

DOJ should investigate social media platform Gab and its CEO over Capitol riots, according to anti-hate group

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A national anti-hate group is calling for the Department of Justice and the FBI to investigate a conservative social media company and its CEO over allegations that they may have "intentionally aided, conspired with or directed" rioters who attacked the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

The Anti-Defamation League released an open letter Wednesday morning calling for authorities to investigate Gab and its CEO, Andrew Torba, saying they "may well bear a measure of criminal responsibility for the attack."

The move comes amid growing pressure on social media outlets that serve as a petri dish for hate and violence. In recent days, Apple, Google and Amazon have taken action to strip conservative social media outlet Parler of its distribution platforms amid accusations that rioters planned aspects of their attack on its platform. Parler has said it is committed to removing content calling for violence.

Although still a niche outlet, Gab has been gaining momentum since the election amid false allegations of fraud as President Donald Trump continues to claim that he won the election. When Trump incited his supporters to march on the Capitol on Jan. 6, they took action by bashing into the building.

The ADL cited a report that Gab commenters exchanged "directions for which streets to take to avoid the police and which tools to bring to help pry open doors," while "multiple people posted about carrying guns into the halls of Congress."

Torba himself posted to Gab on Jan. 6 that "in a system with rigged elections there are no longer any viable political solutions," according to ADL's letter.

"The phrase 'there is no political solution' is used in online accelerationist white supremacist circles to further the idea that the US government system is rotten, democratic processes for change are futile and therefore the system should be destroyed," the ADL said. "The phrase embraces political violence as the only valid response."

The organization also reported that before the riot began, Torba posted that it "would be a real shame if the people outside stormed the Senate."

In an emailed response to U.S. TODAY's request for comment, Torba called for an investigation into Facebook instead and said Gab had "put an immediate stop to a series of newly created accounts that were making threats of violence aimed at public officials" in December.

"We worked diligently with law enforcement and spent several weeks warning our community about this behavior and taking swift action to remove it from our platform," Torba said in the email. "Our

moderation and legal teams work tirelessly to ensure public safety. Threats of violence and illegal activity have no place on Gab."

Gab also posted Torba's response and a screenshot of U.S. TODAY's emailed request for comment to Twitter.

Since the crackdown on Parler, Gab has said it has experienced a surge in users, saying it saw 40 million visits last week.

Gab first launched in 2016 and has remained online despite efforts to shut it down in 2018 after it was discovered the suspected gunman in the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting that killed 11 people posted on the platform.

Gab was launched as an alternative to traditional platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. During that time, Twitter had suspended several accounts associated with extremist groups on the same day it vowed a crackdown on hate speech. The suspensions pushed many people to Gab, which has fewer content restrictions compared with Facebook, Twitter and other platforms.

"We believe that the future of online publishing is decentralized and open," reads a description on Gab's website. "We believe that users of social networks should be able to control their social media experience on their own terms, rather than the terms set down by Big Tech."

Users turned to Gab, and also Parler, in part because of concerns that larger platforms such as Twitter were censoring conservative opinions. However, the relaxed rules opened the door for content such as conspiracy theories and misinformation.

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