Sporadic outages at 8chan and a new host after mass shooting

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A Virgin Mary painting, flags and flowers adorn a makeshift memorial for the victims of Saturday's mass shooting at a shopping complex in El Paso, Texas, Sunday, Aug. 4, 2019. (AP Photo/Andres Leighton)

The online message board 8chan suffered sporadic outages Monday after

its cybersecurity provider cut it off for what it called a "cesspool of hate" following mass shootings in Texas and Ohio.

But the board, which has a history of use by violent extremists, also quickly found a new online host. That company also provides such support for Gab.com, another social media site frequented by white supremacists that doesn't ban hate speech.

8chan was up and down after the security company Cloudflare said it would no longer provide services that protect web sites from denial-of-service attacks that can make them unreachable.

The operators of 8chan said there might be downtime in the next one or two days as the site sought a solution, and online records indicated the site had been moved to a new domain host: Sammamish, Washington-based web services provider Epik.com.

The company bills itself on its site as "the Swiss bank of domains." Epik.com did not immediately respond to requests sent by email and via LinkedIn

Police are investigating commentary posted on 8chan and believed to have been written by the suspect in a shooting Saturday that killed 20 people in El Paso, Texas.

If there is a connection, it would be the third known instance of a shooter posting to the site before going on a rampage following mass shootings at two New Zealand mosques in the spring, and another at a California synagogue.

The suspect in El Paso "appears to have been inspired" by discussions on 8chan, said Cloudflare CEO Matthew Prince in a blog post on his company's site. He said a suspect in an earlier shooting at a synagogue in

Poway, California, also posted a "hate-filled 'open letter'" on 8chan, as did the mosque attacker in Christchurch, New Zealand.

"8chan has repeatedly proven itself to be a cesspool of hate," wrote Prince. "They have proven themselves to be lawless and that lawlessness has caused multiple tragic deaths."

Prince acknowledged that little can be done under current rules to silence sites like 8chan.

With the big social networks doing a better job of moderating hate speech, incitement to violence and harassment, it's inevitable that extreme speech is gravitating to smaller websites that are often little more than message boards—sites teenagers routinely make in their bedrooms, said Joan Donovan, the director of the technology and social change project at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Services like Cloudflare or BitMitigate that host and protect websites are necessary to keep contentious, extremist-tolerant message boards like 8chan online because they typically attract hostile traffic from hacktivists aimed at overwhelming the sites and making them unreachable.

"That's precisely the paradox that Cloudfare finds itself in," Donovan said. "It sees itself as a necessary part of the internet infrastructure while at the same time understanding that in providing protection to these hate sites they are in some cases one of the reasons this content continues to exist or continues to stay online."

Two years ago, Cloudflare terminated service to the Daily Stormer, a neo-Nazi and white supremacist site.

"Today, the Daily Stormer is still available and still disgusting," Prince

wrote. "They have bragged that they have more readers than ever. They are no longer Cloudflare's problem, but they remain the Internet's problem."

In fact, the Daily Stormer's new security provider, BitMitigate, was purchased in February by Epik.com , whose CEO is Robert Monster of Bellevue, Washington.

In November, Monster defended in a blog post his company's decision to host Gab.com after its previous domain host, GoDaddy, dropped it.