association" has taken on new connotations in the technological age. The government's presumptions about our so-called guilt or innocence have extended down to our very cellular level with a diabolical campaign to create a nation of suspects predicated on a massive national DNA database.

Limitations on our right to move about freely. At every turn, we're tracked by surveillance cameras that monitor our movements. For instance, license plate readers are mass surveillance tools that can photograph over 1,800 license tag numbers per minute; take a picture of every passing



license tag number and store the tag number and the date, time, and location of the picture in a searchable database; then share the data with law enforcement, fusion centers and private companies to track the movements of persons in their cars. With tens of thousands of these license plate readers now in operation throughout the country, police can track vehicles in real time.

The war on cash. Digital currency provides the government and its corporate partners with a mode of commerce that can easily be monitored, tracked, tabulated, mined for data, hacked, hijacked and confiscated when convenient. This push for a digital currency dovetails with the government's war on cash, which it has been subtly waging for some time now. In recent years, just the mere possession of significant amounts of cash could implicate you in suspicious activity and label you a criminal. Americans are having their bank accounts, homes, cars, electronics and cash seized by police under the assumption that they have been associated with some criminal scheme.

These programs push us that much closer towards a suspect society where everyone is potentially guilty of some crime or another and must be preemptively rendered harmless.

In this way, the groundwork is being laid for a new kind of government where it won't matter if you're innocent or guilty, whether you're a threat to the nation, or even if you're a citizen.

What *will* matter is what the



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government—or whoever happens to be calling the shots at the time—thinks. And if the powers-that-be think you're a threat to the nation and should be locked up, then you'll be locked up with no access to the protections our Constitution provides.

In effect, you will disappear.

As I make clear in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) and in its fictional counterpart [The Erik Blair Diaries](#), our freedoms are already being made to disappear.

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