

The background of the entire page is a monochromatic blue-tinted photograph. It depicts the United States Capitol building at night, with its iconic dome illuminated. In the foreground, a line of riot police is visible, wearing helmets with 'ACPD' on them and holding clear riot shields. Some shields have 'ICE' and 'POLICE' written on them. The scene suggests a moment of civil unrest or a security operation.

Far From Gone: The Evolution of Extremism in the First 100 Days of the Biden Administration

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Executive Summary

About this Study

- This report provides an overview of domestic extremism in the United States. It examines the various groups and movements that gained momentum under the administration of former President Donald Trump, the key discourses and motivations of those that were a part of the 6 January insurrection, and how these have evolved in the first 100 days of the Biden administration.
- Through analysis of the MAGA movement and some of its various components, including the Oath Keepers, the Boogaloo Bois, Three Percenters, Proud Boys, and QAnon, this report reveals a country contending with a persistent domestic extremist threat which, despite Trump's defeat, is unlikely to dissipate any time soon.
- The 100 days that followed the inauguration of President Biden revealed a number of common narratives under which previously distinct groups have begun to converge, including anti-government ideologies, COVID conspiracy theories, election misinformation, racism, antisemitism, misogyny and transphobia. This report considers how these have evolved, and how they may continue to be a threat in the coming months and years.
- The authors applied a mixed methods approach, leveraging data scientific methods and digital ethonography, in an effort to better understand MAGA-related groups, movements, and narratives both prior to and after Biden's inauguration.

Militias

- The authors suggest that the militia movement should be conceptualised as having undergone a number of "waves" relating to its rise and fall, and changes to prominent narratives in the movement related to the results of various US elections. The movement has long feared that the US is under threat from a New World Order which intends to strip citizens of their freedoms. Militias were significantly emboldened by Trump's presidency and redirected much of their efforts against the political left and "Antifa" throughout his presidency.
- The militia movement is extremely hostile towards President Biden, and, after backing the "Stop the Steal" campaign during the US election, many members view his presidency as illegitimate and as a sign of the impending New World Order.
- The militia movement is on the brink of a "fourth wave" since Trump left office. This wave may be marked by increased fears of citizens' freedoms diminishing and severe opposition to President Biden.

Oath Keepers

- Some Oath Keepers members who participated in the insurrection appeared to feel they were doing so as a direct response to a call to action issued by Donald Trump. We warn that Trump's influence and ability to mobilise Oath Keepers members is likely to continue despite the fact he is no longer in office.

Three Percenters

- The insurrection is likely to have inspired Three Percenters and may be taken as a signal that the American people can stand up to perceived tyrannical governments. As such, the concept is likely to remain a dominant influence within the broader militia movement.

Boogaloo Bois

- While the Boogaloo movement was not a dominant force during the insurrection itself, members are likely to have been inspired by it, and it may influence them to take part in further organised actions against the United States government.

Proud Boys

- The Proud Boys experienced a substantial rise in popularity towards the end of Donald Trump's presidency and gained a significant number of followers, largely as a result of the success of the alternative social media platform Parler. The group also had a significant presence during the insurrection, and multiple members face charges of conspiracy.
- In 2021, the group has faced a considerable decline after Parler was dropped by their hosting provider, and they have lost around 150,000 followers as a result. Multiple chapters have also "splintered" from the central Proud Boys organisation after it was revealed that their chairman has been a longtime FBI informant. This means that the group is in a comparatively precarious situation compared to where it stood in 2020.
- However, the Proud Boys continue to be active on Telegram, and have two large channels each with over 30,000 members. Their ability to mobilise on Telegram should not be underestimated.
- In particular, the Proud Boys' second channel has over 45,000 members and consistently shares content which is explicitly linked with white supremacy and the neo-fascist ideology Third Positionism. Therefore, a significant number of Proud Boys are likely to espouse, or at least tolerate, white supremacist ideology – although this is not directly endorsed by the main group itself. Thus, the Proud Boys should be recognised as a group with tangible links to the extreme right and should continue to be monitored as a security threat.

QAnon

- The insurrection of 6 January 2021 is a stark example of what happens when an ideological movement such as QAnon is taken seriously, especially in the context of how some of its adherents have evolved into an ideologically motivated violent extremist movement. However, due to the mass deplatforming of QAnon, creating a mass exodus to alternative social media platforms, the group has balkanised into various ideological ecosystems, thus the threat is not consistent across the board and should be considered as a spectrum.
- Neo-QAnon influencers like Sidney Powell and Lin Wood, as well as QAnon elected officials Marjorie Taylor Greene and Lauren Boebert, will continue to play an influential role on QAnon adherents and those adjacent to the movement due to their nexus to political power, as well as advancing and adapting conspiracy theories to current political environments. Their future actions will potentially continue to radicalise and mobilise individuals in the QAnon ecosystems to action.
- The breadth of the fragmentation of QAnon across alt-tech platforms is still unknown, and it remains to be seen how this will impact the threat posed by the movement. Close attention is needed to evaluate how this will develop in the coming months.
- The symbiosis between QAnon adherents and other extremist actors on alt-tech platforms requires continued monitoring as there is continued community building that will be taking place and will inform which ecosystems may lead to long term viability especially with the overlap between QAnon and ideologically motivated violent extremist (IMVE) actors.
- Threat actors on alt-tech platforms will continue to seek to recruit disenfranchised QAnon adherents to further radicalise and mobilise them to action.

Narratives and Motivation

- A diversity of ideologically distinct actors, from neo-Nazis to Orthodox Jews, were present at the 6 January insurrection, united around common narratives of anti-government and anti-COVID conspiracies. Popular conspiracy theories among insurrectionists, such as a New World Order, QAnon and the Great Reset, converged around common mistrust in liberal democratic institutions and theories of an alleged malignant global actor pulling the strings, propped up by the complicity of governments.
- Although not universal, insurrectionists were mobilised by election misinformation and the Stop the Steal movement, where accusations of voter fraud were viewed as confirmation of existing anti-government conspiracies. With the election of Joe Biden, such actors have been pushed out of the mainstream political system, which may lead some to see violence as the only possible solution. Whilst key events have increased mainstream public awareness of the extreme nature of anti-COVID and election fraud conspiracies, these narratives continue to motivate and radicalise IMVE actors.

- COVID health restrictions were seen as evidence of a deep state conspiracy encroaching on individual freedoms, capitalising on chaos, panic and fear to push conspiracies into the mainstream. Whilst such narratives placed blame on different actors and incited varying levels of violence, many of the insurrectionists shared a common anti-government conspiratorial framework.
- In the first 100 days of the Biden administration, various ideological strands have converged under a “big tent” conspiracy, increasingly adopting narratives from other IMVE movements. COVID conspiracies have been entrenched by the vaccine rollout and hesitancy in re-opening the economy, including discussions about vaccine passports.

Anti-Asian narratives

- Anti-Asian narratives, which boomed under the Trump administration, have been integrated into wider anti-COVID and anti-leftist ideologies. In the first 100 days of the Biden administration, anti-Asian narratives have spiked on social media and attacks on Asian-Americans have been recorded.

Antisemitism

- Narratives about Jewish people and Judaism were not monolithic in the insurrection, with the recorded presence of neo-Nazis, antisemitic conspiracy theorists, philosemitic far-right actors and Jewish people themselves. This generates a complicated and nuanced threat picture. However, while not the primary motivation of most insurrectionists, the intrinsic nature of antisemitism within the movement is evident. In the first 100 days of Biden’s administration, a move towards a “big tent” conspiracy has generated a “big tent” enemy, often seen as the Jew. This is likely to continue to grow antisemitism among American IMVE actors.

Misogyny

- Under Trump, misogynistic discourse was mainstreamed, present within the administration itself and bolstered by the online ecosystem known as the Manosphere, which is a broad coalition of actors united by a hatred of feminism.
- While numerous women have been important players in the MAGA movement, misogyny has also been central to some of its key groups and movements, in particular the Proud Boys who are self-described Western chauvinists and have widely promoted hegemonic masculinity and traditional gender norms.

Transphobia

- Transphobia has long been one of the most major and ubiquitous narratives around which the far right mobilises. The way in which transphobia is utilised as a narrative within the far right must be afforded considerably more academic and policymaker consideration. Transphobia should be recognised as a security concern.

- Further efforts should be made to communicate and educate both far-right groups and the general public on the lived realities of various trans experiences. In particular, these efforts should focus on dispelling myths, such as that children are being forced to transition biologically and surgically at young ages, which are commonly used to mobilise transphobia within the far right.
- Under the Biden administration transphobia has been amplified by various factions of the far right against the appointment of Dr Rachel Levine, the first openly transgender individual to be confirmed by the US Senate. While her appointment should be viewed as an important step forward in normalising the visibility of transgender people, it is a rallying point for various far-right groups and narratives.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction	3
<i>The 6 January Insurrection</i>	5
2 The MAGA Movement: Groups, Networks and Narratives	9
<i>United States' Militias: A Movement in Four Waves</i>	9
<i>The Proud Boys</i>	25
<i>QAnon</i>	37
3 The 6 January Insurrectionists: Narratives and Motivations	55
<i>Common Narratives on 6 January</i>	55
<i>From Common to Communal Narratives: 100 Days of the Biden Administration</i>	58
<i>Mobilising Factors</i>	61
<i>Anti-Asian Racism, Antisemitism, Misogyny and Transphobia</i>	64
<i>Converging Narratives</i>	78
4 Conclusions	79

1 Introduction

The threat landscape in the United States shifted under Donald Trump's presidency. While domestic extremism was on the rise prior to his election to office in November 2016, his administration facilitated a fertile climate for domestic threat actors to recruit and mobilise in the open. It failed at crucial moments to condemn domestic threat actors, for example when Trump stated that there were "very fine people on both sides" following the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in 2017, after the death of the activist Heather Heyer at the hands of a domestic violent extremist.¹ Indeed, Trump and his administration attacked the media, fomented conspiracy theories and helped erode the domestic social fabric. Ideologically motivated violent extremist (IMVE) actors were no longer ashamed to hold and espouse extremist ideologies; rather, they were emboldened, as the former president amplified and shared their narratives and conspiracy theories, and chose to scapegoat Antifa, rather than acknowledging the data and analysis of experts on the rise of IMVE domestic threat actors.

Thus, few would deny that domestic terrorism and hate exploded during this period. IMVE actors (anti-government militias such as the Oath Keepers, Boogaloo movements and neo-Nazi organisations; far-right groups such as the Proud Boys; and movements such as QAnon) were invigorated by having an ally at the head of government who was willing to indulge their narratives and turn a blind eye to their transgressions. President Biden therefore came to power on 20 January 2021 at the culmination of the "Trump effect". The 6 January insurrection on Capitol Hill was the consequence of years in which IMVE actors were emboldened by the President and strengthened by the erosion of social cohesion.

Although a new administration is now in place, IMVE actors are still invigorated by Trump's baseless claims of voter fraud in the presidential election and conspiracy theories about the coronavirus pandemic. It is important to stress that threat assessments made prior to the January insurrection are no longer entirely viable, as the landscape has shifted in a way that requires new insights, particularly in light of the mass deplatforming of actors, the continued pandemic and the new administration. This report is therefore an attempt at breaking down the initial phases of how violent extremists in the United States have adapted after 6 January and within the first 100 days of the new administration. In light of this, this report maps out the key IMVE actors who expanded in the United States during Trump's presidency, the narratives and themes under which they now coalesce, and how radicalisation and mobilisation are occurring. In doing this, it aims to capture the diverse ideological cornucopia that has emerged, which is made up not only of American domestic violent extremists, but also of the insurrectionists, many of whom do not fall into established categories of politically motivated violent

¹ Lois Beckett, "A white girl had to die for people to pay attention": Heather Heyer's mother on hate in the US", *The Guardian*, 1 October 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/oct/01/heather-heyers-mother-on-hate-in-the-us-were-not-going-to-hug-it-out-but-we-can-listen-to-each-other>



Figure 1. Visual mapping of violent extremism from the Canadian Security and Intelligence Services 2020 Public Report

extremism or religiously motivated violent extremism. The latter form part of a new trend of actors that falls outside traditional categories found in counter-terrorism research. To this end, authors have chosen to classify these actors as ideologically motivated violent extremists (IMVE) or ideologically motivated extremists (IME).²

IMVE is a term developed by the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) to define the new reality of cross-pollination between ideologies and groups. The CSIS definition states “proponents of ideologically motivated violent extremism (IMVE) are driven by a range of influences rather than a singular belief system. IMVE radicalisation is more often caused by a combination of ideas and grievances resulting in a personalised worldview that is inspired by a variety of sources including books, videos, online discussions, and conversations. The resulting worldview often centres on the willingness to incite, enable or mobilise to violence. These individuals and cells often act without a clear affiliation to a specific organised group or external guidance, but are nevertheless shaped by hateful voices and messages online that normalise and advocate violence.”

The mapping of these actors will be crucial over the coming months and years, as it has been noted by US intelligence agencies that domestic violent extremism poses a “heightened threat” in 2021,

² The CSIS report further highlights that “The COVID pandemic has exacerbated xenophobic and anti-authority narratives, many of which may directly or indirectly impact national security considerations. Violent extremists continue to exploit the pandemic by amplifying false information about government measures and the virus itself on the internet. Some violent extremists view COVID as a real but welcome crisis that could hasten the collapse of Western society. Other violent extremist entities have adopted conspiracy theories about the pandemic in an attempt to rationalize and justify violence. These narratives have contributed to efforts to undermine trust in the integrity of government and confidence in scientific expertise. While aspects of conspiracy theory rhetoric are a legitimate exercise in free expression, online rhetoric that is increasingly violent and calls for the arrest and execution of specific individuals is of increasing concern.”, <https://www.canada.ca/en/security-intelligence-service/corporate/publications/2020-public-report.html>

particularly from racially motivated extremists.³ Moreover, FBI Director Christopher Wray stated that domestic violent extremism is “metastasizing across the country”.⁴ Therefore, this report fundamentally seeks to reveal the diversity of actors operating within this space and the seriousness of the United States domestic threat.

The 6 January Insurrection

On 6 January 2021, a pro-Trump political rally of various groups and movements turned into a violent mob of protesters who stormed the Capitol Building with the intent of disrupting the United States’ electoral process.⁵ Insurrectionists left a trail of violence, destruction and desecration in their wake. In less than two hours, the insurrectionists had overwhelmed Capitol police and security, as well as forced members of Congress to go into lockdown inside the building or flee. The seat of American government was breached for the first time in 211 years, five individuals, including US Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, died during the events and over 100 people were injured. The events sent shockwaves around the world and have marred the first 100 days of the Biden administration.

For several years, there has been a rise in domestic violent extremism, in what has been described by experts at George Washington University as “an extremely broad and ever-expanding plethora of groups and ideologies, including armed militias and committed conspiracy theorists, neo-Nazis and isolated anti-government militants with few common denominators beyond hate and propensity for violence.” These actors appear to be extremely diverse, as seen through social media, in news reporting and court documents following the arrest of over 250 participants in the insurrection. Amongst those present were members of armed militias, neo-Nazis, and harder to define ideologies and movements such as QAnon and the Boogaloo Bois.⁶

The events on 6 January were thus the culmination of propaganda, misinformation and conspiracy theories fomenting online for years, as the ideological fringe gained a foothold on mainstream social media, due in part to the pandemic and in part to the political rhetoric of the Trump administration in the preceding years. For months in advance, Trump had falsely claimed that the November election would be rigged, which would explain why he would not be re-elected. His rhetoric mirrored and fed conspiracy theorists, particularly followers of the QAnon movement. While these individuals are often dismissed as “crazy people on social media”, QAnon adherents were among the most prominent individuals on the front line to storm Capitol Hill.⁷ A similar pattern can be witnessed in the Boogaloo movement, Oath Keeper militias and far-right groups in this space.

3 Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021”, 01 March 2021, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/UnclassSummaryofDVEAssessment-17MAR21.pdf>

4 Guardian Staff and Agencies, “Racist extremists pose most deadly threat to US, intelligence warns”, 17 March 2021, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/17/racist-extremists-us-domestic-terrorism-intelligence-report>

5 The 6 January insurrection is also known in popular discourse as the Capitol Hill riot, or uprising.

6 “This is Our House!": A Preliminary Assessment of the Capitol Hill Siege Participants", Program on Extremism, The George Washington University, March 2021, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/This-Is-Our-House.pdf>

7 Marc-André Argentino, “QAnon and the storm of the U.S. Capitol: The offline effect of online conspiracy theories”, *The Conversation*, 7 January 2021, <https://theconversation.com/qanon-and-the-storm-of-the-u-s-capitol-the-offline-effect-of-online-conspiracy-theories-152815>

The insurrection was not an accident; thousands of people travelled from across the United States during a pandemic to join a protest that culminated in the insurrection, many of whom were connected with militias, white nationalists and conspiracists. Additionally, one unidentified individual, who is still wanted by the FBI, planted two pipe bombs on 5 January, one behind the Republican National Committee, the other next to a park bench near the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee.⁸ The events were also somewhat predictable: there were plenty of digital fingerprints indicating the forewarning of violence following the election results.⁹ Although the FBI stated that it had no prior intelligence about the potentiality of violence, several researchers and journalists had been raising the alarm about the post-election environment for months. In October, Argentino and Amarasingam warned that there was a potential for violence following the election results, particularly if there was a Biden victory.¹⁰ There were also concerns about Ali Alexander, a Republican Party activist and founder of the Stop the Steal movement, which promoted disinformation and conspiracy theories around the election being stolen. Indeed, Stop the Steal was organising protests for the insurrection long in advance of the events themselves. The Digital Forensic Research Lab have argued that the 6 January insurrection would not have occurred without Trump's encouragement of the Stop the Steal movement.¹¹ It wasn't until after the insurrection that platforms and the government noticed of the threat posed by election disinformation from this movement.¹²

Experts have noted that prior to the insurrection, Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, and others had an active presence on numerous online platforms and had extensively discussed how events might unfold, further observing that while mainstream platforms such as Facebook and Twitter contained some activity, the majority of IMVE actors had flocked to more fringe spaces, including Parler, Telegram, Gab and MeWe. It has also been highlighted that there were warning signs on both mainstream platforms and alt-tech networks.¹³ According to Jared Holt, the far-right groups that appeared at the riot had maintained a vigorous presence on alt-tech social media platforms, where they "spread their propaganda" among sympathisers, numbering in the "hundreds of thousands and even millions". Seemingly, they had been publicising the protest on these platforms for weeks.¹⁴

Moreover, as the Digital Forensic Research Lab noted in the wake of the insurrection, the effectiveness of the attack represented the "birth of the post-Trump" movement, arguing that the more casual

8 "Pipe bombs in Washington D.C.", FBI, 5 January 2021, <https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/seeking-info/suspected-pipe-bombs-in-washington-dc>

9 Jonathan Lewis and Bennett Clifford, "Take Nothing But Pictures, Leave Nothing But (Digital) Footprints: Social Media Evidence From the US Capitol Siege Perpetrators", Global Network on Extremism & Technology, 25 January 2021, <https://gnet-research.org/2021/01/25/take-nothing-but-pictures-leave-nothing-but-digital-footprints-social-media-evidence-from-the-us-capitol-siege-perpetrators/>

10 Marc-André Argentino and Amarnath Amarasingam, "Q-Pilled: Conspiracy Theories, Trump, and Election Violence in the United States", International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague, 29 October 2020, <https://icct.nl/publication/q-pilled-conspiracy-theories-trump-and-election-violence/>

11 DFRLab, "#StopTheSteal: Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities Leading to 1/6 Insurrection", Just Security, 10 February 2021, <https://www.justsecurity.org/74622/stopthesteal-timeline-of-social-media-and-extremist-activities-leading-to-1-6-insurrection/>

12 Haley Messenger, "Facebook bans all 'stop the steal' content", *NBC News*, 11 January 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/facebook-bans-all-stop-steal-content-n1253809>

13 Meili Criezis and Brad Galloway, "From MAGA to the Fringe: What Was Happening Online Before the 6 January Insurrection and What Can We Do Now?", Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET), 27 January 2021, <https://gnet-research.org/2021/01/27/from-maga-to-the-fringe-what-was-happening-online-before-the-6-january-insurrection-and-what-can-we-do-now/>

14 Jared Holt, Graham Brookie and Emerson T Brooking, "FAST THINKING: How the Capitol riot was coordinated online", Atlantic Council, 7 January 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/fastthinking/fast-thinking-how-the-capitol-riot-was-coordinated-online/>

Trump supporters seen in the preceding years would be replaced by less ideological, but a more violent set of activists.¹⁵ The validity of this prediction remains to be seen, and will depend on the ability of the actors described in this report to maintain support and gather momentum in the coming months and years. By providing an overview of domestic extremism in the United States, the key discourses and motivations of those involved in the 6 January insurrection, and how these have evolved under the first 100 days of the Biden administration, it is hoped that this report will contribute to the overall understanding of the current threat and how it may shift and mutate.

¹⁵ DFRLab, "Op-Ed: For right-wing extremists, this was a victory", *DFRLab*, 7 January 2021, <https://medium.com/dfriab/op-ed-for-right-wing-extremists-this-was-a-victory-fbd67d46bceb>

2 The MAGA Movement: Groups, Networks and Narratives

United States' Militias: A Movement in Four Waves

What is the Militia Movement?

As defined by Mark Pitcavage, the militia movement is “a loose collection of paramilitary groups that self-identify as ‘militias’ and individuals with strong sympathies for such groups”.¹⁶ At the core of the movement’s ideology is the belief that the United States’ government is becoming increasingly tyrannical, severely infringing on American citizens’ rights and ultimately straying from the core vision of the founding fathers.¹⁷ More specifically, a dominant belief throughout the militia movement is the notion that the United States is under threat from a “New World Order”, a “socialist one-world government” conspiracy that has subsumed most of the world and is being secretly aided from within the US government to “slowly strip Americans of their rights and freedoms”.¹⁸ The militia movement frames itself as the last stand for American citizens who must arm themselves against the government to prevent mass enslavement of the American people by the New World Order. Members also often draw parallels between the modern-day movement and American patriot fighters in 1775 who rebelled against the British.

Conspiracy is deeply embedded in the ideological fabric of the militia movement. The Anti-Defamation League demonstrates that three other enduring subsidiary conspiracies generally support the core belief of an impending New World Order.¹⁹ First, there is intense paranoia within the militia movement surrounding the imposition of martial law and fears that conspirators within the government will attempt to capitalise on unrest surrounding a crisis – be it real or engineered – in order to impose restrictions that severely limit the freedoms of American citizens. The movement is also often intensely focused on the notion that hundreds of “concentration camps” have been constructed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to house political enemies and dissidents as prisoners. Finally, perhaps the most common and far-reaching conspiratorial belief pervasive throughout the militia movement is an intense paranoia surrounding mass gun confiscation. As a result, members may often emphasise the need to expand and protect firearms rights as the necessary step to enable them eventually to overthrow tyrannical government forces impinging on their freedoms.²⁰

16 Mark Pitcavage, “Camouflage and Conspiracy: The Militia Movement From Ruby Ridge to Y2K”, *American Behavioural Scientist* vol. 44 no.6, 2001: pp.957–81, p.958

17 Sam Jackson, “Conspiracy Theories in the Patriot/militia Movement”, Program on Extremism, 2017: p.2.

18 Anti Defamation League, “The Militia Movement (2020)” <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/the-militia-movement-2020>

19 Ibid.

20 Jackson, “Conspiracy”

The First Wave

The militia movement differs from many other organised groups that took part in the 6 January insurrection in that it is deeply rooted in United States' history, rather than in more specific, modern phenomena. Pitcavage details the origins of the early militia movement, showing that it was rooted in the “dual traditions” of right-wing paramilitary groups and the Posse Comitatus. Posse Comitatus was a group which began in the 1970s, and posited that the American government had been corrupted by conspiratorial means. It therefore advocated for a model of governance focused on multiple, highly localised structures of governance. These early movements began to shift the focus of the American extreme right towards an increasingly anti-government world view.²¹

Yet, ultimately, the militia movement was predominantly catalysed by a series of events during the 1990s, the most important of which were the 1992 Ruby Ridge standoff and the 1993 Waco siege.²² Both incidents involved significant armed standoffs between reclusive civilian groups and armed government agents, and both ultimately resulted in massive casualties, with 82 civilians and four government agents killed over the course of the 1993 confrontation.²³ Pitcavage stresses that, to many, “these events signified that the government was willing to strike at, even kill, people who refused to conform”, an idea that was ultimately used to mobilise the militia movement throughout the 1990s.²⁴ This period of history represents the first wave of the American militia movement, with a number of paramilitary groups forming across the United States and receiving significant media attention.

Nevertheless, by 1996 the movement began to lose momentum, and several of the previously organised militia groups that had been formed began to splinter, forming smaller cells and in some instances attempting to carry out large-scale terrorist attacks.²⁵ Although the militia movement remained active, by 2000 it was significantly weakened, largely owing to depleted memberships following increased arrests of more radical members and the failure of the Y2K “Millennium Bug” conspiracy – which the movement had embraced – to come to fruition.²⁶ Indeed, the Anti-Defamation League estimated that between the 1990s and 2003, the number of militias in the United States declined from several hundred to approximately thirty.²⁷

The Second Wave

Following years of relative dormancy, however, the movement re-emerged in 2008, in what we propose should be defined as the “second wave” of the militia movement. Several intersecting forces can be attributed to the resurgence of this wave: these include technological advances in social media which technology enabled militia groups to appeal to a new, younger demographic,

21 Pitcavage, “Camouflage and Conspiracy”, p.959.

22 Jason Wilson, “Ruby Ridge, 1992: the day the American militia movement was born”, *The Guardian*, 26 August 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/26/ruby-ridge-1992-modern-american-militia-charlottesville>

23 Catherine Wessinger, “The deaths of 76 Branch Davidians in April 1993 could have been avoided – so why didn't anyone care?”, *The Conversation*, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/the-deaths-of-76-branch-davidians-in-april-1993-could-have-been-avoided-so-why-didnt-anyone-care-90816>

24 Pitcavage, “Camouflage and Conspiracy”, p.961

25 Pitcavage, “Camouflage and Conspiracy”, p.968

26 “The Militia Movement (2020)”, Anti-Defamation League, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/the-militia-movement-2020>

27 Ibid.

spread propaganda and recruit prospective members using online social networks, and the election of the Democrat Barack Obama as president.²⁸

Across the far-right landscape, the Obama election re-energised various factions of the radical and extreme right and was interpreted by some within the militia landscape as a signal of an impending New World Order.²⁹ However, most militia members would plausibly deny that the resurgence of the movement was connected with racial tension surrounding the inauguration of the first African-American president of the United States. Indeed, broadly the militia movement has a somewhat ambiguous or ambivalent relationship with race and racism. As outlined by the Rural Organisation Project, the militia movement's "organisational structures and political goals remain largely the same as in the days of open racism – even though the reasoning behind the arguments has changed".³⁰ Thus, while the movement may aspire to dismantle various aspects of federal law, it often does not provide alternatives to this legal infrastructure, meaning that the goals of the militia movement "which were consciously formulated as racist positions by Posse Comitatus ... are given a different reasoning by today's activists, but have the same potential effect"³¹ at an organisational level. Furthermore, many militias may also deny that the dynamics of structural racism exist and may at times feel that accusations of structural or organisational racism are orchestrated by 'Leftist elites' to sow discord among the American people.

The final and potentially most far-reaching factor that contributed to the resurgence of the militia movement during this second era was the emergence of the "Three Percenter" concept: "the most powerful marketing tool for the militia movement in its history".³² Coined in 2008 by Mike Vanderboegh, the former leader of the 1st Alabama Cavalry Regiment Constitutional Militia, on his blog "Sipsey Street Irregulars", the term "three percenters" refers to the false belief that only three percent of Americans fought in the Revolutionary War against the British.³³ The concept manifests within the militia movement both as an ideological strain and as a rallying call in mobilising anti-government small groups, speaking to the idea that, should they band together, small groups of American patriots could have the power to overthrow government. This idea of a powerful minority standing up to the perceived tyranny of government was, and is, an incredibly potent one within the militia movement.

However, it must be specified that Three Percenters are not in and of themselves an organised militia group, and many individual Three Percenters may not be affiliated with any group whatsoever.³⁴ Rather, one may identify as a Three Percenter, and may or may not be part of an actual militia group. Coupled with social media advances, the Three Percenter concept was therefore an important shorthand for popularising common anti-government militia rhetoric, sparking the second wave of the movement.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Michael Mills, "Obamageddon: Fear, the Far Right, and the Rise of 'Doomsday' Prepping in Obama's America", *Journal of American Studies*, pp.1–30

³⁰ "Racism and Identity in the Patriot Movement", Rural Organizing Project, <https://rop.org/ua/section-i/the-patriot-movement-historically-nationally/racism-identity-movement/>

³¹ Ibid.

³² "The Militia Movement"

³³ Judy L. Thomas, "Longtime militia and 'Patriot' leader Mike Vanderboegh dies at 64", *The Kansas City Star*, 2016, <https://www.kansascity.com/news/politics-government/article94813217.html>; Anti-Defamation League, "Three Percenters", <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/three-percenters>

³⁴ Ibid.

The Third Wave

Having undergone this resurgence during Obama's presidency, the militia movement once again shifted trajectory after Donald Trump announced his bid for office in 2015. As detailed by the Anti-Defamation League, Trump appealed to the militia movement as a fringe political candidate, akin to other Republican or third-party candidates the movement had previously supported, such as Ron Paul.³⁵ During his campaign he appealed to "disenfranchised" militia members who admired his strict approach to the deportation of illegal immigrants, his beliefs that Obama was not born in the United States (known as "birtherism"), and his repeated promises to build a wall along the Mexican border.³⁶ Yet even among his supporters there was some scepticism, at least initially, that Trump could legitimately win the US election, with the militia group the Oath Keepers apparently fearing that the election would be rigged and "stolen" from Trump – a foreshadowing of the extremely prevalent Stop the Steal campaign narrative the group would later back in 2020.³⁷

Indeed, when Trump then won the 2016 Presidential election, his win appeared to "pose a dilemma for the militia movement".³⁸ Although the groups had tentatively engaged with other political candidates prior to Trump, none had gone on to achieve comparable electoral success, and the militia-backed candidate's new position as president appeared to threaten the militia movement's ability to organise around anti-establishment and anti-government rhetoric. Rather than abandon its support for Trump, the militia movement instead shifted the focus of its opposition away from the federal government and instead directed it more towards the political left. For instance, in the wake of the election results being announced, anti-Trump protests and rallies were quickly identified as objects of derision and mockery by the militia movement.³⁹ The movement also concentrated on its "traditional secondary enemies", concentrating on anti-immigration, anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Black Lives Matter narratives.⁴⁰

Importantly, during this era Antifa also became the target of intense and ultimately enduring opposition from the militia movement. Antifa, a portmanteau of "anti-fascist", is a loose association of "far-left or anarchist individuals" and networks, focused on exposing and confronting fascism and white supremacy in all forms.⁴¹ During Trump's political campaign and subsequent presidency, Antifa began protesting at pro-Trump events, which it interpreted as being inherently racist. Mark Pitcavage explains that their presence at Trump rallies familiarised the militia movement with Antifa, and framed them as "a new enemy", when previously militias had little to no engagement with Antifa. Subsequently, various militias began co-opting Antifa's own tactics by showing up at pro-Trump events that they believed

35 "The Militia Movement (2020)"

36 Jason Wilson, "Extremist militias recruiting in fear of Clinton winning election, activists say", *The Guardian*, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/18/us-militia-recruiting-clinton-trump-election-patriot-movement>; Justin Mitchell and Andy Sullivan, "Meet the Trump-supporting armed militia training in the woods in preparation for a Hillary Clinton victory", *The Independent*, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/us-election-hillary-clinton-victory-donald-trump-armed-group-militia-3-cent-security-force-georgia-a7393556.html>

37 Jennifer Williams, "The Oath Keepers, the far-right group answering Trump's call to watch the polls, explained", *Vox*, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/11/7/13489640/oath-keepers-donald-trump-voter-fraud-intimidation-rigged>

38 "The Militia Movement (2020)"

39 Pitcavage, "The Militia's Election"

40 Dave Davies and Mark Pitcavage, "Armed Militias Face Off With the 'Antifa' in the New Landscape of Political Protest", *NPR*, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/08/23/545509627/armed-militias-face-off-with-the-antifa-in-the-new-landscape-of-political-protes>

41 Jason Wilson, "What is antifa and why is Donald Trump Targeting it?", *The Guardian*, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/06/what-is-antifa-trump-terrorist-designation>

might attract individuals affiliated with Antifa and confronting Antifa on the front lines of the rallies under the guise of providing ‘security detail’ at these events.⁴²

Thus, throughout this third wave, the militia movement expressed intense support for Donald Trump and, following his entry into political office, partially reframed its oppositional focus towards the political left, with a particular emphasis on Antifa as an enemy.

The Oath Keepers

The Oath Keepers are a militia group that merits particular attention, due to the onus it places on recruiting current and formerly serving military and police personnel as well as first responders. While anyone is welcome to join the rank-and-file Oath Keepers organisation, to be a full member of the group, individuals must have a history of serving in the army or law enforcement. Founded in 2009 by Stewart Rhodes, an army veteran and former volunteer for libertarian Ron Paul’s 2008 presidential campaign, the Oath Keepers organise around the central premise that military and law enforcement officers will be among those first called upon to enforce the will of the New World Order and are therefore the first line of defence guarding the American people against impending tyranny.⁴³ As such, Oath Keepers are required to pledge that they will value the US Constitution as the highest order, defending it from “all enemies, foreign and domestic”, and disobey any orders they deem to be unconstitutional.⁴⁴ A list of ten particular orders Oath Keepers should not obey was laid out by Rhodes during the group’s formation. The list emphasises that members must not comply with orders to disarm the American people, subject citizens to military tribunal, force citizens into concentration camps or impose martial law.⁴⁵

At the time it was formed, during the second wave of the militia movement, the group established itself as a “hub in the sprawling anti-Obama movement”.⁴⁶ Indeed, in a blog post published a short time after Obama’s inauguration, Rhodes emphasised that “the window of opportunity [was] clos[ing] on any hoped-for purely political restoration of liberty in America”.⁴⁷ However, the Oath Keepers would stringently deny that this political awakening was in any way correlated with the fact that Obama was the first African-American president of the United States; instead Rhodes argued that many members’ fears of increasing government powers had been present during George Bush’s presidency, but had simply intensified since Obama took office.⁴⁸ Indeed, the group’s by-laws stipulate that prospective members who are found during a mandatory vetting process to have been associated with any racist or hate group will not be allowed to join.⁴⁹

42 Davies and Pitcavage, “Armed Militias Face Off With the ‘Antifa’”

43 “Elmer Stewart Rhodes”, Southern Poverty Law Center, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/elmer-stewart-rhodes-0>

44 The Oath Keepers, “About Oath Keepers”, 2012

45 The Oath Keepers, “Declaration of Orders We Will Not Obey”, 2012

46 Justine Sharrock, “Oath Keepers and the Age of Treason”, *Mother Jones*, 2010, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2010/02/oath-keepers/>

47 Stewart Rhodes, “Welcome to Oath Keepers”, Oath Keepers Blogspot, 2009

48 Justine Sharrock, “Oath Keepers and the Age of Treason”

49 The Oath Keepers, “Oath Keepers Bylaws”, 2015

Yet, in keeping with the broader militia movement's charged relationship with racism, the Oath Keepers have a somewhat ambivalent relationship with issues of race. While race is explicitly not emphasised in the group's oath or the orders that members must not obey, some content hosted on their website appears to affirm racist sentiments. For example, one article posted there written by group official and associate editor of the Oath Keepers' blog, Brandon Smith, alleges that "there is no privilege for whites, males, white males or straight white males", therefore undermining notions of structural or institutional racism – and indeed patriarchy.⁵⁰ Elsewhere in the article, Smith also argues that "political correctness" is symptomatic of a wider "Cultural Marxism" that seeks to sow discord among US citizens while "attacking and homogenizing very real and natural divisions based on biological reality and inherent genetic and psychological ability".⁵¹ This is a particularly loaded statement. Reference to differential "inherent genetic and psychological" abilities is potentially a dog-whistle to the commonly held white supremacist belief, rooted in biological racism, that alleges that races possess different "racial IQs", and by extension that White people are inherently more intelligent than Black people.⁵² Furthermore, the concept of Cultural Marxism is often imbued with inherent antisemitism.⁵³

More broadly, the Oath Keepers have also had a terse relationship with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Initially the group appeared to support BLM protesters. However, during marches in 2014 after the unarmed Black teenager Michael Brown was killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, Oath Keepers were also stationed in Ferguson where armed members pointed firearms at demonstrators in efforts to "defend stores" in the town. Rhodes also argued that the government refused to suppress looting in Ferguson as part of a larger plan to enable a totalitarian police state.⁵⁴ During the more recent protests as part of the reignited BLM movement in 2020, Rhodes labelled BLM protesters "well-funded Marxist and racist agitators", deploying Oath Keepers to "protect" property at the sites of various protests. Furthermore, the Oath Keepers' Twitter account actively praised Kyle Rittenhouse, a 17-year-old charged with the murder of two protesters in the aftermath of BLM protests in Kenosha, Wisconsin.⁵⁵ Yet despite these positions, individual Oath Keepers have been mocked by members of more overtly racist movements and in 2017 were described by neo-Nazi Andrew Anglin as "boomer[s]" who were "obsessed with not being perceived as 'racists'".⁵⁶

The Oath Keepers are one of the main groups to be indicted with involvement in the 6 January insurrection and face claims that they were one of the minority of groups to have been part of a more organised, potentially pre-planned action on the day. Presently, at least 13 individuals affiliated with the Oath Keepers have been charged

50 Ryan Lenz and Mark Potok, "Seeds of Sedition", Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2016/seeds-sedition>

51 Brandon Smith, "How to Stamp Out Cultural Marxism In A Single Generation", Oath Keepers, 2015

52 Andrew Winston, "Science in the Service of the Far Right: Henry E. Garrett, the IAAEE, and the Liberty Lobby", *Journal of Social Issues* vol.54 no.1, 1998: pp.179–210

53 Bill Berkowitz, "Cultural Marxism: Catching On", Southern Poverty Law Center, 2003, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2003/cultural-marxism-catching>

54 Rural Organizing Project, "Racism and Identity in the Patriot Movement", Rural Organizing Project, <https://rop.org/uia/section-i/the-patriot-movement-historically-nationally/racism-identity-movement/>

55 Robert Klemko, "Behind the armor: Men seek 'purpose' in protecting property despite charges of racism", *The Washington Post*, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/behind-the-armor-men-seek-purpose-in-protecting-property-despite-charges-of-racism/2020/10/05/b8496fec-001e-11eb-9ceb-061d646d9c67_story.html

56 Derek Hawkins, "Boomer antifa: White Supremacists rip into paramilitary Oath Keepers for not being racist enough", *The Washington Post*, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/06/16/boomer-antifa-white-supremacists-rip-into-paramilitary-oath-keepers-for-not-being-racist-enough/>

with federal crimes associated with the insurrection. A core group of twelve members have so far been indicted as part of a conspiracy case.⁵⁷ These accused conspirators are predominantly older than the ‘average’ extremist, with the median age of the group being just under 51, and the eldest participant, Bennie Parker, aged 70. The group also included four women, with Jessica Watkins appearing to take on one of the main organising roles.

In video footage of the insurrection, a military-style tactical “stack” formation of eight to ten individuals linked together by holding on to each other’s backs or vests can be seen approaching an entrance at the east side of the Capitol Building. The group are clad in helmets, reinforced vests and tops bearing the Oath Keepers’ logo and insignia, with one member displaying a badge on the back of his vest with the words “I don’t believe in anything. I’m just here for the violence” next to his Oath Keepers’ patch.⁵⁸ The stack can be seen pushing its way to the front of the crowd and the members are among the first to enter the Capitol Building, with footage taken by Oath Keeper Donovan Crowl showing him and fellow member Jessica Watkins inside the Capitol rotunda exclaiming “We took on the Capitol! We overran the Capitol!”⁵⁹

However, the crux of the conspiracy case against the Oath Keepers rests mainly on the assertion that the group took part in the insurrection as part of a preconceived plan. It is certain that the group had, for some time, intended to participate in a rally in Washington, DC, on 6 January. On 31 December, a post was shared on the Oath Keepers’ website entitled “January sixth, see you in DC!”, which declared that the group intended to have a formal presence in the capital on that day and encouraged others to participate.⁶⁰ In a subsequent post written by Rhodes and published on 4 January 2021, the group declared that it would have “multiple volunteer security teams” present at the rally “to assist in protecting multiple scheduled events, speakers, VIPs, and event attendees”. The post was particularly clear in how it encouraged as many Oath Keepers as possible to be present during the rally, stressing “It is CRITICAL that all patriots who can be in DC get to DC to stand tall in support of President Trump’s fight to defeat the enemies foreign and domestic who are attempting a coup, through the massive vote fraud and related attacks on our Republic.”⁶¹ In short, it is certain that there was a concerted effort on the part of the Oath Keepers to ensure the group had a presence in the capital during 6 January.

Yet evidence suggests the core group members intended to take part in some form of action in Washington on 6 January since at least November 2020, long before either of the above announcements were made on the Oath Keepers’ website. Members had also made concerted efforts to recruit and vet potential participants during the preceding months.⁶² Importantly, this evidence also suggests that Jessica Watkins, who was allegedly one of the group’s main organisers, viewed their action as a direct response to a call to action from Donald Trump. On 9 November, Watkins allegedly expressed

57 Spencer Hsu, “Oath Keepers founder, associates exchanged 19 calls from start of Jan. 6 riot through breach, prosecutors allege”, *The Washington Post*, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/oath-keepers-calls-capitol-riot/2021/04/01/1b48aad4-9338-11eb-a74e-1f4cf89fd948_story.html

58 *United States of America v. Sandra Ruth Parker and Bennie Alvin Parker*, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, 2021

59 *Ibid.*

60 Nancy Oakley, “January Sixth, see you in DC!”, *The Oath Keepers*, 2020

61 Stewart Rhodes, “Oath Keepers Deploying to DC to Protect Events, Speakers, & Attendees on Jan 5-6: Time to Stand!”, *The Oath Keepers*, 2021

62 *United States of America v Donovan Crowl*, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, 2021

concern over plans to attend protests on 6 January, saying “Unless the POTUS himself activates us, it’s not legit ... If Trump asks me to come, I will. Otherwise, I can’t trust it.” These concerns were later apparently mollified; in a text message sent in December to another Oath Keepers member, Watkins stressed that “Trump wants all able-bodied Patriots to come”.⁶³

Watkins was not alone in feeling that her presence on 6 January was explicitly requested by Trump. On 19 December 2020, Trump sent a tweet stating, “Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!”.⁶⁴ Seemingly in response, three days later fellow Oath Keepers member Kelly Meggs spoke of his intentions to attend the protest over Facebook Messenger, stating: “Trump said It’s gonna be wild!!!!!!... He called us all to the Capitol and wants us to make it wild!!! Sir Yes Sir!!!”.⁶⁵ These messages indicate that at least some members of the Oath Keepers viewed their actions as mandated by Donald Trump and potentially would not have participated in the insurrection if they had not felt compelled to do so as a result of statements made by the former president.

Importantly, there is also some indication that this core group of Oath Keepers travelled to DC with the intention or anticipation that they might engage in some form of violence or pre-planned action. On 3 January 2021, a message sent by Meggs to another individual stipulated that the “January 6 event will *not* be a ‘rally’”.⁶⁶ The intended meaning of this message is unclear and it is unknown whether Meggs was insinuating that the group intended to engage in some form of pre-planned action. However, it is known that prior to 6 January, Watkins was allegedly involved in facilitating “basic training” camps that prospective participants were required to complete before travelling to DC and that members were required to be “fighting fit by inauguration”.⁶⁷

Furthermore, Thomas Caldwell, another Oath Keepers member facing conspiracy charges for his role in the insurrection, is alleged to have attempted to organise a so-called “quick reaction force”, potentially stationed across the Potomac River, which could ferry “heavy weapons” to Oath Keepers members should such weaponry be required on the day.⁶⁸ The actual extent of this quick reaction force remains unclear with Oath Keepers’ defence lawyers claiming that the force comprised of a single individual. However, a group of men, at least one of whom wore a tactical earpiece and held some form of communication device with an antenna, did appear to be stationed across the Potomac River next to a vehicle with a large toolbox in the back on the day of the insurrection, although there is no formal indication that the group was associated with the Oath Keepers.⁶⁹ It is also possible that Caldwell harboured some desire or intent to engage

63 Katelyn Polantz, “Justice Department says an Oath Keeper leader waited for Trump’s direction before Capitol attack”, *CNN Politics*, 2021

64 The Trump Archive (2021) available <https://www.thetrumparchive.com/?searchbox=%22Big+protest+in+D.C.+on+January+6th.+Be+there%2C+will+be+wild%21%22>

65 United States of America v. Kelly Meggs, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, 2021

66 Ibid.

67 United States of America v. Jessica Marie Watkins, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, 2021

68 United States of America v Thomas Edward Caldwell, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, 2021

69 ARL Now, “EXCLUSIVE: While the Capitol Was Stormed, A Group of Men Gathered Near the Marine Corps War Memorial”, 2021, <https://www.arlnow.com/2021/03/01/exclusive-while-the-capitol-was-stormed-a-group-of-men-gathered-near-the-marine-corps-war-memorial/>

in violence during the insurrection, as he wrote in a message sent to a friend after storming the Capitol Building, “If we’d had guns we would have killed 100 politicians”.⁷⁰

Private messages sent by Kelly Meggs prior to 6 January also allege that there was some kind of loose “alliance” with the Proud Boys prior to 6 January, with the Proud Boys being directed to march towards individuals associated with Antifa, distracting the police and enabling Oath Keepers members to fall back and attack Antifa from behind.⁷¹ However, the extent and depth of the coordination between the two groups remains unknown.

Finally, communications records between the group during the storming of the Capitol show that members were frequently in touch with each other throughout the insurrection. The group allegedly exchanged 19 phone calls over the day, both before entering the Capitol Building and once it was inside.⁷² Importantly, a number of these calls were between members of the core group of Oath Keepers and their leader, Stewart Rhodes. Rhodes did not enter the Capitol Building itself but was stationed outside and appears to have remained in near-constant contact with those storming the Capitol both by phone and using the encrypted messaging app Signal.⁷³ The group were also in contact over Zello, a push-to-talk mobile phone app that operates like a walkie-talkie with no distance restrictions that has been extensively used by various militias for recruitment and organisational purposes.⁷⁴ In a Zello channel named “Stop the Steal J6”, an unknown male described the group’s action during the insurrection as “executing citizen’s arrest ... for acts of treason, election fraud”, while another described the group’s actions after entering the Capitol building as “everything we fucking trained for”.⁷⁵ After exiting the Capitol Building, the core group joined Rhodes outside and shortly afterwards Rhodes sent the following message over Signal:

“We have one FINAL chance to get Trump to do his job and his duty. Patriots entering their own Capitol to send a message to the traitors is NOTHING compared to what’s coming if Trump doesn’t take decisive action right now. It helped to send that message to HIM. He was the most important audience today. I hope he got the message.”

Rhodes’ message after the insurrection suggests that he may have felt that the symbolic power of the insurrection could be enough to force Trump to take action and overturn the results of the election. However, the following morning, some Oath Keepers members apparently felt that their actions had been in vain, with Joshua James stating, “Trump conceded ... it’s over. We lose”.⁷⁶

Following the seemingly sobering realisation that the efforts of the insurrection had not been sufficient to prevent the ratification of Biden’s electoral success, some Oath Keepers appeared to

⁷⁰ United States of America v Thomas Edward Caldwell

⁷¹ Kyle Cheney, “New evidence suggests ‘alliance’ between Oath Keepers, Proud Boys ahead of Jan. 6”, *Politico*, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/03/24/oath-keepers-proud-boys-alliance-capitol-riot-477741>

⁷² Hsu, “Oath Keepers founder”

⁷³ Admin, “Weekly: 15 Mar 21”, *Militia Watch*, 2021, <https://militia.watch/updates/20210315/>

⁷⁴ Admin, “Zello, Operator: Recruitment, right-wing ecosystems, and semi-clandestine organization”, *Militia Watch*, 2020, <https://militia.watch/read/zello-operator/>

⁷⁵ United States of America v. Thomas Caldwell, Donovan Crowl, Jessica Watkins, Sandra Parker, Bennie Parker, Graydon Young, Laura Steele, Kelly Meggs, Connie Meggs, Kenneth Harrelson, Roberto Minuta and Joshua James, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, 2021

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

begin to make plans for an armed rebellion. In messages sent between Oath Keepers Donovan Crowl and Jessica Watkins on 11 January 2021, Crowl reassures Watkins to “keep the faith” and states “we will have our answers by the 20th”, indicating that he was holding out hope that Trump may still somehow retain the presidency. It is possible that Crowl’s certainty that Trump would prevail had been influenced by belief in the QAnon conspiracy theory. In a court filing against him, Crowl is recorded as stating “the Storm has arrived”, a key phrase within the QAnon movement, when bragging about his involvement in the insurrection. The prosecution advises that Crowl’s allusion to QAnon should “gravely concern the Court” and “speaks to his dangerousness”.⁷⁷ However, the extent to which his potential belief in the conspiracy theory influenced his decision to participate in the events of 6 January is currently unknown.

In the same conversation between Crowl and Watkins, the two discuss plans to gather a group of over twenty Oath Keepers to stage an armed resistance from a site in the Kentucky mountains against presumed government forces that they felt might be sent to take control of the state when Joe Biden assumed office.⁷⁸ These plans suggest that a core group of Oath Keepers remained committed to conspiratorial notions that Biden had fraudulently usurped Trump’s rightful place in office and that tyrannical powers were likely to be enforced, such as mass firearm confiscation or the imposition of martial law. These committed members were prepared to make an armed stand against that imposition.

After the insurrection, the Oath Keepers’ involvement in storming the Capitol was well publicised and considerably boosted the group’s profile among a mainstream audience. However, this boost to the group’s public profile seemed to come with negative consequences. On 11 January, LiquidWeb, the service that had previously hosted the Oath Keepers’ website, revoked its protection, causing the site, which had been live for eleven years, to go down.⁷⁹ A statement made by the Oath Keepers at the time argued that LiquidWeb had “caved” to political pressure from the “Loony Left” following the group’s involvement in the insurrection.⁸⁰ The site’s failure was a particular blow to the group as it was one of the major platforms left that enabled it to reach a relatively large public audience, especially after the Oath Keepers were removed from Twitter in 2020.⁸¹ While the site was live again two days later, now hosted by Epik, the Oath Keepers were unable to get the affiliated-members-only forum back online for over a month, meaning that many members were left without communications from the group following the insurrection. Similarly, the group claims that it was dropped by its mailing list provider, meaning it may have been unable to communicate effectively with many of its members.⁸²

⁷⁷ United States of America v Donovan Crowl, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, 2021

⁷⁸ United States of America v Donovan Crowl

⁷⁹ Salvador Hernandez, “A Major Militia Group Said Its Website Was Taken Down Days After It Sent Members To The Capitol Riots”, *Buzzfeed News*, 2021, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/salvadorhernandez/oath-keepers-website-epik-down>

⁸⁰ Andrew Blake, “Oath Keepers militia group blames ‘radical left’ after website goes offline following Capitol riot”, *The Washington Times*, 2021, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/jan/14/oath-keepers-militia-group-blames-radical-left-aft/>

⁸¹ Matt Shuham, “Armed Right-Wing Group Oath Keepers Banned From Twitter For Violating Extremism Policy”, *Talking Points Memo*, 2020, <https://talkingpointsmemo.com/news/armed-right-wing-group-oath-keepers-banned-from-twitter-for-violating-extremism-policy>

⁸² The Oath Keepers, “Home”, 2021

Once the Oath Keepers' website was back online, posts shared on the site have continued to push the narrative that the Biden government is an illegitimate regime that intends to infringe on the freedoms of American citizens. On 19 January, one day before Biden took office, Rhodes published a "Warning Order" on the website:

"What is now being installed is not a constitutional government. It's an illegitimate regime that has unjustly taken power through massive vote fraud, to install a ChiCom⁸³ puppet who will do the bidding of a mortal enemy of this nation, as well as the bidding of international elites who are in allegiance and alliance with the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] as they pursue a common goal of destroying our Republic and enslaving the American people."⁸⁴

The statement goes on to warn of a "high possibility" of an international electricity blackout, which malicious actors would capitalise upon to orchestrate "raids" against their political enemies within the patriot movement. Individual Oath Keepers were advised to "muster ... all Trump supporters, all patriots, all constitutionalists, all libertarians, etc. – all committed to liberty and limited constitutional government", to form county-level and eventually state-level groups prepared to defend their communities against "deep state traitors who have stolen the White House ... along with their street level terrorist allies".⁸⁵ The instructions laid out in the statement appear to reflect the proposed actions discussed between Crowl and Watkins to gather in Kentucky to take defensive action. Rhodes' statement indicates that Biden's inauguration into what is viewed as an illegitimate presidency "stolen" from Trump through fraudulent means, was framed by the Oath Keepers as an indication of an impending New World Order. However, it is not clear how many members of the movement seriously responded to the post.

The group's involvement in the insurrection was also not supported by all factions of the group and was in fact condemned by some members, resulting in some internal fracturing. For example, members of the North Carolina Oath Keepers chapter, led by Doug Smith, stressed that they were "horrified" by the actions taken by fellow Oath Keepers who were part of the core "stack" group and felt that they had "sullied" the group's reputation in the eyes of law enforcement, which is antithetical to the organisation's core values.⁸⁶ While this chapter's disavowal of Oath Keepers involvement in the insurrection does not yet appear to be indicative of other chapters, Smith's decision to break away from the organisation indicates that not all members are content to be associated with violence and view the insurrection as a stain on the militia's historical record.

However, since Biden's inauguration, the Oath Keepers have maintained two main interrelated narratives. The first is that the 6 January insurrection was constitutional although not directly incited by Trump. Numerous blog posts shared on the Oath Keepers' website somewhat forcibly indicate that Trump should be absolved of all blame for encouraging the insurrection and that the second impeachment trial against him was a "clown show" orchestrated

⁸³ Derogatory term used to refer to a Chinese communist.

⁸⁴ Stewart Rhodes, "Red Alert! Oath Keepers Warning Order Part 1"

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Jefferson Weaver, "State organisation breaks ties with Oath Keepers", *Columbus County News*, 2021, <https://columbuscountynews.com/2021/01/state-organization-breaks-ties-with-oath-keepers/>

by the left in a shadowy attempt to frame the Republican party as inherently extremist.⁸⁷ The second main narrative is that, as a result of Biden's presidency, which itself was enabled by conspiratorial forces acting against Trump, there is an ongoing unconstitutional assault on American peoples' rights. For example, another blog post suggests that the Security Clearance Improvement Act of 2021, which was introduced by Democrats in January, is an attempt deliberately to vilify Trump supporters and frame "the average American as a 'domestic terrorist'".⁸⁸ Many of the themes the group employ in pushing these narratives appear similar to those used prior to the insurrection. For example, it has continued to capitalise on the coronavirus pandemic as a vehicle for its anti-government narrative, sharing articles that argue that mandatory vaccine passports could be the "end of human liberty in the West" and an affront to individual American freedoms.⁸⁹

Finally, the group has also pushed the narrative that the Oath Keepers organisation is being unfairly persecuted for its role in the 6 January insurrection. In one post, which alleges that Oath Keepers have been pursued for their roles in the insurrection with a "particular vengeance", the arrests of two members charged with relatively minor roles in the insurrection are portrayed as an unfair and biased act of "political persecution".⁹⁰ Stewart Rhodes has also indicated that he expects to be charged for his role in the insurrection, although he maintains that any accusations against him are entirely illegitimate. He has stated, "I may go to jail soon, not for anything I actually did, but for made-up crimes."⁹¹ He has repeatedly been referred to as "Person One" throughout court proceedings; although he has not been charged with a role in the insurrection, his actions in relation to 6 January and potential involvement in any planning related to the insurrection appear to be being closely scrutinised by prosecutors.⁹² While it remains unknown whether Rhodes may eventually be charged in relation to the insurrection, his arrest would certainly have a significant impact on the Oath Keepers movement, although the group's framing of prior charges being illegitimate attacks against it has laid the necessary groundwork to invalidate similar charges against Rhodes. Such charges would also be viewed by the group as biased, and as confirmation that the Oath Keepers are being politically persecuted by an illegitimate government.

Three Percenters

The Oath Keepers were, by far, the largest and most active militia or paramilitary-style organisation to partake in the insurrection with members claiming at least 40 of them were present at the initial Trump rally.⁹³ However, a short aside is merited to acknowledge

87 KrisAnne Hall, "Trump Had to Do 2 Specific Things to 'Incite' Insurrection – He Did Neither", 2021, <https://oathkeepers.org/2021/01/trump-had-to-do-2-specific-things-to-incite-insurrection-he-did-neither/>; Daniel Bobinski "Was the Capitol Riot a False Flag?", The Oath Keepers, 2021; Matthew Boose, "Republicans Acquit Trump, But Leave His Supporters Defenseless", The Oath Keepers, 2021

88 Jim Hof, "Pure Marxism: Democrats to Target Patriotic Americans as 'Domestic Terrorists'...", The Oath Keepers, 2021

89 Jack Phillips, "Mandatory Vaccine Passport Could Lead to 'End of Human Liberty in the West'", The Oath Keepers, 2021

90 Edward Durfee, "The Political Persecution Of The Oath Keepers", The Oath Keepers, 2021

91 Salvador Hernandez and Jessica Garrison, "Stewart Rhodes, The Founder Of The Oath Keepers, Said He May Soon Be Arrested", *Buzzfeed*, 2021, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/salvadorhernandez/stewart-rhodes-oath-keepers-expects-arrest>

92 Ryan Lucas, "Prosecutors Allege 'Substantial Evidence' Of Oath Keepers Conspiracy To Storm Capitol", *NPR*, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/25/981210089/prosecutors-allege-substantial-evidence-of-oath-keeper-conspiracy-to-storm-capitol>

93 Sharyn Alfonsi "Oath Keepers: How a Militia Group mobilized in Plain Sight for the Assault on the Capitol" *60 Minutes* (2021) available <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-capitol-riots-oath-keepers-militia-2021-04-18/>

the role of Three Percenters on 6 January. As outlined earlier in this report, Three Percenters are not a singular militia group, rather a loose association of individuals that subscribe to and are inspired by the false belief that only three percent of Americans fought in the Revolutionary War against the British.⁹⁴

A number of symbols affiliated with the Three Percenter movement were spotted on the clothing worn by protesters and insurrectionists during 6 January or on patches sown to their uniforms.⁹⁵ The concept is an important organising force among the militia movement and it may have influenced some individuals' participation in the insurrection, prompting them to view their actions as parallel to those taken by their American forefathers.

Given the popularity of the Three Percenter motif within the militia movement, it is not unsurprising that the symbol featured prominently during the insurrection and that various individuals may have been motivated by the concept, which has been a driving force of the militia movement's popularity since the second wave. It is likely that the concept will continue to be a dominant influence within the broader militia movement.

At least two Three Percenters are currently facing charges in association with the riots. Gus Wesley Reffitt of Texas was arrested on 18 January following his role in the insurrection, accused of trespassing on restricted areas of the Capitol grounds and obstruction of justice. According to Reffitt's wife, he is a part of the Three Percenter movement and also belongs to the "This is Texas Freedom Force", a group that the FBI has referred to as a "militia extremist group" but which has attempted to brand itself as a "nonprofit".⁹⁶ Reffitt is believed to have purchased two firearms on his drive from Texas to Washington, DC, although they were reportedly disassembled after purchase to comply with Washington law. It is unclear why Reffitt purchased the firearms at this time and whether he felt that they might be required during the rally. However, upon returning to Texas, he allegedly threatened his teenage children with the firearms, claiming he would take action against them should they report his involvement with the insurrection to law enforcement.⁹⁷

Additionally, Robert Gieswein from Colorado, another Three Percenter and alleged member of the private paramilitary group the "Woodland Wild Dogs", also faces charges after the insurrection.⁹⁸ Gieswein is accused of spraying a Capitol police officer with pepper spray, of assaulting them with a baseball bat and of entering a government building without permission.⁹⁹

94 Anti-Defamation League, "Three Percenters", <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/three-percenters>
95 Washington Post Staff, "Identifying far-right symbols that appeared at the US Capitol riot", *The Washington Post*, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/interactive/2021/far-right-symbols-capitol-riot/>
96 Jaclyn Diaz and Rachel Treisman, "Members of Right-Wing Militias, Extremist Groups Are Latest Charged in Capitol Siege", *NPR*, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/sections/insurrection-at-the-capitol/2021/01/19/958240531/members-of-right-wing-militias-extremist-groups-are-latest-charged-in-capitol-si>
97 United States of America v. Guy Wesley Reffitt, "Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint and Arrest Warrant", United States Court for the District of Columbia, 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/page/file/1356111/download>
98 Diaz and Treisman, "Members of Right-Wing Militias"
99 Allison Sherry, "Robert Gieswein of Woodland Park And Patrick Montgomery Of Littleton Charged In US Capitol Breach", *CPR News*, 2021, <https://www.cpr.org/2021/01/19/robert-gieswein-the-woodland-park-man-arrested-in-us-capitol-breach-was-a-lone-wolf-sheriff-says/>

The Boogaloo Bois

Another prominent faction of the militia movement to play a role in the insurrection was the Boogaloo movement. The movement is inherently difficult to define neatly, partly owing to its origins on the nebulous and anonymous 4chan, which itself is difficult to confine to promoting one specific ideology. The Boogaloo movement is perhaps best understood as a loose online network of radical firearms activists that unites individuals from various nodes of the political spectrum. It has considerable links with the far right, with elements of Boogaloo ideology being amplified by explicit Neo-Nazi and extreme right groups.¹⁰⁰ Yet it is by no means a uniformly white supremacist movement, and others have espoused leftist beliefs and have attempted to advocate for the BLM movement.¹⁰¹

In the absence of one overarching ideological narrative, members of the Boogaloo are instead bound by an informal allegiance of shared in-jokes and memes, such as donning the informal and ironic uniform of the movement – the Hawaiian shirt.¹⁰² Indeed, the movement's name is itself derived from the internet practice of referring to an impending civil war as an "Electric Boogaloo", in reference to the 1984 film sequel *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo*. Robert Evans and Jason Wilson suggest that the term was first used in this way in 2012 on 4chan's /k/ board, which is reserved for the discussion of firearms and weaponry.¹⁰³

Matthew Kriner and Jon Lewis provide a slightly more nuanced definition of the movement, suggesting it is best visualised as "a decentralized, anti-authority movement composed of a diverse range of actors mobilised in part by adherents' belief that they are following in the footsteps of the United States' founders and participating in a revolution against tyranny."¹⁰⁴ They stress that, in accordance with its nomenclature, significant factions of the Boogaloo movement subscribe to accelerationist ideals and wish to "usher in or respond to societal collapse, specifically through threats and targeted violence against law enforcement".¹⁰⁵

The movement experienced explosive growth throughout 2020 after gaining considerable traction on mainstream social media platforms, in particular on Facebook.¹⁰⁶ Part of what enabled this popularisation was the Boogaloo's ability to capitalise on narratives surrounding the coronavirus pandemic and their presence within the Reopen movement. Factions of the Boogaloo movement have suggested that the pandemic was instituted by the government.¹⁰⁷

Boogaloo Bois, as adherents of the movement are known, have also demonstrated a propensity for violence. One alleged follower, Steven Carrillo of Santa Cruz, California, killed one police deputy and injured

100 Alex Newhouse and Nate Gunesch "The Boogaloo Movement Wants to be Seen as Anti-Racist, But it has a White Supremacist Fringe" *Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey* (2020) available <https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/academics/centers-initiatives/ctec/ctec-publications/boogaloo-movement-wants-be-seen-anti-racist-it>

101 Robert Evans and Jason Wilson, "The Boogaloo Movement Is Not What You Think", *Bellingcat*, 2020, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/05/27/the-boogaloo-movement-is-not-what-you-think/>

102 Ibid.; Jacob Gallagher, "Why the Extremist 'Boogaloo Boys' Wear Hawaiian Shirts", *The Wall Street Journal*, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-the-extremist-boogaloo-boys-wear-hawaiian-shirts-11591635085>

103 Robert Evans and Jason Wilson, "The Boogaloo Movement"

104 Matthew Kriner and Jon Lewis, "The Evolution of the Boogaloo Movement", *CTC Sentinel* vol.14 no.2, 2021: pp.22–32

105 Ibid., p.23

106 Marc-André Argentino, "Digital Platforms and Extremism 2: Electric Boogaloo", *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, 2020, <https://gnet-research.org/2020/06/08/digital-platforms-and-extremism-2-electric-boogaloo/>; Lois Beckett, "How Facebook and the White House let the 'boogaloo' movement grow", *The Guardian*, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/01/what-is-boogaloo-movement-rightwing-anti-government>

107 "COVID Disinformation Briefing No.2", *Institution for Strategic Dialogue*, 2020, <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-Briefing-PDF.pdf>

another during an ambush he initiated as officers attempted to arrest him for a drive-by shooting he had previously taken part in with Robert Justus Jr.¹⁰⁸ Three other Nevada-based Boogaloo Bois are currently facing terrorism charges after they hatched a plot to attack law enforcement at Black Lives Matter protests and target infrastructure in Las Vegas.¹⁰⁹ Several followers of the Boogaloo movement were also involved in the October 2020 conspiracy to kidnap Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer.¹¹⁰

Unlike the Oath Keepers, it is unlikely that members of the Boogaloo movement were one of the more dominant forces present at the 6 January insurrection; however, some members were involved in the riots. Members of the Last Sons of Liberty, a militia force associated with the Boogaloo movement, posted video footage to Parler during and after the insurrection, which showed members “charging past” metal barricades surrounding the Capitol Building and getting into physical altercations with police stationed on the steps outside the Capitol.¹¹¹

However, Boogaloo Bois were potentially more active in the wake of the insurrection rather than on the day itself. Many followers interpreted the events of 6 January as an opportunity to further their accelerationist objectives and overthrow the government. Following the riots, various factions of the far right, in particular those affiliated with the Boogaloo movement, were involved in planning and attempting to participate in armed protests across all fifty states of America on 17 January. Before the protests, the FBI issued a warning to state and local law enforcement that potential violence might break out at the protests as a result of the Boogaloo Bois’ involvement.¹¹² Overall, the protests should be considered unsuccessful: in many states, protests did not occur; in those where protests did go ahead, they often only attracted a handful of members. However, it should be noted that among those who did attend protests, many considered themselves Boogaloo Bois.¹¹³

For the Boogaloo Bois, who do not uniformly support Donald Trump, there is some potential that the symbolic power of the 6 January insurrection may encourage further violence. Because insurrectionism is such a fundamental aspect of the Boogaloo movement, the events of January 6th and the precedent they set that everyday Americans could be capable of taking on the government, may be a major mobilising force for adherents. The Southern Poverty Law Center has warned that after being able to “establish firm footholds via social media” and “organise and show up for protests”, it is highly likely that the Boogaloo movement will continue to be active throughout 2021 and to “appeal to wider audiences”.¹¹⁴

108 Nick Martin, “The Boogaloo cases”, *Informant*, 2020, <https://www.informant.news/p/the-boogaloo-cases>

109 Ibid.

110 Ben Collins, Brandy Zadrozny, Tom Winter and Corky Siemaszko, “Whitmer conspiracy allegations tied to ‘boogaloo’ movement”, *NBC News*, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/whitmer-conspiracy-allegations-tied-boogaloo-movement-n1242670>

111 A C Thompson, ProPublica, Lila Hassan, Karim Hajj, FRONTLINE, “The Boogaloo Bois Have Guns, Criminal Records and Military Training. Now They Want to Overthrow the Government”, *ProPublica*, 2021, <https://www.propublica.org/article/boogaloo-bois-military-training>

112 Caitlin Dickson, “FBI Warns of Potential Boogaloo Violence During 17 Rallies”, *Huff Post*, 2021, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fbi-warns-boogaloo-violence_n_5ffc8832c5b63642b6fdf46a

113 Lois Beckett “Biden inauguration: 25,000 national guard vetted over insider attack fears as state protests fizzle”, *The Guardian*, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/17/us-capitol-statehouses-boogaloo-bois>

114 Hatewatch Staff, “Who Are Boogaloos, Who Were Visible at the Capitol and Later Rallies?”, Southern Poverty Law Center, 2021, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2021/01/27/who-are-boogaloos-who-were-visible-capitol-and-later-rallies>

Towards a Fourth Wave of United States' Militia Movements

The militia movement has undergone a number of considerable changes since its initial formation and rise in the 1990s. The movement experienced a resurgence during Barack Obama's presidency that was sustained and energised by Donald Trump during his campaign and subsequent presidency where he was adopted as the militia-backed candidate. Trump's 2020 electoral loss should be interpreted as a significant blow for the militia movement, as his presidency had led to the movement somewhat reframing who they regarded as their primary opposition, with an increased focus on the political left.

It remains unknown what the long-term effects of Trump losing the 2020 election will be. However, the presence of militias, particularly the Oath Keepers, during the 6 January insurrection, and their continued support for Trump, indicates that he is likely to remain an important mobilising figure within the movement. At least some members of the Oath Keepers appeared to take part in the insurrection as they felt they were directly answering Trump's call to action. The demographics of the main "stack" group which stormed the Capitol Building – largely older and with a significant female presence – are also potentially indicative of the wider MAGA movement, which feels a particular loyalty towards Trump.

The Oath Keepers' activity throughout the first 100 days of Biden's presidency may be something of a litmus test for the future of the wider militia movement. The group has interpreted Joe Biden's presence in the White House as both illegitimate and a sign of an impending New World Order, consistent with the militia movement's conspiratorial beliefs. The movement intensely fears that individual freedoms, particularly those concerning firearms ownership, will be severely restricted under Biden's presidency, and an order issued by the group for members to muster prior to Biden's inauguration shows that at least some factions of the group may be prepared to organise against the administration.

These fears have long been touchstones of the militia movement. However, they are likely to have been intensified by the stark contrast between the wide support that former president Donald Trump received from the militia movement and the distrust and various anxieties the movement has projected on to Biden's presidency, which is perceived to be both seriously threatening and entirely illegitimate. Not all chapters of the Oath Keepers have endorsed the group's presence on 6 January, with at least one chapter dissociating itself with the movement in its wake. This suggests that potentially the organisation may be becoming – or at least perceived to be becoming – more violent or extreme.

The influence of the Boogaloo movement within the wider militia milieu may also represent a faction that is particularly receptive to opportunities to conduct violent actions under the umbrella philosophy of accelerationism. In short, the exact trajectory of the militia movement going forward is yet to be seen. However, various members' involvement in the insurrection and the movement's trajectory during the first 100 days of Biden's presidency suggest that it is far from gone. The subtle shifts associated with an emerging fourth wave, now that Trump has left office, may just be visible.

The Proud Boys

Founded in 2016 by Canadian national Gavin McInnes, the Proud Boys can be classified as a far-right group.¹¹⁵ The group's largest presence is in the United States, where it has chapters in most states, but it also has an international reach, with several factions in other countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Norway and Australia.¹¹⁶ The public face of the Proud Boys aligns most closely with the "radical right", the subsection of the far right that, unlike the extreme right, "accepts the essence of democracy, although opposes fundamental elements of *liberal* democracy".¹¹⁷ They have been branded a "general hate" group by the Southern Poverty Law Center and the movement in the United States has been labelled an "extremist group with ties to white nationalism" by the FBI.¹¹⁸

The group markets itself as staunchly opposed to what it deems "political correctness" and "racial guilt", calling for closed borders, minimal government and maximum protection of free speech and the right to bear arms.¹¹⁹ The organisation describes itself as a collection of (exclusively male) "Western chauvinists who refuse to apologise for creating the modern world", although the Anti-Defamation League has described the movement as "a dominant force within the alt-lite", with ideological influences from the alt-right surrounding misogyny, Islamophobia, transphobia and anti-immigration – accusations the Proud Boys stringently deny.¹²⁰ It functions somewhat like a fraternity and is motivated by a palingenetic desire to return to an imagined and idealised simpler time of rigid gender roles, male chauvinism and Western nationalism. Members view modern society as a corrupting force that cripples "Western culture" and impinges on individual freedoms.¹²¹

The Proud Boys have consistently attempted to align themselves with the political mainstream and market the group as the voice of the "silent majority" of the political right wing. They consciously attempt to create an image that they are accepting of individual differences, claiming to accept members from "all races, all religions, gay or straight", with the only requirement that members be male "Western chauvinists". In particular they have attempted to distance themselves from accusations of racism and have been publicly accepting of non-white members and leaders within their group, as long as these members recognise that "white men are not the problem" of modern society.¹²² Furthermore, Julia DeCook stresses that the group has repeatedly attempted to distance itself from accusations that it is part of the alt-right and that it avoids sharing explicitly racist posts on its social media channels.¹²³ However, despite these efforts, DeCook notes that the group does reproduce dynamics of racism

115 Anti-Defamation League, "Proud Boys", <https://www.adl.org/proudboys>

116 Cas Mudde, "Introduction", *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press), (2019): pp.1–9, p.7

117 Southern Poverty Law Center, "Proud Boys", <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/proud-boys>; Jason Wilson, "FBI now classified far-right Proud Boys as 'extremist group', documents say", *The Guardian*, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/19/proud-boys-fbi-classification-extremist-group-white-nationalism-report>

118 Southern Poverty Law Center, "Proud Boys"; Jason Wilson, "FBI now classified"

119 Proud Boys, "Tenets"

120 Proud Boys "About Us" *Proud Boys USA*; Anti-Defamation League "Proud Boys"

121 Proud Boys, "About Us"

122 Will Sommer, "The fratty Proud Boys are the alt right's weirdest new phenomenon", *Medium*, 2017, <https://medium.com/@willsommer/the-fratty-proud-boys-are-the-alt-rights-weirdest-new-phenomenon-7572b31e50f2>

123 Julia DeCook, "Memes and symbolic violence: #proudboys and the use of memes for propaganda and the construction of collective identity", *Learning, Media and Technology* vol.43 no.4, 2018: pp.485–504, pp.499–500

and oppression such as in social media posts where it has somewhat equated Black Lives Matter and Antifa with Nazis by labelling them all as hate groups.¹²⁴

Indeed, the group often attempts to have it both ways. One prominent example of this relates to the Proud Boys' participation in the 2017 Unite the Right rally. The event united individuals and groups from across the far-right spectrum under a shared banner of racism and antisemitism, in a rally that eventually culminated in the murder of counter-protester Heather Heyer in a vehicle-ramming attack initiated by a self-identified white supremacist.¹²⁵ After the rally attracted international condemnation, Gavin McInnes issued a statement attempting to distance the group from the rally and reiterating its supposed opposition to the alt-right, white supremacism and antisemitism more broadly. However, the statement is limited in its effectiveness by the facts that the Proud Boys were a major presence at the rally, and that the rally was co-organised by Jason Kessler, who, at the time, was a newly sworn member of the Proud Boys.¹²⁶ Furthermore, although at a group level the Proud Boys claim to be fundamentally non-racist, a number of individual members have repeatedly espoused racist rhetoric and their time with the Proud Boys served as a waypoint on their radicalisation journeys into neo-Nazi extremism.¹²⁷

Also crucial to the Proud Boys' continued attempts to ingratiate themselves with the political mainstream is their long-term campaign to brand themselves as a non-violent movement. The group frequently attends anti-fascist rallies and street protests as opposition forces or as "security" during pro-Trump events, and maintain that they do so in a fully non-violent manner. However, their presence at various rallies has often led to skirmishes with other protesters or has contributed to violence. Indeed, during weeks of unrest in Portland, Oregon, throughout 2020, the Proud Boys entered into violent clashes with Black Lives Matter protesters.¹²⁸ At an organisational level, stipulations of non-violence also appear hollow, as while the Proud Boys profess that they never initiate violent incidents, the initiation ritual to be accepted as a fourth degree Proud Boy, the highest level of official membership within the group, is physically to assault an individual affiliated with Antifa.¹²⁹

The Proud Boys' Rise Throughout 2020

The year 2020 was a pivotal time for the Proud Boys. In order to understand the current position of the group fully, it is necessary first to understand the upward trajectory of the movement over the past year.

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- 124 BBC News, "Charlottesville: Who was victim Heather Heyer", *BBC News*, 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-40924922>; Gavin McInnes, "WE ARE NOT ALT-RIGHT", Proud Boys, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20200408090430/https://officialproudboys.com/proud-boys/we-are-not-alt-right/>; DeCook, "Memes and symbolic violence", pp.499–500
- 125 BBC News, "Charlottesville: Who was victim Heather Heyer"
- 126 Tom Porter, "Who are the Alt-Right Leaders Addressing the White Nationalist Rally in Charlottesville", *Newsweek*, 2017, <https://www.newsweek.com/alt-right-leaders-are-addressing-largest-white-nationalist-rally-decades-650096>
- 127 Ben Makuch and Mack Lamoureux, "For Some, Joining the Proud Boys Was a Stop on the way to Neo-Nazi Terror", *Vice*, 2020, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjpb5q/for-some-joining-the-proud-boys-was-a-stop-on-the-way-to-neo-nazi-terror>
- 128 Adam Schrader, "Violent Clash: Huge brawl breaks out in Portland as Proud Boys and Antifa right with baseball bats and pepper spray", *The Sun*, 2020, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/12475868/portland-brawl-breaks-out-proud-boys-antifa-fight/>
- 129 David Gilmour, "Meet the Proud Boys, the pro-men, anti-masturbation enemy of 'antifa'", *Daily Dot*, 2021, available <https://www.dailydot.com/layer8/proud-boys/>

The group's social media presence had seriously suffered since August 2018 when it was permanently suspended from Twitter, with Facebook and Instagram also banning the group in November of that year, after it violated the platform's community standards surrounding "hate".¹³⁰ This was a significant setback for the group as they had amassed a sizeable audience on these larger social media platforms, with one of their Facebook groups having over 20,000 members before it was shut down.¹³¹ Being blacklisted from these larger services seriously limited the group's ability to become a meaningful voice within mainstream political debate.

Following these removals, the Proud Boys were unable to gain anything like the following they had established on mainstream social media platforms and were relegated to more niche platforms like Parler, and those often associated with being more openly far right, such as Gab and Minds, where they attracted a small audience of between 1,000 and 2,000 followers. In early 2020, the group's largest following was on Telegram, where it had attracted just under 5,000 followers, a far cry from the reach they had previously established on Facebook.¹³²

However, the group's social media standing changed significantly in May 2020 with the huge rise in popularity of Parler. Tweets made by then President Donald Trump that falsely claimed that the US election had been "rigged" were marked with a disinformation warning by Twitter, providing users with an option to "get the facts about mail-in ballots".¹³³ Trump responded to the action by claiming that Twitter was stifling free speech, a false claim that was repeated by a number of high-ranking Republicans close to the president.¹³⁴ Following the fall-out, a number of these Republican officials began promoting Parler as an alternative social media platform. Since its inception in 2018, the platform had previously attracted only a small and largely inactive audience that prominently featured right-wing figures who had been banned from more mainstream social media.¹³⁵ This endorsement is likely to have permanently changed both the shape and intensity of the MAGA movement and boosted the Proud Boys' profile among the movement's ranks.¹³⁶ Prior to Parler being promoted by high-ranking Republicans, the group had profiles for over twenty chapters on the site, yet had failed to attract a large number of followers. However, around one month after Trump's tweet was fact-checked they had amassed 24,000 followers, making it the platform where they now had by far their largest official audience.¹³⁷

130 Ryan Mac and Blake Montgomery, "Twitter Suspended Proud Boys' and Founder Gavin McInnes' Accounts Ahead of the 'Unite the Right' Rally", *Buzzfeed News*, 2018, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ryanmac/twitter-suspends-proud-boys-and-founder-gavin-mcinnnes>

131 Kristen Hugo "Facebook and Instagram ban Proud Boys groups for 'organised hate'" *Independent* (2018) available <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/proud-boys-facebook-instagram-antifa-hate-speech-far-right-charlottesville-a8610631.html>

132 Blyth Crawford, "The Proud Boys", *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation*, 2020, <https://icsr.info/2020/10/01/the-proud-boys/>

133 Katie Paul and Elizabeth Culliford, "Twitter fact-checks Trump tweet for the first time", *Reuters*, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-twitter-trump-idUSKBN232389>

134 Alix Culbertson, "Donald Trump: President accuses Twitter of 'stifling free speech' for flagging his 2020 election tweets", *Sky News*, 2020, <https://news.sky.com/story/donald-trump-president-accuses-twitter-of-stifling-free-speech-for-flagging-his-2020-election-tweets-11995353>

135 Blyth Crawford, "From Patriots to Proud Boys: Who is – and isn't – Using Parler", *Global Network on Extremism and Technology*, 2020, <https://gnet-research.org/2020/07/20/from-patriots-to-proud-boys-who-is-and-isnt-using-parler/>

136 Paige Leskin, "Top Trump officials are encouraging followers to migrate to Parler, an alternative social network beloved by far-right agitators kicked off Facebook and Twitter", *Insider*, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/parler-popular-trump-campaign-republicans-twitter-censorship-2020-6?r=US&IR=T>

137 Blyth Crawford, "From Patriots to Proud Boys"

The group's success on Parler cannot be overstated and its importance in influencing the group's rise in notoriety during Trump's presidency should not be underestimated. Throughout 2020, they were able to build a following on Parler that reached approximately 200,000 followers. This was by far its largest social media following on any platform and even dwarfed the success it had previously achieved on mainstream sites.¹³⁸ Parler also allowed the group access to exactly their target audience, as it effectively congregated disaffected, hardliner pro-MAGA Republicans and elevated the Proud Boys as an official "verified influencer" account.¹³⁹ In many ways Parler offered them a crucial chance to push the Overton Window¹⁴⁰ of publicly accepted discourse and to bridge the gap between extremism and mainstream political discourse.

The Proud Boys capitalised on their ability to appeal to this ready-made audience by feeding into narratives already popular with Parler users. Throughout 2020 the group had been active within the Reopen movement, which advocated for the lifting of coronavirus lockdown restrictions.¹⁴¹ As the year progressed the group was also vocal in its opposition against the BLM movement, condemning protests as excuses for violence, rioting and looting, and complaining against perceived political leniency towards BLM.¹⁴² Both these narratives were highly popular among Parler users, and the Proud Boys repeatedly shared content and memes related to these narratives that typically fostered a high level of engagement on the site. Often the Proud Boys were more active in posting content to their Parler profile than they were on other social media platforms. QAnon was also a prominent narrative on Parler, and multiple posts made by the Proud Boys also appeared to echo narratives popular within the QAnon community, apparently with the intent of appealing to these users as well.

Importantly, the Proud Boys strategically exploited this success on Parler by actively and repeatedly directing users to their associated Telegram channels, where they posted more extreme content than they shared with their larger Parler audience. For many Parler users, who predominantly belonged to older generations, joining the Proud Boys' Telegram channel was likely to have been their first interaction with the app, which is predominantly used by a younger audience.¹⁴³ Indeed, after just months on Parler, the Proud Boys were also able to grow their audience on their main Telegram channel from just under 2,000 to around 30,000 users.

Of course, the most visible and likely important promotion of the Proud Boys came during the first presidential debate of the 2020 United States' election. During the debate, Trump was asked repeatedly to condemn white supremacists and right-wing militias, a request that he dodged. Instead, having been called on by his opponent Joe Biden

138 Kristin Hugo, "Facebook and Instagram"

139 Ari Levy, "Trump fans are flocking to the social media app Parler – its CEO is begging liberals to join them", *CNBC*, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/27/parler-ceo-wants-liberal-to-join-the-pro-trump-crowd-on-the-app.html>

140 The Overton window is the range of policies politically acceptable to the mainstream population at a given time.
141 Shayan Sardarizadeh and Mike Wendling, "George Floyd protests: Who are Boogaloo Bois, antifa and Proud Boys", *BBC News*, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-53018201>

142 Sardarizadeh and Wendling "George Floyd protests"

143 Embee, "Has Parler Had Its 15 Minutes of Fame or is There More to Come?" 2020, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.mediapost.com/uploads/HasParlerHadIts15Minutes.pdf>; Jamie Grierson, "Neo-Nazi groups use Instagram to recruit young people, warns Hope Not Hate" *The Guardian*, 22 March 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/22/neo-nazi-groups-use-instagram-to-recruit-young-people-warns-hope-not-hate>

and moderator Chris Wallace, Trump addressed the Proud Boys specifically, stating:

*“Proud Boys, stand back and stand by. But I’ll tell you what, somebody’s got to do something about Antifa and the Left because this [referring to violence in Portland during 2020] is not a right-wing problem, this is a left-wing problem.”*¹⁴⁴

The mention of the Proud Boys by name during the debate was effectively free publicity for the group and immediately led to an influx of interest and support. After the debate, the group gained 3,000 followers on Parler overnight.¹⁴⁵ In particular, Trump’s remark that the group should “stand back and stand by” was read as direct endorsement of the Proud Boys from the US president and was imminently printed on T-shirts sold on the group’s official online shop. The group also jokingly referred to Trump as their new “leader” on their Parler page, again suggesting that his remarks had been taken as encouragement.¹⁴⁶

There were some setbacks for the group in 2020, however. Notably, for instance, the group’s official website was dropped by its host in October 2020 and has remained offline ever since.¹⁴⁷ Nonetheless, this was most likely viewed only as a slight setback by the group as its presence on Parler had long since usurped its website as its primary means of communication with its followers. Thus, throughout 2020 the Proud Boys experienced considerable success and largely flourished on social media under the Trump presidency.

Trump’s Defeat and Involvement in 6 January Insurrection

Trump’s electoral defeat was therefore both a shock and a crushing blow to the Proud Boys; with hindsight, it was potentially the tip of the iceberg of what would be their decline throughout 2021. Following the election, the Proud Boys maintained that mass voter fraud had occurred, as is highlighted in Figure 2 which shows a meme shared to the Proud Boys’ main Telegram insinuating Democrat voters voted multiple times. The group therefore repeatedly suggested that Biden’s electoral victory was illegitimate. Members expressed continued and intense frustration at the announcement of Biden’s win, and backed Donald Trump’s bid to attempt to overturn the results of the election. On an episode of WarBoys, a livestreamed Proud Boys show, which aired after the election, prominent Proud Boys member Joshua Biggs described government officials as “evil scum” who “deserved to die a traitor’s death”, to which Ethan Nordean, another prominent Proud Boy, replied, “Yup, Day of the Rope”.¹⁴⁸ The phrase “Day of the Rope” is a reference to the novel *The Turner Diaries* written by William Luther Pierce, which is one of the most prolific and influential texts among far-right extremist and white supremacist communities.¹⁴⁹ The concept

144 Sky News, “Watch in Full: Trump versus Biden in the first US Presidential election debate”, YouTube, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8Z9Kqhrh5c&t=3939s>

145 Sinéad Baker, “Parler, the social media network of choice for the Proud Boys, says its activity tripled during the debate where Trump mentioned the group”, 2020 <https://www.businessinsider.com/parler-social-media-app-proud-boys-use-spike-trump-debate-2020-10?r=US&IR=T>

146 Blyth Crawford, “The Proud Boys”

147 J Clara Chan, “Proud Boys Website, Online Store Dropped by Web Host”, *The Wrap*, 2020, <https://www.thewrap.com/proud-boys-website-online-store-dropped-by-web-host/>

148 Tom Dreisbach, “Conspiracy Charges Bring Proud Boys’ History Of Violence Into Spotlight”, *NPR*, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/04/09/985104612/conspiracy-charges-bring-proud-boys-history-of-violence-into-spotlight>

149 J M Berger, “The Turner Legacy: The Storied Origins and Enduring Impact of White Nationalism’s Deadly Bible”, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2016, <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2016/09/ICCT-Berger-The-Turner-Legacy-September2016-2.pdf>



Figure 2. A post shared to the Proud Boys' main Telegram channel insinuating the results of the 2020 election were illegitimate.

refers to an incident in the book where white supremacist rebels carry out mass lynchings of those they perceive to have betrayed the integrity of the white race.¹⁵⁰

While the group did not directly encourage followers on its main Telegram channel to attend the 6 January rally in DC, on 29 December, Chairman Enrique Tarrío announced on his Parler profile that the group would “turn out in record numbers”.¹⁵¹ He added that the Proud Boys would be in attendance with the “twist” that members were to wear all black clothing so as to be “incognito” in a possible bid to blend in with any members of Antifa they believed might be in attendance, who typically wear all black. Tarrío also wrote that the group would break into smaller teams upon arrival at the rally and spread out across downtown DC.¹⁵² Other Proud Boys were also active in drumming up attendance prior to 6 January.

Ultimately, the Proud Boys were a major force during the insurrection and at least 19 members or associates of the group face federal court charges relating to the riot.¹⁵³ Multiple members of the organisation are

150 Anti-Defamation League, “Day of the Rope”, <https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/day-of-the-rope>

151 Dell Cameron, “Encrypted Chats, Parler Posts Indict Proud Boys Leaders for Capitol Rioting”, *Gizmodo*, 2021, <https://gizmodo.com/encrypted-chats-parler-posts-indict-proud-boys-leaders-1846517487>

152 Joshua Zitser, “Far-right group Proud Boys claim they will attend January 6 DC rally ‘incognito’ and wear all-black to blend in with antifa protesters”, *Business Insider*, 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/proud-boys-attend-january-6-dc-rally-incognito-all-black-2021-1?r=US&IR=T>

153 Lois Beckett, “Capitol attack: more than 60 Proud Boys used encrypted channel to plan, indictment says”, *The Guardian*, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/20/four-proud-boys-leaders-indicted-capitol-riot-donald-trump>

charged with entering the Capitol Building as part of the insurrection and with destruction of property once inside.¹⁵⁴ A core group of four leaders – Nordean, Biggs, Zachary Rehl, leader of a Proud Boys chapter in Pennsylvania, and Charles Donohoe, leader of a chapter in North Carolina – face conspiracy charges.¹⁵⁵ This group is accused of playing a role in instigating the mob of protesters who stormed the Capitol and leading groups of other Proud Boys inside the building.

However, like the case against the Oath Keepers, the crux of the conspiracy charges rest on the implication that the Proud Boys' actions in storming the Capitol were coordinated and pre-planned, a claim that at the time of writing remains contested. Prosecutors allege that over 60 individuals who were members or affiliated with the Proud Boys participated in encrypted Telegram channels used to plan and coordinate the insurrection prior to 6 January, including one channel named "Boots on the Ground". They argue that on 5 January, Biggs posted to the group to say that the group had a "plan" for the following day.¹⁵⁶ Nordean is also accused of being one of the foremost planners behind the Proud Boys' presence at the Capitol and it is alleged that he was internally elected to assume "ultimate leadership" of the Proud Boys' activities during 6 January.¹⁵⁷ Posts made by Nordean to Parler in late December show that he was attempting to raise money for the Proud Boys to purchase protective gear and communications equipment.¹⁵⁸ Both Biggs and Nordean have pleaded not guilty to charges of conspiracy.¹⁵⁹

A final notable detail concerning the Proud Boys' actions during the insurrection is that, unusually, a woman appears to have been among their ranks. Felicia Konold is accused of being part of the group led by Nordean into Capitol Building to obstruct metal barriers once inside, and claims to have been recruited by the Kansas City chapter of the Proud Boys before 6 January.¹⁶⁰

In a Snapchat video posted by Konold, she can be seen displaying a Kansas City Proud Boys' "challenge coin", (Figure 3) which are used to denote membership of the group.¹⁶¹ Importantly, this particular kind of coin does not appear available to purchase online, suggesting it may have been given to her directly by a member of the group.

Konold's alleged membership of the Proud Boys is extremely unusual. Since their inception, the Proud Boys have been entirely opposed to including women in their group,¹⁶² stating on their website "Our group is and will always be MEN ONLY (born with a penis if that wasn't clear enough for you leftists)!"¹⁶³ In theory, women supportive of the Proud Boys' cause are welcome to join the affiliated group Proud Boys' Girls;

154 Cameron, "Encrypted Chats"

155 Beckett, "Capitol attack"

156 Ibid.

157 Rachel Treisman, "Prosecutors: Proud Boys Gave Leader 'War Powers,' Planned Ahead For Capitol Riot", *NPR*, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/02/972895521/prosecutors-proud-boys-gave-leader-war-powers-planned-ahead-for-capitol-riot>

158 United States v. Nordean, District Court, District of Columbia, Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint, Sealed Complaint as to Ethan Nordean, 2021, <https://www.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.dcd.227014/gov.uscourts.dcd.227014.1.1.pdf>

159 Lewis Kamb, "Proud Boys leader from Auburn area pleads not guilty to Capitol riot charges", *The Seattle Times*, 2021, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/crime/proud-boys-leader-from-auburn-area-pleads-not-guilty-to-capitol-riot-charges/>

160 United States of America v Christopher Kuehne, Louise Enrique Colon, Felicia Konold, Cory Konold, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/case-multi-defendant/file/1366446/download>

161 United States of America v Christopher Kuehne, Louise Enrique Colon, Felicia Konold, Cory Konold

162 Proud Boys, "About Us"

163 Brandy Zadrozny and Croky Siemaszko, "The Boys and Girls of white nationalism: 'Proud' groups labelled 'extremist' in newly revealed FBI files", *NBC News*, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/boy-girls-white-nationalism-proud-groups-labeled-extremist-newly-revealed-n938546>



Figure 3. *The Proud Boys challenge coin allegedly obtained by Felicia Konold.*

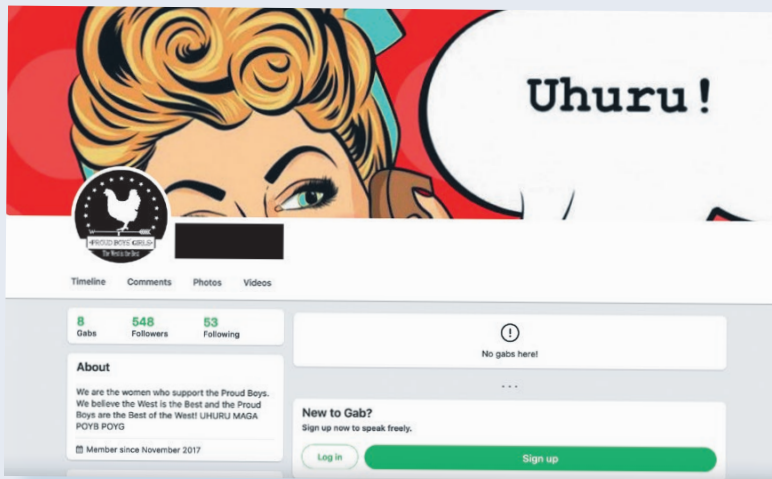


Figure 4. *The Proud Boys' Girls Gab Account showing that all previous posts have been wiped from the page.*

however, it is not clear if the group still exists. While for some time the Proud Boys' Girls maintained a website and modest social media presence, the site has since been deleted and all posts on the group's Gab account have been wiped (Figure 4),¹⁶⁴

Thus, if Konold really was invited officially to join the Proud Boys, her membership could potentially mark a new trajectory for the group in allowing women to join its ranks. This decision could be an attempt to attract more members to the group, yet the call to allow women to assume a more active role in the group appears contrary to the Proud Boys' rigid construction of gender roles and one of their central tenets, which is to "venerate the housewife".¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Zadrozny and Siemaszko, "The Boys and Girls of white nationalism"

¹⁶⁵ Proud Boys, "Tenets"; As a caveat to this analysis, it is also worth noting that Konold's brother, Corey Konold, is also charged with being part of the Nordean-led group, meaning it is possible that he may have been a Proud Boys member and that Felicia may have obtained the coin from him. However, his lawyers have stated that he was not a member of the Proud Boys. Associated Press, "Father of Arizona siblings at US Capitol attack touts conspiracies", *AZ Central*, 2021, <https://eu.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona/2021/02/12/father-konold-siblings-us-capitol-attack-touts-conspiracies/4468115001/>

After the Insurrection and the First 100 Days

The Proud Boys' rise throughout 2020 should be starkly contrasted with the current trajectory of the group and the various difficulties it has faced following the insurrection. The first blow to the group occurred just four days after the insurrection, on 10 January, when both Google's and Apple's app stores banned the Parler app. After it was closely linked to the events of 6 January, Parler was also dropped from its hosting service, Amazon Web Services, resulting in the platform going down for just over a month.¹⁶⁶ The site going down meant that the Proud Boys immediately lost what was by far their largest audience. The loss of the platform led to a temporary influx of users to the various Telegram channels affiliated with the Proud Boys. This influx was acknowledged by Enrique Tarrio on his personal channel, where he posted an informal guide for new users on how to use Telegram, and on the Proud Boys' official channel, which posted a poll asking users if they had come to the channel after using Parler. Almost 70% of the over 9,000 users to respond to the unofficial poll indicated they had come from Parler. This increase of new users to Telegram is potentially troubling as the content posted by the Proud Boys on the app is often more extreme than that which was shared on Parler. Yet it is not clear how many users who did make the transition have remained active in following the Proud Boys; their largest affiliated channel still has 150,000 followers fewer than the group amassed on Parler.

In a parallel to the group's reaction to being linked to the 2017 Unite the Right rally, some Proud Boys responded to the allegations that they were a major player in the 6 January riots by attempting to distance themselves from further action associated with the insurrection. In the lead up to Joe Biden's inauguration on 20 January, many other far-right channels on Telegram were allegedly involved in planning protests across the United States. However, a statement made on one channel associated with the Proud Boys claimed that the group would not be present at these protests and that "anyone dressed as a Proud Boy out at one of them, they're either a fed [federal officer] or antifa."¹⁶⁷

Alongside this attempt to distance themselves from any future potential violence, the Proud Boys also put forward narratives on social media that broadly vindicated those who took part in the insurrection. A statement made by the group the day after the riots alleges that those involved in the insurrection "waited months" spent "peacefully protesting & trying to get a resolution on an election in which they didn't trust the results", and that they only stormed the Capitol after "their concerns went unheard". The statement continues that participants in the insurrection are being unfairly persecuted by "the media" and politicians. It alleges that actions carried out by the BLM movement and Antifa, including "burning buildings, looting, destroying private property, attacking courthouses, violence in the streets, murder, etc.", were treated with unfair leniency by comparison and thus that the political right wing is being discriminated against and more severely punished than the political left. Various other posts made by the group continued to indicate support for the actions taken on 6 January, including a post that suggested that Ashli Babbitt, a protester who was killed by an unnamed Capitol Police officer during

¹⁶⁶ Brian Fung, "Parler has now been booted by Amazon, Apple and Google", *CNN Business*, 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/01/09/tech/parler-suspended-apple-app-store/index.html>; BBC News, "Parler app back online after month-long gap", *BBC News*, 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-56071112>

¹⁶⁷ E J Dickson, "Proud Boys Channels Are Exploding on Telegram", *Rolling Stone*, 2021, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/proud-boys-telegram-far-right-extremists-1114201/>



the insurrection, was an “American hero” (Figure 5). Another post stresses that politicians in the Capitol Building should have expected – and potentially deserved – to be targeted at the insurrection after “bullying the American people” and “fucking [them] over for decades”. The Proud Boys have also shared funding campaigns to assist various members charged for their roles in the insurrection, describing the cases made against them as “heavy handed”.

The Proud Boys' somewhat contradictory behaviour is representative of the bind the group likely found themselves in, in the wake of the insurrection. On one hand, the group appeared eager not to attract further legal troubles or mainstream scrutiny by protesting on the day of Biden's inauguration. This suggests they feared that further actions linked to the insurrection might mean they were branded as an extremist group, and would tarnish their reputation among more mainstream audiences. Yet, on the other hand, the Proud Boys could not be seen to alienate their supporters who had taken part in storming the Capitol, or to fully distance themselves from the insurrection itself, for fear of being viewed by their supporters as abandoning the wider cause against Biden and the left. Thus, the statements defending insurrectionists may have been an attempt to keep their supporters on side. This dilemma demonstrates the perpetual difficulty the Proud Boys face where they are constantly striving to find legitimacy within the mainstream political sphere, yet must simultaneously cater to their extremist supporters.

Another setback for the Proud Boys occurred just seven days into Biden's presidency on 27 January, when Reuters revealed that Enrique Tarrío had been a “prolific”, long-time informant for the FBI providing

them with information about Antifa.¹⁶⁸ Notably, at the time the story broke the Proud Boys did not comment on the revelation on their official social media channels. However, the group has long been outspoken against the FBI on their more explicit affiliated Telegram channel, alleging that the agency is biased towards the left and works with “anti-white” organisations. Thus, news that Tarrío had at one time been working with the agency was a serious betrayal of the core values of the Proud Boys, and would go on to have a significant ripple effect on the structure of the group. Notably, Tarrío is not the only Proud Boy to have been recently exposed as working with the FBI: Jason Biggs also claimed, in a defence filing related to charges he faces after the insurrection, that he had consistently aided FBI inquiries on Antifa, which is only likely to cause further embarrassment and anger among Proud Boys’ members.¹⁶⁹

Although no official statement was made at the time, Tarrío’s actions as an informant are likely to have directly influenced what is probably the biggest negative occurrence the Proud Boys have experienced in the first 100 days of Biden’s presidency: the splintering of a number of chapters. In the months that followed, chapters in Oklahoma, Nevada, Alabama, Missouri and St. Louis moved to disassociate themselves from the broader Proud Boys organisation.¹⁷⁰ Tarrío’s past appeared to be a major motivation for many of these groups, with the Alabama chapter stating, “We reject and disavow the proven federal informant, Enrique Tarrío, and any and all chapters that choose to associate with him”.¹⁷¹ The high number of Proud Boys arrested following the insurrection also seems to have motivated some groups, such as the St. Louis chapter, to distance themselves from the organisation.¹⁷²

The official Proud Boys group has commented on the splintering, with Tarrío claiming that the bonds between Proud Boys members are too deep ever to be truly broken, and that news outlets reporting on the groups’ departure were “underestimat[ing]” the extent and potential capabilities of the group. Although presenting a brave face publicly, the group splitting up is one of the most serious and detrimental changes to occur within the organisation. While it has faced disagreements between factions and prominent members in the past – notably between leader Gavin McInnes and Jason Kessler, one of the Unite the Right rally organisers – the direct disavowal of Proud Boys’ leadership and the simultaneous announcement that at least five chapters were claiming their independence is an event unparalleled in Proud Boys’ history. At present it is unclear what the long-term effects of the splintering will be for the Proud Boys; however, this is just one, albeit the most serious, in a long line of negative events to impact the group in 2021.

Indeed, on 3 February, the groups would face another difficulty when the Canadian government officially designated the Canadian chapter of the Proud Boys as a terrorist entity. While the designation does not make being a member of the group illegal, it does mean that the assets of members of the group can be frozen and that members can be charged with a terrorist offence should they commit acts of

168 Aram Roston, “Exclusive: Proud Boys leader was ‘prolific’ informer for law enforcement”, *Reuters*, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-proudboys-leader-exclusive-idUSKBN29W1PE>

169 Katelyn Polantz, “In bid to avoid jail, Proud Boys leader claims he was in contact with FBI years before Capitol riot”, *CNN Politics*, 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/03/30/politics/proud-boys-fbi-contacts/index.html>

170 Neil MacFarquhar, “Far-Right Groups Are Splintering in Wake of the Capitol Riot”, *The New York Times*, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/01/us/extremism-capitol-riot.html>

171 *Ibid.*

172 *Ibid.*; *The Verge*, 25 January 2021, <https://www.theverge.com/2021/1/25/22248640/amazon-amazonsmile-oath-keepers-three-percenters-ban>

violence.¹⁷³ While it was not the sole justification for the designation, the Canadian government cited the group's role in the insurrection as a motivating factor for the decision.¹⁷⁴ Notably the Proud Boys were designated alongside two other far-right groups that openly advocate violence and can be comfortably classed as part of the extreme right: Atomwaffen Division and the Base.¹⁷⁵ To be designated as a terrorist entity, let alone grouped alongside two openly white-supremacist, violent groups, is a far cry from the Proud Boys' ambition to become part of mainstream political discourse. Although it remains unlikely that the group will be proscribed in the United States, being associated with the label of a terrorist organisation is likely to limit their appeal among more moderate members of the MAGA movement.

Five days later, on 8 February, the Proud Boys' social media presence became fractured. For years, the group had maintained a presence on Telegram across two separate channels: one channel was branded as their official group, while another was a larger "uncensored" channel run by high-ranking Proud Boys members where more extreme, often openly racist and discriminatory content was posted. The uncensored channel publicly declared that the community's administrators had unanimously voted to change the name of the channel so that it no longer included the words "Proud Boys". The announcement clarified that the channel would continue to be run by the same people and denied that the decision was part of a "split or shakeup". However, the decision to partially decouple the two channels, which previously frequently reshared each other's content, is highly likely to have been influenced by the negative chain reaction of events faced by the group since the insurrection. In particular, the news that Tarrío had been an informant is possibly related to the decision as, notably, the channel has not mentioned or made statements in support of Tarrío since news of his past broke. Therefore, renaming is possibly an attempt by the administrators of the uncensored channel to distance themselves from Tarrío's reputation and to continue to appeal to members of the group angered by his actions.

The two channels have always slightly differed in the content they shared, with the uncensored channel posting more frequently and attracting almost 15,000 more followers. Notably the larger group openly promotes Third Positionism, as is shown in Figure 6, while the main channel does not.¹⁷⁶ Third Positionism refers to a subset of beliefs seen to transcend the political binaries of "left" and "right",¹⁷⁷ and "capitalism" and "communism". It broadly belongs to the neo-fascist school of thought. Roger Griffin describes the ideology as one that seeks a "third way between capitalism and communism, and associates itself with Third World struggles against the global market and a USA-Israel dominated 'international community' ... 'Zionist' capitalism, and the cultural hegemony of the USA".¹⁷⁸



Figure 6. An Image shared to the Proud Boys' secondary Telegram channel which promotes Third Positionism.

173 "Proud Boys: Canada labels far-right group a terrorist entity", *BBC News*, 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-55923485>

174 Rob Gillies, "Canada designates the Proud Boys as a terrorist entity", *AP News*, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/canada-proud-boys-terrorist-group-510b8cd8286f1207a726904f61e63e4d>

175 *Ibid.*

176 Roger Griffin, "Interregnum or endgame? The radical right in the 'post-fascist' era", *Journal of Political Ideologies* vol.5 no.2, 2000: pp.163–78, p.168

177 Chip Berlet, "What is the Third Position?", *Political Research Associates*, 2016, <https://www.politicalresearch.org/2016/12/19/what-third-position>

178 Roger Griffin, "Interregnum or endgame?", p.168

Chip Berlet expands upon this definition, clarifying that more extreme Third Position groups desire a “racially-homogeneous decentralised tribal form of nationalism” and noting that the ideology is influenced by the intellectual European New Right school and has origins in the anticapitalism wing of Adolf Hitler’s Nazi Party.¹⁷⁹

The group has continued to push narratives advocating for a Third Position since Trump left office and has utilised Biden’s electoral victory as a talking point in its propaganda to spread the ideology, writing that “there is no political solution. Voting will not remove them ... Embrace The Third Position.” While the uncensored channel, like the main Proud Boys’ Telegram channel, was broadly supportive of Trump during his presidency, since he left office, he has been viewed as having somewhat abandoned his supporters. The channel has capitalised upon this sentiment, stating “Even Donald Trump has totally wiped his hands clean from his most loyal supporters that risked their lives for him. The GOP is useless ... It’s time for us to leave them behind and embrace 3rd positionism.”

Even more radically, the uncensored group has openly praised Adolf Hitler. Since the channel formally disentangled itself from the main Proud Boys’ group, it has become more extreme in the content it posts, and on 20 April, for the first time the group posted a long statement in honour of Hitler’s birthday, stating: “Happy birthday Adolf, we’ll have our home again one day”. This is a clear move towards open Nazism. Given that this channel currently hosts the Proud Boys’ largest social media following, a significant number of Proud Boys are likely to espouse, or at least tolerate, white supremacist or Neo-Nazi ideology – although this is not directly endorsed by the main group itself. Thus, the Proud Boys should be recognised as a group with tangible links to the extreme right and should continue to be monitored as a security threat.

In sum, the Proud Boys have been one of the largest groups to have been indicted for their involvement with the 6 January insurrection, and their activities throughout 2021 have been some of the most widely publicised. The group’s trajectory following the insurrection can be described as a chain reaction of negative events and consequences. The impacts of these should be considered in stark contrast to the group’s significant rise throughout 2020 and the extent to which they prospered under and as a direct result of Trump’s presidency. However, the group must not be considered to have disappeared, and although it has faced significant setbacks, it has retained a relatively large audience on encrypted platforms, and there is potential that content associated with the group is becoming far more radical.

QAnon

What is QAnon?

QAnon is a decentralised violent ideology rooted in an unfounded conspiracy theory that a globally active “Deep State” cabal of satanic paedophile elites is responsible for all the evil in the world. Adherents of QAnon also believe that this same cabal is seeking to bring down

¹⁷⁹ Chip Berlet, “What is the Third Position?”

President Trump, whom they see as the world's only hope to defeat it. The name "QAnon" refers to its followers' belief in "Q", a supposed military intelligence operation geared towards supporting President Trump in his efforts to root out and eliminate the Deep State.¹⁸⁰

QAnon is a militant and anti-establishment ideology rooted in a quasi-apocalyptic desire to destroy the existing "corrupt" world order and usher in a promised golden age. This is reminiscent of numerous violent, anti-government, white nationalist and neo-Nazi extremist organisations across the globe. Its diversified and increasingly broad base of support means that it continually absorbs other conspiracy theories that have fed into other globalist, anti-government movements. Among these absorbed conspiracy theories are the beliefs of 1990s militia movements about the "New World Order",¹⁸¹ thinly veiled connections to centuries-old antisemitic narratives about blood libel,¹⁸² and the anti-government apocalypticism and religious fervour of the Branch Davidians.¹⁸³

QAnon's central claim has its origins in the Pizzagate conspiracy theory, which can be traced back to October 2016.¹⁸⁴ According to this theory, the hacked emails of Hillary Clinton contained coded words and satanic symbolism indicating the existence of a secret child-sex-trafficking ring run out of a popular pizza restaurant in Washington, DC. Two months after these ideas began to gather momentum, a Pizzagate conspiracy theorist arrived at the restaurant in question with an AR-15-style rifle, firing three shots before surrendering to police after realising that he and, indeed, the Pizzagate theory in general were mistaken.¹⁸⁵

The essence of QAnon lies in its attempts to delineate and explain evil. It is about theodicy, not secular evidence. QAnon offers its adherents comfort in an uncertain – and unprecedented – age, as the movement crowdsources answers to the inexplicable. QAnon becomes the master narrative capable of explaining simply various complex events. The result is a world view characterised by a sharp distinction between the realms of good and evil that is non-falsifiable.

No matter how much evidence journalists, academics and civil society offer as a counter to the claims promoted by the movement, belief in QAnon as the source of truth is a matter of faith – specifically in Trump and "Q".

Though it started as a series of conspiracy theories and false predictions, since 2017, QAnon has evolved into an extremist religio-political ideology. The coronavirus pandemic has played a significant role in popularising the QAnon movement. Facebook data since the start of 2020 shows QAnon membership grew by 581%, most of which occurred after the United States closed its borders last March as part of its coronavirus containment strategy.

180 "What is QAnon?", Global Network on Extremism and Technology, 15 October 2020, <https://gnet-research.org/2020/10/15/what-is-qanon/>

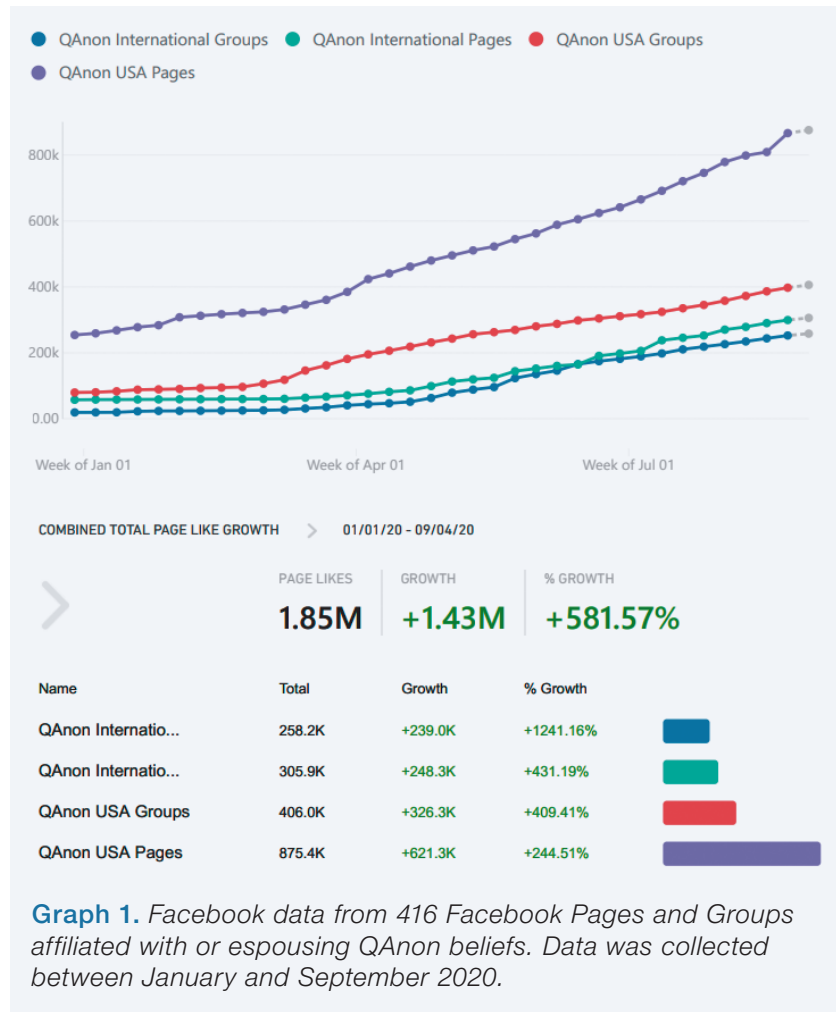
181 Amarnath Amarasingam and Marc-André Argentino, "The QAnon Conspiracy Theory: A Security Threat in the Making?", *CTC Sentinel* vol.13 no.7, <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-qanon-conspiracy-theory-a-security-threat-in-the-making>

182 Brian Fridberg, "The Dark Virality of a Hollywood Blood-Harvesting Conspiracy", *Wired*, 31 July 2020, <https://www.wired.com/story/opinion-the-dark-virality-of-a-hollywood-blood-harvesting-conspiracy/>

183 Amarasingam and Argentino, "The QAnon Conspiracy Theory"

184 Adrienne LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q", *The Atlantic*, June 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/>

185 Matthe Haag and Maya Salam "Gunman in 'Pizzagate' Shooting Is Sentenced to 4 Years in Prison" *The New York Times*, June 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/22/us/pizzagate-attack-sentence.html>



Taking a close look at the data, the pandemic was the turning point for the mainstreaming of the movement. Data regarding QAnon Facebook pages and groups demonstrates just how much QAnon grew during this period.¹⁸⁶ The authors collected Facebook data from 406 QAnon and QAnon aligned Facebook groups and pages. The graphs demonstrate that QAnon groups prior to March 2020 had approximately 220,600 members, whereas QAnon pages had a total of 558,800 likes. By 7 August 2020, QAnon groups had approximately 1,516,100 members and QAnon pages had 1,610,200 likes. With the pandemic continuing into 2021, its long-term effects yet to be determined, coronavirus will likely continue to play a role in sustaining and mobilising QAnon. Prior to the pandemic, as of mid-2019, the QAnon movement was struggling to sustain itself.

Following the Christchurch attack in New Zealand, the mass shooting in El Paso, Texas, and the mass shooting in Dayton, Ohio, the website 8chan was taken down in August 2019, as it was where the perpetrators of these events posted their manifestos.¹⁸⁷ This was a significant temporary setback for QAnon as 8chan was the only

¹⁸⁶ The data was collected using Crowdtangle, a social media analysis tool owned by Facebook. It provides an aggregate count of group membership, therefore, if a user would join 50 of the QAnon groups or pages identified by the authors, this user would be counted 50 times. Therefore, this provides a measurement of the mainstreaming of the QAnon movement on Facebook, rather than a real count of unique members.

¹⁸⁷ Kari Paul "8chan: ex-users of far-right site flock to new homes across internet" *The Guardian*, 9 August 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/aug/08/8chan-shutdown-users-social-media>

place where “Q” posted. A key concept for QAnon is “no outside comms”, which implies that Q will only post on 8chan and nowhere else. As a result of 8chan’s removal, there were no posts from Q for four months until 8chan re-emerged as 8kun in November 2019.¹⁸⁸ After this setback, the pandemic, its related conspiracy theories and their adoption by QAnon likely saved QAnon from fading away, and turned it into the threat it is today.

As Alex Kaplan from Media Matters noted, 2020 was the year “QAnon became all of our problem”,¹⁸⁹ not only by spreading COVID conspiracy theories and disinformation,¹⁹⁰ but also as it was then further brought into the mainstream by 97 US congressional candidates who publicly showed support for the movement.¹⁹¹ Additionally, 2020 was the year Trump finally gave QAnon what it always wanted: respect. As Travis View, a conspiracy theory researcher and host of the QAnon Anonymous podcast recently wrote, “Over the past few months ... Trump has recognised the QAnon community in a way its followers could have only fantasised about when I began tracking the movement’s growth over two years ago.”¹⁹²

Current Trends

In the months prior to Joe Biden’s inauguration, former President Donald Trump and lawyers Sidney Powell and Lin Wood,¹⁹³ as well as conspiracy theorist Ron Watkins,¹⁹⁴ all actively inflamed QAnon apocalyptic and anti-establishment desires by promoting voter fraud conspiracy theories. While QAnon has often been dismissed as “crazy people on social media”, QAnon adherents were among the individuals in the front line of protesters who violently breached the Capitol Building with the intent of disrupting the certification of the 2020 presidential election. According to analysis by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), as of 23 March 2021, 34 QAnon followers were charged with participating in the Capitol insurrection.¹⁹⁵

The insurrection of 6 January 2021 is a stark example of what happens when an ideological movement such as QAnon is not taken seriously, especially in the context of how it has evolved into an ideologically motivated violent extremist movement. Consequently, due to the role of QAnon followers on 6 January, major social media platforms banned QAnon, creating a mass exodus to alternative platforms. What has taken place is a balkanisation of the QAnon ideology and movement to the platforms where adherents have found refuge. The mass deplatforming

188 Jon Porter “8chan returns to the internet at 8kun”, *The Verge*, 4 November 2019, <https://www.theverge.com/2019/11/4/20947429/8chan-8kun-online-image-board-shooter-gunmen-manifesto>

189 Alex Kaplan, “In 2020, QAnon became all of our problem”, *Media Matters*, 31 December 2020, <https://www.mediamatters.org/qanon-conspiracy-theory/2020-qanon-became-all-our-problem>

190 Marc-André Argentino, “QAnon conspiracy theories about the coronavirus pandemic are a public health threat”, *The Conversation*, 8 April 2020, <https://theconversation.com/qanon-conspiracy-theories-about-the-coronavirus-pandemic-are-a-public-health-threat-135515>

191 Ibid.

192 Travis View, “Trump Finally Gave QAnon What It Always Wanted: Respect”, *Intelligencer*, 29 December 2020, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/amp/2020/12/trump-gave-qanon-what-it-always-wanted-respect.html>

193 “Trump Weighed Naming Election Conspiracy Theorist as Special Counsel”, *The New York Times*, 19 December 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/19/us/politics/trump-sidney-powell-voter-fraud.html>; Ryan Grenoble, “Who Is Lin Wood, The Pro-Trump Lawyer Spewing Conspiracies About Lizard Squads?”, *HuffPost*, 4 January 2021, https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/who-is-lin-wood-trump-tweets_n_5ff335d7c5b6e7974fd514c1?ri18n=true

194 Rachel E Greenspan, “Trump continues to promote conspiracy theories from a rapidly rising QAnon star”, *Insider*, 15 December 2020, <https://www.insider.com/trump-shares-voter-fraud-conspiracy-theories-of-qanon-star-ron-watkins-2020-12>

195 Michael Jensen and Sheehan Kane, “QAnon Offenders in the United States”, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism and Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States, https://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/publications/local_attachments/START%20QAnon%20Research%20Brief_3_23.pdf

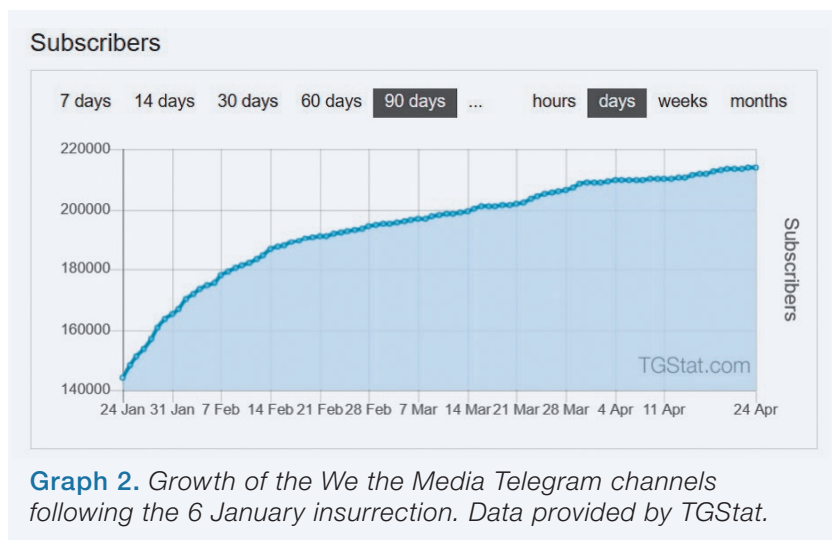
and the absence of Q since their last post on 8 December has
 i) created communities where QAnon influencers have banded together to maintain canonical QAnon narratives and ideologies in the absence of Q; ii) given rise to new influencers in the neo-QAnon movement; iii) given rise to old influencers in the movement; and iv) provided the opportunity for QAnon to merge with other movements. The two largest QAnon communities presently are found on Telegram and Gab. The following sections of this report will discuss each of these trends.

i) We the Media

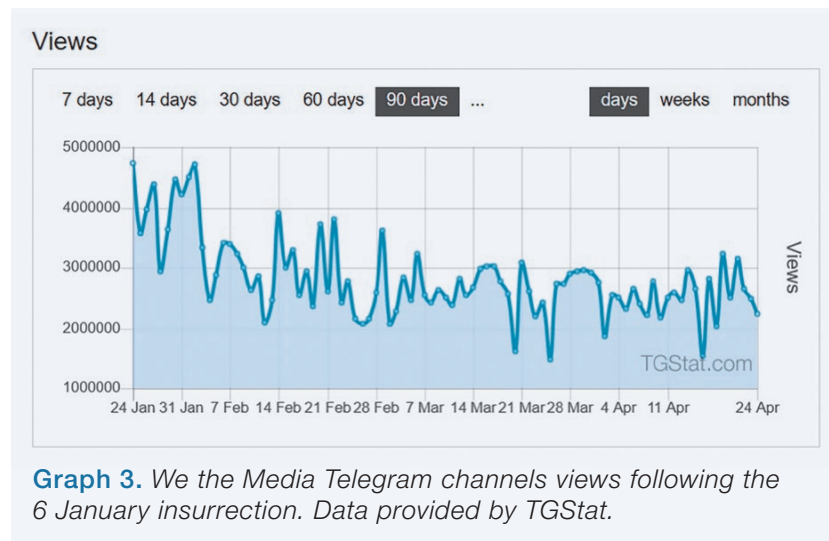
‘We the Media’ is the main Telegram Channel for QAnon. It is administrated by 38 influencers in the QAnon movement, who are highlighted in Table 1.

Jordan Sather	Anonymous Patriot	Julians Rum
Operation War Room	Resignation Anon	bullionbitcoins
Little Mel Q	StormyPatriotJoe	BrunoBarks
imglover13THGENPATRIOT	BlueSkyReport	World Line Zero Report
Pepe Deluxed	Techno Frog	Gunf46Memes
Danielle_MAGA	Liz Crokin	Tribunal Watch
The Kate Awakening	We The Memeier	MikeBravoDude
SSGQ	Mike Smith “Crux”	RedPill78
Pepe Lives Matter	X22 Report	Forecast 432Hz
EyesOnQ	World Wire News	Qtime Network
Midnight Rider	Red.Pill.Pharmacist	Eye Drop Media
Qtah_17	AQP13526	InevitableET
Redpillbabe	TommyGPatriot	

The channel was created on 9 January and grew rapidly as QAnon adherents could not find a stable home on Parler or Gab, their prior homes following QAnon takedowns on the main platforms. Graph 2 shows how We the Media grew rapidly throughout February and plateaued at the start of March. It currently boasts 210,000 members. The associated Telegram chat has 20,000 members. This channel has become the central source of “canonical” QAnon narratives in the absence of Q. We the Media is larger than any of the Facebook groups



Graph 2. Growth of the We the Media Telegram channels following the 6 January insurrection. Data provided by TGStat.



to have existed. The community is healthy, with channel members regularly commenting on posts and the chat is also very active with a few thousand posts a day.

As Graph 3 shows, the channel ordinarily reaches 2,600,000 views a day. Views do not necessarily imply engagement, though it does indicate that the content is shared, on average, to 150 different channels.

Most of the We the Media administrators also have their own QAnon channels and chats separate from this main channel. Though most do not have the same following as they did on Twitter, these channels still have between 20,000 and over 100,000 members in them. American-based QAnon influencers were able to maintain and sustain a community post-deplatforming, not only by creating a super-channel with a large number of known influencers, but also by maintaining their individual brands of QAnon decoding and geopolitical interpretation. What is most important is that rank-and-file QAnon adherents have also found a way to build their own communities by creating many smaller channels, where they are developing relationships with others in the movement.

It should be stressed that it is difficult to tell how many users in the QAnon channels are still active since the Biden inauguration, as most users are likely to uninstall Telegram or not use it rather than delete their accounts. However, the basic security settings in Telegram are set to delete an account if it is not used for six months; after that period we may see a drop in membership in QAnon channels. Also, it is impossible to know how many members are actual QAnon adherents, as opposed to trolls from ‘Terrorgram’¹⁹⁶, or journalists, academics and law enforcement agents. This is a phenomenon present in any analysis of extremist Telegram communities. However, QAnon channels are much larger than other IMVE channels on Telegram. As a result, it is very likely that the majority of users are actually adherents or interested in QAnon content.

¹⁹⁶ Terrorgram refers to a network of Telegram channels used by ideologically motivated violent extremists who support the use of terrorism and violence to achieve their goals of taking down the government and political order to replace it with one of their own. This network is multifaceted and is formed of multiple actors and ideologies. This network gained popularity for praising the Christchurch attacker.

The growth of American QAnon on Telegram presented an opportunity for the international QAnon community (mostly German, French, Italian, Israeli, Dutch, Belgian and British), which has had a home on Telegram for over two years, to intersect and engage. The growing transnational connection between QAnon communities on Telegram is significant and may present a new threat vector as these communities evolve over time.

ii) Neo-QAnon Influencers

Sidney Powell and Lin Wood quickly rose to fame in QAnon circles, as both former Trump lawyers were openly QAnon supporters. Their proximity to the former president and support for QAnon narratives and conspiracy theories made them immediate stars in QAnon circles, while also irking QAnon influencers they overshadowed. These two individuals will continue to play an influential role in QAnon and conspiracy theorist circles. Powell was part of Trump’s legal team and represented Michael Flynn – who is also a QAnon supporter and



Figure 7. Sidney Powell’s Twitter profile prior to removal.

was at the centre of many QAnon conspiracy theories.¹⁹⁷ She rose to prominence as she built a case that Joe Biden and the Democrats did not actually win the election. Powell called the case a “Kraken” that, when released, would demonstrate Biden had not won the election legally.¹⁹⁸

QAnon adherents, Trump supporters, and conspiracy theorists amplified Powell’s case under the hashtag #ReleaseTheKraken in support of the legal campaign to challenge the election results. Powell’s case played an important role in feeding the conspiracy theory that Trump would be inaugurated on 20 January rather than Biden. The unfounded claims she made in her court documents were of voter fraud,¹⁹⁹ disinformation about voting machines – in particular that the Dominion voting system was used to steal the election (a conspiracy theory amplified by Ron Watkins)²⁰⁰ – and claims of foreign interference, in which China, Venezuela and Iran helped Biden to win.

Powell has appeared multiple times on well-known QAnon-affiliated streams and engaged with or retweeted QAnon influencers and used QAnon references in her tweets.²⁰¹ As such, Powell rapidly became a QAnon favourite.

After being banned from Twitter in January 2021 for violating the site’s Coordinate Harmful Activity policy, Powell created a Telegram channel, which currently has 483,000 members and is a central hub for “neo-QAnon” content.²⁰² Powell is described as neo-QAnon as she is not an individual who interprets Q-drops (the anonymous messages posted by the figure known as “Q”) or is enmeshed deeply in the QAnon ideology. However, she has built a following of conspiracy-minded IMVE actors and Trump supporters, who consume QAnon-adjacent content. As she has surpassed many of the older, established QAnon influencers in terms of prominence, Powell drew criticism about how some QAnon adherents were relying on Powell’s posts to interpret QAnon content.

Ultimately, influencers pushed back and implied that Powell is an ally but her interpretation of Q-drops should not be seen as gospel. Although her content is perceived as apocryphal by QAnon influencers, the rank and file and those who are QAnon adjacent still turn to her today for hope about the election results being overturned or because Powell continues to be an anti-government voice in Trump-supporting circles. Her position of power as a lawyer and her proximity to those who were in power, as well as the fact that she acts without consequences, continue to make her narratives potential threat vectors.

197 Jackie Flynn Mogensen “To Celebrate the Fourth, Michael Flynn Posts a Pledge to Conspiracy Group QAnon”, *Mother Jones*, 5 July 2020, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2020/07/to-celebrate-the-fourth-michael-flynn-posts-a-pledge-to-conspiracy-group-qanon/>

198 BBC News “The Kraken: What is it and why has Trump’s ex-lawyer released it?” 28 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-us-2020-55090145>

199 Reality Check team, “US election 2020: Fact-checking Trump team’s main fraud claims”, *BBC News*, 23 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2020-55016029>

200 Drew Harwell, “To boost voter-fraud claims, Trump advocate Sidney Powell turns to unusual source: The longtime operator of QAnon’s Internet home”, *The Washington Post*, 1 December 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/12/01/powell-cites-qanon-watkins/>

201 Donie O’Sullivan “Sidney Powell is a beacon of hope to sad QAnon supporters”, *CNN Business*, 24 November 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/11/24/business/sidney-powell-qanon/index.html>

202 Ben Collins and Brandy Zadrozny “Twitter bans Michael Flynn, Sidney Powell in QAnon account purge” *NBS News*, 8 January 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/twitter-bans-michael-flynn-sidney-powell-qanon-account-purge-n1253550>



Figure 8. *Lin Wood’s Twitter profile prior to takedown.*

Lin Wood was brought into Trump’s legal team following a recommendation by Powell. QAnon-supporting congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene also hired Wood to represent her.²⁰³ He also temporarily represented Kyle Rittenhouse; and announced that he would be using the hashtag #FightBack, which was the campaign to raise bail money for Rittenhouse, to expose “fraud in the November 3 election”.²⁰⁴ Wood shot to QAnon fame following Biden’s victory as part of the legal team challenging the election results. However, his high profile and controversial clients had already given him a positive reputation and influence among QAnon adherents. Wood was and remains an open QAnon adherent: for instance, in his Twitter bio he displayed the QAnon hashtag #WWG1WGA (Where We Go One We Go All).

Between the announcement of the election results and the inauguration of President Biden, Wood shared and amplified QAnon narratives and influencers, and created and promoted disinformation about the election results that was shared and amplified by Trump. Prior to being removed from Trump’s legal team, Wood tweeted that Mike Pence would be executed by firing squad for treason if he did not play the “Pence Card”. This post refers a QAnon conspiracy theory that combined with Sovereign Citizen²⁰⁵ conspiracy theories regarding

203 Matthew Rosenberg, “A QAnon Supporter Is Headed to Congress”, *The New York Times*, 5 February 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/03/us/politics/qanon-candidates-marjorie-taylor-greene.html>; EJ Dickson, “Is Marjorie Taylor Greene Becoming the New Face of QAnon?”, *Rolling Stone*, 27 January 2021, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/marjorie-taylor-green-congress-qanon-1119742/>

204 James Hill, “Controversial attorney withdraws from Kyle Rittenhouse criminal case, launches new fundraising appeal”, *ABC News*, 7 December 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/controversial-attorney-withdraws-kyle-rittenhouse-criminal-case-launches/story?id=74545504>

205 “Sovereign citizens believe that they — not judges, juries, law enforcement or elected officials — get to decide which laws to obey and which to ignore, and they don’t think they should have to pay taxes. Sovereigns are clogging up the courts with indecipherable filings and when cornered, many of them lash out in rage, frustration and, in the most extreme cases, acts of deadly violence, usually directed against government officials.” <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement>

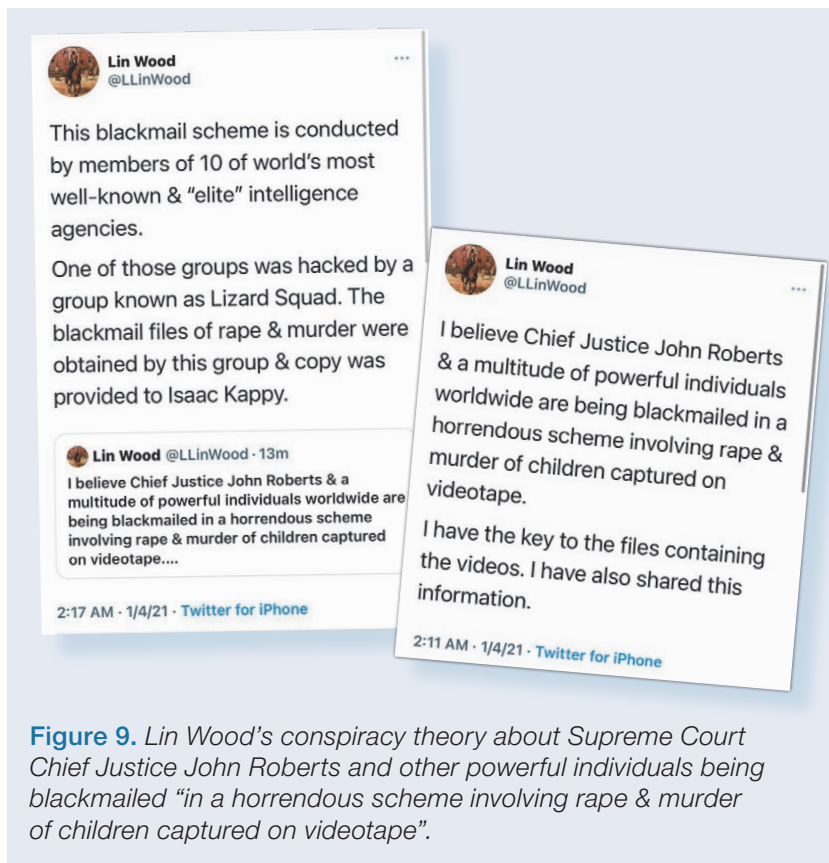


Figure 9. *Lin Wood's conspiracy theory about Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts and other powerful individuals being blackmailed "in a horrendous scheme involving rape & murder of children captured on videotape".*

the interpretation of the constitution, whereby the vice president had the capacity to overturn the election results through unfounded constitutional and senatorial powers. Wood also promoted the conspiracy theory that Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts and other powerful individuals were being blackmailed "in a horrendous scheme involving rape & murder of children captured on videotape" and that the blackmail was being carried out by the hacking group 'Lizard Squad'²⁰⁶ (Figure 9). Following this incident, a former member of Lizard Squad reached out to one of our authors to confirm that this was not the case, and that Lizard Squad is no longer active, stating "we had literally no involvement in what that Lin Wood person is posting".

After the mass deplatforming of QAnon, Wood ended up losing his Twitter account; like many others he started a Telegram channel. Wood currently has 833,000 members making it the largest QAnon channel on the platform. Within a week of creating it, Wood had 484,000 members and within a month he was at 800,000, which shows there are substantial numbers of people who will follow him to different platforms. This is highly significant as it means that Wood, a neo-QAnon influencer, has a larger platform on Telegram than the combined platform of 38 of the original QAnon influencers who make up the "We the Media" channel.

²⁰⁶ Lizard Squad was a hacking group, mainly known for their claims of distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks which primarily sought to disrupt gaming-related services.

There are several reasons why Wood has managed to establish such a vast platform. First, like Powell, he speaks not only as a lawyer but from the position of being part of Trump's legal team. As Trump is a central figure in the QAnon conspiracy theory, access to the former president gave Wood a large boost. More importantly, after Trump's electoral loss, much of the QAnon community was left reeling, as they had taken inspiration from the conspiracy and felt sure that Trump would be re-elected. Following the election, Q also went silent and has not posted a single drop since November 2020. This left many supporters worried and potentially considering leaving the conspiracy behind. Simultaneously, mainstream platforms began purging QAnon content from their sites.²⁰⁷ In the wake of the election, many established QAnon influencers reassured adherents to be patient and wait out the series of events which were unfolding.

In contrast, Wood instead continued the QAnon narrative by making up new evidence, crafting new conspiracy theories, promoting the voter fraud narrative and claiming access to whistle blowers and insider information. All of these are things that QAnon adherents crave, especially in the absence of Q. This kept the QAnon narrative constantly evolving rather than stagnating. At the time, established influencers were rehashing the same conspiracy theories and reeling from the series of failed predictions, the ban from mainstream platforms, and the lack of guidance from Q. Wood told QAnon adherents that they had not lost and that there was hope that Trump would be made president. He promoted new conspiracies about the global cabal and child trafficking. As a QAnon adherent himself, he was able to gauge what other adherents wanted to hear and made full use of this to boost his profile among the conspiracy community.

After 6 January, We the Media toned down its rhetoric, distancing itself from the more far-fetched narratives in QAnon circles. Wood, however, did not shy away, sharing more radical narratives and ideas. Like an algorithm that promotes more extreme content to keep users engaged, Wood indulged in extreme and far-fetched QAnon narratives to ensure adherents were hooked on his message, rather than encouraging them to slow down.

Both Powell and Wood have established themselves as neo-QAnon influencers; these are actors who need to be monitored over the next few months as they may act as indicators of how QAnon will evolve in time. Without the influence of Q, and with the original influencers toning their content down, Powell and Wood will have behavioural impacts on the QAnon movement and other conspiracy theorists. Already the voter fraud narratives have played an important role in the 6 January insurrection, of which Wood and Powell were key promoters; their future actions will potentially continue to act as potential threat vectors.

²⁰⁷ Blyth Crawford "QAnon and the 2020 US Election: What Trump's Loss Means for the pro-Trump Conspiracy", ICSR, 2020, <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ICSR-Insight-QAnon-and-the-2020-US-Election.pdf>

iii) The Return of Gab

Gab is an alternative social media platform launched in 2016 by Andrew Torba, and has historically attracted a relatively small userbase of far-right actors.²⁰⁸ Since the inception of QAnon, Gab has been a hub for QAnon users who have been deplatformed from Facebook and Twitter. However, Gab's QAnon community remained quite small. In October 2020, the membership in QAnon groups was 142,300. However, as of March 2021, membership in these same groups was 643,000, an increase of 352%. In the aftermath of 6 January, Gab saw an influx of users banned from major social media platforms. Web servers could not keep up with the new traffic, which led to Gab servers shutting down. During a critical moment of IMVE actors seeking a new home, Gab could not keep its doors open and potentially missed out on a large number of new followers. Initially QAnon influencers had found a home on Parler and Gab, but the difficulties these sites faced in the wake of 6 January ultimately led to Telegram becoming the main home for QAnon.

Nevertheless, there is a QAnon community that formed on Gab after the site was able to stabilise. It also helps that Gab founder and CEO Andrew Torba has aligned himself with QAnon narratives and tropes.²⁰⁹ Some influencers did not move to Telegram or were not invited to become moderators in We the Media who have remained on Gab. This has led to an increase in infighting and a balkanisation of the QAnon community.

The community on Gab is more insular and American-centric than QAnon on Telegram. The Gab QAnon community is primarily American, with some presence from other English-speaking QAnon communities from Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Therefore, the transnational dimension of QAnon plays a less important role on Gab, which would indicate that QAnon threat vectors would be mostly homegrown.

iv) QAnon Symbiosis and Mutation

QAnon content is mass-produced for consumption by an anonymous body of non-discriminating consumers. Not all consumers of QAnon conspiracy theories are QAnon adherents; the narratives have mass appeal to a segment of the population. QAnon content is formulaic, manipulative and consumed by an audience unlikely to question its verifiability. The movement's ideological authority is rooted in this mass-produced and mass-approved content, though it is consumers who ultimately decide what is of importance and how it is to be interpreted, especially in the absence of Q. This is what also makes QAnon narratives attractive to a diverse audience of violent and non-violent extremists. According to a report from START on 23 March, twelve of the 66 QAnon offenders of ideologically motivated crimes had known ties to other extremist movements; five of these twelve individuals carried out successful plots in the US.²¹⁰

As social polarisation increased throughout 2020 due to the pandemic and the US election, the erosion of trust in government created a fertile ground for conspiracy theories among the Christian and political right. The idiosyncratic combination of religion, politics and American

208 Justin Vallejo "What is Gab? Inside the fast-growing Twitter competitor that has become a refuge for Trump and his supporters", *Independent*, 6 February 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-gab-account-what-is-it-b1798516.html>

209 According to Alex Kaplan from Media Matters for America "The CEO of Gab appears to be flat out supporting QAnon now. It comes as he has been encouraging QAnon supporters to join the platform as the conspiracy theory faces crackdowns on other platforms." <https://twitter.com/AlKapDC/status/1321551548925812737>

210 "QAnon Offenders in the United States", START

apocalypticism is what highlights the bricolage of conspiracy theories described by Michael Barkun.²¹¹ This apocalyptic, anti-democratic and anti-establishment desire of a segment of the US population permits the growing intersectionality of QAnon and other IMVE actors, who are also seeking to replace the Deep State/Corrupt Government/Zionist Occupied Government and impose their own golden age.

The community-building observed on Gab and Telegram is central to the long-term viability of QAnon communities on Telegram, Gab and other alternative social media platforms. There is often a focus on the narratives and conspiracy theories stemming from the movement, which means that a key element is frequently overlooked: why is QAnon important to these individuals? In brief, it gives them a sense of community. This is not a new phenomenon in extremist movements; indeed, Amarasingam has previously highlighted the importance of community to Islamic State supporters on Twitter.²¹²

QAnon and its Growing Incorporation of Sovereign Citizen Narratives

Following the election loss on 3 November and the growing amount of conspiracy theories and disinformation about electoral fraud, QAnon adherents started looking into various ways the constitution, courts or Senate could play a role in overturning the election results. One of these viral QAnon conspiracy theories – the 4 March conspiracy – was initially created in a prepping²¹³/sovereign citizen Telegram channel. A QAnon influencer subsequently amplified this in We the Media (figure 10).

The conspiracy theory proceeds as follows. First, 4 March is an important date: the US constitution originally went into effect on 4 March 1789 and, until 1933, presidents were inaugurated on 4 March. However, according to the theory, in 1871 the United States became a corporation rather than a country, one that was owned by the banking industry (in particular, the City of London). To return to the United States being a country, the theory posited that a number of steps had to be carried out. First, Trump was required to step down as president. Then the military would become guardians of the nation and break all ties with the US being a corporation. Finally, Trump would be again sworn in as the 19th president on 4 March, because, the conspiracy goes, the last “real” president was Ulysses S Grant, the 18th president. This conspiracy borrows deeply from the Sovereign Citizen movement. While this may appear odd to many outside observers, the mainstream virality of this conspiracy theory led Reuters to fact-check the story after a Canadian QAnon YouTube influencer posted a video reading this Telegram post in Figure 10.²¹⁴ Following the inauguration of Joe Biden, this YouTube vlog reached a million views before being removed from

211 Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 2013: pp.15–38.

212 Amarnath Amarasingam, “What Twitter really means for Islamic State supporters”, *War on the Rocks*, 30 December 2015, <https://warontherocks.com/2015/12/what-twitter-really-means-for-islamic-state-supporters/>

213 “[Preppers] Are a subculture of Americans across political lines preparing for the breakdown of civilization, off-the-grid living, food shortages and natural disaster...the popularity of such conferences almost certainly stems from several causes: uncertain political times, a presidential campaign that exposed toxic tensions dividing the country on fault lines of race and class, and worries about the environment.” Ryan Lenz, “The New Bazaar: Survivalist ‘Prepper’ Conferences are Again Serving as Waypoints in the Traffic of Conspiracy Theories”, *Southern Poverty Law Center*, 24 April 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/04/24/new-bazaar-survivalist-%E2%80%98prepper%E2%80%99-conferences-are-again-serving-waypoints-traffic-conspiracy>

214 Reuters Staff, “Fact check: No evidence to support QAnon claims of mass arrests, military takeover, illegitimacy of Biden’s presidency or Trump’s return to power”, *Reuters*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-qanon-military-theories-idUSKBN29R1ZA>

A Peaceful Transition is coming. Trump will NOT be Sworn in as the 45th President of the United States on January 20.

Trump WILL take office as the 19th President of the United States on March 4 2021.

Let me explain: You believe you live in a nation called United States of America.

This Nation hasn't existed since 1871, when this country ceased to be a Nation and became a corporation belonging to the City of London (every time you see an American flag with Gold Fringe and Gold Tilt attached to it, it represents the Corporation, NOT the country).

This is the reason you can never make progress financially. This is why the Law always seems to be against the average Citizen, while the Rich and the Elite literally get away with murder (and worse things).

If Biden, Harris, Pence, Pelosi, etc are arrested for their crimes before January 20th, there will be no one to assume the Presidency.

Since Trump has not been certified as the Presidential winner by Congress, he cannot remain President.

If there is NO PRESIDENT on January 20th, the corporation known as the United States of America will be Dissolved. The Military will be the Guardians of the Nation during the Transition.

People will then have irrefutable proof that the Election was Stolen by Foreign Entities and that Trump was chosen by a Landslide.

Trump then assumes the Presidency as the 19th President of the United States (the last President elected before America became a corporation was Ulysses S. Grant).

Now, I really don't know all the details involved in this. Just know the end goal has always been the destruction of that 1871 corporation and the return of America to the people like the democratic republic it always intended to be.

The next month and a half will be Chaotic. Make sure you have plenty of food and water!

Comply with the National Guard and United States Marine Corp. They took Oath to the Nation, not the Corporation, the Act of 1871. Be vigilant!

Pray. Your Nation has returned to you.

Figure 10. A Telegram post outlining the 4 March conspiracy, which shows the overlap between the sovereign citizen and QAnon communities.

the platform. However, the video remained widely shared on alternative vide-sharing platforms and subsequently received 124,000 views on BitChute and 66,000 on Rumble.²¹⁵

Ultimately, because of the potential threat of QAnon adherents coming to DC because of the conspiracy theory, the US government deployed 5,000 National Guards and Capitol police stated it had intelligence of a militant group that was potentially willing to breach the Capitol Building on 4 March.²¹⁶ The FBI was also on alert for potential threats from militant groups on 4 March, and the House of Representatives shut down for the day considering the potential threat.²¹⁷ To restate the importance of this, a QAnon conspiracy theory forced the posting of national guards, had Capitol police, DC police and the FBI on alert and forced Congress to shut down. Although 4 March was another failed QAnon prophecy and the events it predicted, of course, did not come to fruition, supporters still posed a threat to democratic institutions and wasted valuable resources from the intelligence community and law enforcement.²¹⁸

This is a key threat vector with QAnon: its unpredictability. QAnon supporters have posed a threat to public safety, public health, critical infrastructure and democratic institutions since the start of the pandemic alone. Although Q will potentially never post again, QAnon – or whatever the conspiracy will metamorphosise into in the coming months and years – will continue to pose a threat. This is not only because conspiracy theorists, the apocalyptic, and the anti-government crowd will seek out new avenues to fulfil their needs, but also because QAnon is and has been merging with or being recruited by more radical or extreme movements that inhabit the alternative media spaces into which QAnon adherents were forced.

QAnon's Growing Overlap with IMVE Actors

A more frequent occurrence since the mass deplatforming of QAnon from mainstream social media platforms is the overlap between QAnon and IMVE actors found on Telegram. When QAnon was deplatformed and adherents could not find a stable home on Parler or Gab, they turned to Telegram. At the time, they believed this would be temporary. However, it has lasted longer than anticipated. Individuals on Terrorgram (an informal network of neo-Nazi accelerationist Telegram channels) were excited about the large pool of new potential recruits joining their digital ecosystem.²¹⁹ Chatter on Terrorgram as of

215 Kaleigh Rogers, "QAnon Has Become The Cult That Cries Wolf", *FiveThirtyEight*, 26 March 2021, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/qanon-has-become-the-cult-that-cries-wolf/>

216 "Capitol Police say intelligence shows militia group may be plotting to breach the Capitol", *The Washington Post*, 3 March 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/capitol-police-march-4-threat/2021/03/03/32a24e86-7c42-11eb-85cd-9b7fa90c8873_story.html

217 Ben Collins and Brandy Zadrozny, "D.C. police, FBI on alert ahead of QAnon's 'true Inauguration Day'", *NBC News*, 2 March 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/internet/dc-police-fbi-alert-ahead-qanons-true-inauguration-day-rcna331>; Mark Katkov and Scott Neuman, "House Cancels Thursday Session After Police Warn Of Possible Attack On Congress", *NPR*, 3 March 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/03/973310942/capitol-police-warns-of-another-possible-right-wing-attack-on-congress>

218 Amarnath Amarasingam and Marc-André Argentino, "QAnon's predictions haven't come true; so how does the movement survive the failure of prophecy?", *Religion Dispatches*, 28 October 2020, <https://religiondispatches.org/qanons-predictions-havent-come-true-so-how-does-the-movement-survive-the-failure-of-prophecy/>

219 Terrorgram is a network of neo-Nazi accelerationist channels. "This network, which fuses the glorification of political violence with a distinctive hyper-stylized visual aesthetic, consists of a small network of channels that share memes glorifying an apocalyptic race war, instructions for 3D-printing weapons, extremist literature and manifestos, and video recordings of white supremacist terror attacks that have been removed from other platforms." Hannah Gais and Megan Squire, "How an Encrypted Messaging Platform is Changing Extremist Movements", Southern Poverty Law Center, 16 February 2021, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2021/02/16/how-encrypted-messaging-platform-changing-extremist-movements>; Cassie Miller, "There Is No Political Solution: Accelerationism in the White Power Movement", Southern Poverty Law Center, 23 June 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/06/23/there-no-political-solution-accelerationism-white-power-movement>; Jakob Guhl and Jacob Davey, "A Safe Space to Hate: White Supremacist Mobilisation on Telegram", Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 26 June 2020, <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/a-safe-space-to-hate-white-supremacist-mobilisation-on-telegram/>

11 January was about “red-pilling and recruiting normies [indoctrinating average people into extremism]”, as well as what they called “Parler and Twitter refugees”.

Examples of threat actors seeking to recruit newcomers into further extremism are shown below in extracts from various conversations which took place across extreme Telegram channels. In some instances, the conversation was geared towards guiding Parler and Twitter refugees towards chats that “are good for patriots”, such as in one post which read, “We need people to go into this chat of normies: https://t.me/***** And then start another conversation about chats that are good for patriots, to which we post this chat: https://t.me/*****”. These chats were part of a wider network of IMVE actors, though it was not obvious what the content of these chats were to the newcomers. These are not isolated incidents as there were several different threat actors who were discussing ways to recruit and radicalise newcomers: “Parler refugees are in https://t.me/***** Everybody move in, to slowly and subtly redpill. People are getting banned for being too obvious. These are our baby brothers and sisters and they need help to see the light.” It is also important to note that women were singled out as targets of recruitment by these threat actors: “We need to share our wisdom with the normies. Give them breadcrumbs and see if they want more. The hardest ones to recruit are the women but if we can get them on our side they will be the most ardent supporters. We might not be able to rid ourselves of the n***** just yet but we can certainly expose the nose.”

In other instances, IMVE actors were not shying away from the content or ideological leaning of their communities, with some openly directing newcomers to Telegram towards more extreme channels to follow. One post provided a list of extreme channels, and encouraged users to be on alert for “Leftists” who lurked on the app. The post read: “Hello Twitter/Parler refugees. If you are new to Telegram, here is a list of Nationalist and Patriot channels to follow. These people will help you understand what is happening and why. [list removed] If you are new to Telegram here is some general advice: 1) Do NOT use your real name/photo, 2) Do NOT dox yourselves (Leftists and feds roam around these chats), 3) Hide your phone number. To do this: Settings -> Privacy and Security -> Phone Number -> Nobody.” In some instances, threat actors decided to openly show their racist, antisemitic and accelerationist motivations to newcomers in the hopes of recruiting them. For instance, one post read: “Welcome to all my new Twitter and Parler refugees N*****, Hitler did nothing wrong, The holocaust was a lie, There are no political solutions, Voting will not remove them, You all have a lot of catching up to do.”

The dynamics on Terrorgram have changed following the election, as threat actors have risen from the extremist Terrorgram ecosystem to mingle in the spaces that were occupied by the conservative, MAGA, QAnon, Parler and Twitter refugees. Although the initial impetus for this was the potential pool of recruits, Terrorgram actors have begun integrating themselves a bit more into the publicly available IMVE ecosystems on Telegram. All the while, IMVE actors composed of conservative, MAGA, QAnon, Parler and Twitter refugees have sunk deeper into more extreme ecosystems.

An equilibrium has formed whereby Terrorgram now has a much larger potential audience and appears to be posting with more regularity. However, some of those who were deplatformed have begun sharing

more extreme narratives as there is no moderation or censorship taking place, allowing them to show their true colours. In QAnon circles, some adherents have looked for a better cause or something more goal-oriented which they can attach their conspiratorial mindset to. This has resolved into QAnon hybrids such as QAnon Proud Boys, QAnon Oath Keepers, QAnon III%, QAnon fascists, QAnon Boogaloo, QAnon White Nationalists, QAnon Great Replacement, QAnon and Traditionalism, and so on, meaning that factions of each of these movements have somewhat infused with QAnon ideology. This is a threat vector to keep an eye on, for as Argentino and Amarasingam wrote:

“QAnon has already led to several acts of violence and the time between radicalisation and mobilisation can be very short with cases measured in days. If more individuals with greater organisational skills and operational acumen seek to pursue QAnon’s agenda, it could eventually lead to more significant threats to public security and become a more impactful domestic terrorism threat.”²²⁰

Although the nexus of QAnon violence was highlighted on 6 January, this was not the first instance of violence of this kind. On 29 August 2020, German IMVE actors, QAnon supporters and anti-lockdown protesters attempted to storm Germany’s parliamentary building, occupying the steps leading up to the Reichstag.²²¹ The Capitol insurrection and the storming of the Reichstag are evidence not only of the increasingly global reach of QAnon, but also of how conspiracy theories and disinformation about the pandemic have rapidly evolved into extremist violence, attacks against critical infrastructure and threats to democratic institutions and against elected officials.

As QAnon continues to grow in salience transnationally and networks continues to form with more violently inclined threat actors, QAnon and other conspiracy-minded threat actors will continue to pose a novel threat, not only from the perspective of violent extremism, but also to critical infrastructure, public health and democratic institutions.

²²⁰ Amarasingam and Argentino, “The QAnon Conspiracy Theory”

²²¹ Esther Felden, Jordan Wildon, Anne Hohn and Lewis Sanders IV, “As Donald Trump Exits, QAnon Takes Hold in Germany”, *DW*, 19 January 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/as-donald-trump-exits-qanon-takes-hold-in-germany/a-56277928>; Katrin Bennhold, “Far-Right Germans Try to Storm Reichstag as Virus Protests Escalate”, *The New York Times*, 31 August 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/31/world/europe/reichstag-germany-neonazi-coronavirus.html>

3 The 6 January Insurrectionists: Narratives and Motivations

Common Narratives on 6 January

The 6 January insurrection saw the convergence of multiple previously ideologically distinct groups, individuals and narratives. While it is vital to understand the role of organised groups, analysis of a dataset of those charged in the insurrection compiled by researchers at George Washington University's Program on Extremism, reveals that, at the time of writing, only 12.8% of defendants were formal members of militant networks. Meanwhile, 31.9% of charged individuals were categorised as "organised clusters", such as family networks, and a majority of those charged, 55.2%, were "inspired believers", defined as individuals who appear to be unconnected to groups and who arranged their own attendance.²²² Therefore, the majority of actors present during the insurrection do not appear to have been formally attached to any group. These findings demand analysis of the ideologies and affiliations of the insurrectionists beyond the formal groups that have dominated public discussion and could have motivated individuals to take part.

It is clear that the insurrectionists were more ideologically and socially diverse than previously suggested. Pro-Trump conspiracy theorists joined armed militia members, and Orthodox Jews marched in the same crowd as avowed neo-Nazis. However, these groups were brought together by shared narratives about government totalitarianism, including electoral fraud, and the use and abuse of pandemic restrictions.

This section will investigate the common threads that run through the groups and individuals present, and the mobilisation mechanisms that brought ideologically diverse actors together. The insurrection on 6 January was the union of a "big tent" of usually distinct American far-right ideologies. This research will also consider how attitudes towards different protected groups, including Asian-Americans, Jewish people, women, and transgender individuals, played a role in radicalising the insurrectionists and how prejudices and conspiracy theories towards these groups mobilised them, and continue to influence the movement during the Biden administration.

Two prominent common narratives can be found among the 6 January insurrectionists, despite their ideological diversity. First, an emphasis on anti-government ideology will be explored by considering the commonalities among different conspiracy theories present among insurrectionists, including Great Reset, the New World Order conspiracy and QAnon. These anti-government ideologies manifested in the Stop the Steal movement and voter fraud conspiracy theories. Second, the vast prevalence of coronavirus misinformation and anti-vaccination conspiracy theories will be demonstrated.

²²² "This Is Our House! A Preliminary Assessment of the Capitol Hill Siege Participants", Program on Extremism, George Washington University, 2021 <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/This-Is-Our-House.pdf>

Anti-government Ideologies and Election Misinformation

Various conspiracy theories that have proliferated among American IMVE actors centre around an anti-government message. The Great Reset conspiracy theory emerged in the wake of the World Economic Forum's (WEF) June 2020 initiative to use the global crisis as a springboard for reducing economic disparity and addressing the climate crisis. Due to a fundamental mistrust of neo-liberal intergovernmental institutions and the often antisemitic assumptions of ulterior motives, Great Reset conspiracy theorists see the WEF's announcement as proof that the political elite are utilising the crisis to advance ultra-capitalism and totalitarianism at the expense of individual freedoms.²²³ The New World Order conspiracy, a feature of militia movements since the 1990s, similarly sees a global force, usually the United Nations, seeking global control and the removal of individual human rights and freedoms.²²⁴ QAnon, a relatively recent conspiracy theory, also buys into the narrative, painting a picture of a dishonest and maligned political elite, controlled by a shadowy global actor, which aims to restrict individual freedoms. Anti-government ideologies were promoted by Neo-Nazi groups who were also present, such as the Nationalist Social Club, posted to its Telegram on the day after the riot a picture of a stolen Capitol Police helmet with the caption "#DC #FuckThePolice", as shown in Figure 11.

In these ways, many conspiracy theories found to be central to the belief systems of insurrectionists are familiar tropes, repackaged for current events and recommunicated for different audiences.

For many insurrectionists, election fraud conspiracies were a realisation of existing opposition to liberal democratic governance. As it slowly became apparent that Donald Trump had lost the 2020 presidential election, the MAGA movement was already constructing false conspiracies and mobilising a movement behind allegations of voter fraud and a stolen election. Organisers such as Ali Alexander generated support for several Stop the Steal rallies outside state capitols on 14 and 30 November and 12 and 19 December, encouraging followers on Telegram to "light this country up" and "defend the Republic" by "fighting back". On 6 January, MAGA supporters rallied outside Congress, allegedly at the behest of Trump, wearing MAGA T-shirts and threatening to "kill every last communist who stands in Trump's way".²²⁵

Although not every participant of the insurrection may have been primarily motivated by a pro-Trump agenda, election misinformation and conspiracy theories still acted as a mobilising factor for the various movements that used such events and narratives as a springboard from which to project more radical agendas, radicalise a new pool of potential recruits and cause chaos, thereby weakening confidence in public institutions. It is this shared inherent mistrust of liberal democratic institutions that united the 6 January movement, transplanted to blame different actors with varying levels of explicitness, depending on the target audience and ideological focus of the perpetrator.

²²³ "The 'Great Reset' Conspiracy Flourished Amid Continued Pandemic", Anti-Defamation League, 29 December 2020, <https://www.adl.org/blog/the-great-reset-conspiracy-flourishes-amid-continued-pandemic>

²²⁴ Sam Jackson "Conspiracy Theories"

²²⁵ "This is Our House!", Program on Extremism, 2021.



Figure 11. Example of anti-establishment and anti-law enforcement content posted to an extremist Telegram channel.

COVID Conspiracy Theories

A second narrative shared by the insurrectionists is a belief that the coronavirus pandemic is being exaggerated or fabricated by institutions to intentionally suppress the freedoms of individual Americans. This storyline takes different forms across the ideological spectrum, from mere anti-lockdown narratives to using COVID as evidence that an evil cabal of elites is pulling strings behind authority figures. Since the start of the pandemic, anti-lockdown narratives and COVID misinformation have taken root within all elements of the far right. Tied to anti-establishment ideologies, the far right aims to play on health-related fears and uncertainties to “radicalise, recruit and inspire” followers,²²⁶ and to “normalise its views and make those of the political mainstream seem inadequate when it comes to explaining or resolving the crisis”.²²⁷

In the United States, COVID misinformation and conspiracy theories are closely tied to the movements that supported Donald Trump. Anatoliy Grudz and Philip Mai followed the journey of the #FilmYourHospital hashtag on Twitter, which aimed to “prove” that COVID was a hoax by demonstrating vacancies in hospitals. The study concluded that a majority of hashtag users were self-described Trump supporters and that the narrative was originally promoted by conservative politicians and far-right activists.²²⁸

226 “Member States Concerned by the Growing and Increasingly Transnational Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism”, United National Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, July 2020, https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CTED_Trends_Alert_Extreme_Right-Wing_Terrorism_JULY.pdf

227 Blyth Crawford, “Coronavirus and Conspiracies: How the Far Right is Exploiting the Pandemic”, King’s College London, 16 September 2020, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/coronavirus-and-conspiracies-how-the-far-right-is-exploiting-the-pandemic>

228 Anatoliy Grudz and Philip Mai, “Going Viral: How a Single Tweet Spawned a COVID Conspiracy Theory on Twitter”, *Big Data*, 2020.

A similar study conducted by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism showed the salience of anti-COVID narratives among Identitarian and National Socialist movements, identifying six key framings that such groups were employing to capitalise on the pandemic.²²⁹ Similarly, the existence of COVID hoax narratives has been well documented among QAnon communities.²³⁰ A diverse range of IMVE actors has developed specific narratives to explain the pandemic.

Discussions around the broad shared narratives of anti-establishment ideology and coronavirus conspiracy theories show how diverse individual actors were able to tailor such ideologies to their specific existing belief systems. The insurrectionists were a “big tent” of American IMVE ideologies and actors, which, and although they had once been mutually distinct, united behind commonalities on 6 January. The factors and contextual events that mobilised the insurrectionists to act on these ideologies on 6 January will be discussed later in this chapter.

From Common to Communal Narratives: 100 Days of the Biden Administration

The 6 January insurrection has resulted in ideological and potentially operational convergence across the American IMVE landscape. In this way, it is reminiscent of how the 2017 Unite the Right Charlottesville rally united various far-right elements, gained global headlines, and energised groups around a common ideological goal. A move towards a “big tent” enemy, which was first evidenced on 6 January, has since accelerated with the merging of various conspiracy theories. In this way, anti-government ideologies are no longer merely mutual, but rooted in a communal overarching narrative. This section will discuss the ways in which the shared narratives present on 6 January have changed, looking at the development of election misinformation, the convergence of anti-government conspiracy theories, and how IMVE actors have manipulated the evolving pandemic context.

Election Misinformation and the Decline of Stop the Steal

Since 6 January, election misinformation and voter fraud conspiracy theories have continued, generating increased relevance for the movement at key election moments. On 9 January, 100 armed protesters attended a “patriot rally” outside the Kentucky State Capitol, armed with zip ties and bearing militia group insignia, although the demonstration remained peaceful.²³¹ Protests outside state capitols continued in the weeks running up to the inauguration on 20 January, but due to increased security, movement decentralisation, decreased organisation and representation from fewer ideological movements, such rallies did not take violent actions such as those seen on 6 January.

²²⁹ Richard McNeil-Willson, “Framing in times of crisis: Responses to COVID amongst Far Right movements and organisations”, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague, June 2020

²³⁰ Amarasingam and Argentino, “The QAnon Conspiracy Theory”

²³¹ Tommy Beer, “Heavily Armed Protesters Gather Outside Kentucky Capitol For Militia Rally”, *Forbes*, 9 January 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tommybeer/2021/01/09/heavily-armed-protesters-gather-outside-kentucky-capitol-for-militia-rally/?sh=2f2c4d524763>

Since Joe Biden's inauguration on 20 January, fewer specifically pro-Trump protests have been seen, and the Stop the Steal movement has largely been reduced to online activity or forced to adopt alternative narratives. This may have in part been motivated by the dismissal of 59 out of 60 lawsuits alleging voter fraud, which were declared by top US federal agencies to be secure.²³² However, many among the Stop the Steal movement are distrustful of mainstream institutions so the failure of these lawsuits has been interpreted by some as further evidence of deep state corruption. Furthermore, a vast number of anti-Democrat conspiracies continue to be prevalent among existing Stop the Steal communities, meaning that election fraud narratives are likely to be a dominant narrative in upcoming elections. This is supported by researchers at the university of Chicago who estimate that violence stemming from stolen election narratives could re-emerge in primaries and mid-terms throughout the Biden administration.²³³

Conspiracy Theories and Anti-Covid Narratives

Ideological convergence has been demonstrated among various conspiracy theories popular among IMVE movements that played active roles in inciting violence on 6 January. Network mapping of the New World Order conspiracy theory conducted by the Network Contagion Research Institute (NCRI) confirms such findings, with mentions of "New World Order" and "NWO" spiking on fringe platforms after 6 January. Such conspiracies accuse the US Government of conspiring with a global New World Order in order to remove freedoms from Americans, such as gun confiscation, where the crossover between a secret global malignant actor and antisemitic tropes of global control is evident.²³⁴ These spikes are an expected reaction to the prominence that such narratives gained through coverage on 6 January, whereby the subsequent security crackdown, arrests of participants and social media bans were used as further evidence of the existence of a plotting political elite.

The NCRI further found numerous thematic changes to network clusters it has studied on fringe platforms since the insurrection, and concludes that the closest term to New World Order being used is now "takeover". A "coup" cluster has also emerged, which appears adjacent to "censorship", while the term "pharma", which sits next to "globalism", suggests the absorption of coronavirus conspiracies into New World Order conspiracy. Similarly, a growing "pedophile" cluster signals the adoption of QAnon narratives. These findings, partially driven by platform relocations, indicate the online convergence of various conspiracy theories and fringe groups, which advocate against a new "big tent" enemy. As NCRI notes, this unification has more potential to impact the vaccine effort in a material way.²³⁵

232 "Refuting the Myth of Voter Fraud Yet Again", *Brennan Center for Justice*, 6 January 2021, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/refuting-myth-voter-fraud-yet-again>; "Joint statement from elections infrastructure government coordinating council & the election infrastructure sector coordinating executive committees", *Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency*, 12 November 2020 <https://www.cisa.gov/news/2020/11/12/joint-statement-elections-infrastructure-government-coordinating-council-election>

233 Robert Pape and Chicago Project on Security and Threats, "Understanding American Domestic Terrorism: Mobilisation Potential and Risk Factors of a New Threat Trajectory", *The University of Chicago*, 6 April 2021, https://d3qi0qp55mx5f5.cloudfront.net/cpost/i/docs/americas_insurrectionists_online_2021_04_06.pdf?mtime=1617807009

234 "Militia Movement", *Anti-Defamation League*, <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/backgrounders/militia-movement>

235 "A Contagion of Institutional Distrust: Viral Disinformation of the COVID Vaccine and the Road to Reconciliation", *Network Contagion Research Institute*, https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/NCRI_Anti-Vaccination_v4.pdf

Various IMVE narratives have converged around coronavirus conspiracies with a renewed fervour. This follows the emergence of new COVID variants from December 2020, a subsequent spike in cases and the rollout of vaccines combined with discussions on vaccine passports. Therefore, narratives about government corruption have been repurposed and redirected to anti-vaccine campaigns, riding “the shift in national conversation” away from Trump as the election result was confirmed.²³⁶

Anti-government groups and individuals see vaccines and the enforced wearing of face masks as evidence of excessive government control. Telegram channels in which anti-government actors, such as the Proud Boys are active, have theorised that “if less people get vaccinated then the system will have to use more aggressive force on the rest of us to make us get the shot”. The idea behind this narrative is that if people are disobedient and force authorities to crack down on the public, the mainstream public will supposedly realise the true violent and oppressive nature of government, resulting in more support for anti-government extremists and ideally a mass uprising.

Furthermore, conspiracy theorists, such as those active in QAnon Telegram channels with over 120,000 subscribers, have shared articles allegedly proving links between Anthony Fauci and Moderna, theorising that the World Health Organisation is in the pay of the Chinese Communist Party, and that expenditure on vaccines is a cover for the administration’s money laundering. Ali Alexander, a key ideological figure in the Stop the Steal movement, agitated against the vaccine rollout, again suggesting on Telegram that Americans’ freedoms were being restricted by stating that there is “nothing more important than opposing vaccine passports and travel permission slips”, as “there’s no participating in a system that’ll make so obvious our own slavery”.

Similarly, Sidney Powell attempted to demonstrate that “some of the highest COVID death rates” that have occurred under Biden are evidence of administrative incompetence. She also cynically commented that “coronavirus is so real and so deadly that Joe Biden just authorised 25,000 migrants to enter our country from Mexico on foot”, using conspiracy narratives to mobilise in other policy areas and incite against migrant communities. Powell, a central ideological figure in election fraud conspiracy theories with nearly 500,000 followers on Telegram, shared a further article, stating that “under the guise of a real medical pandemic, we’re really moving into a coup situation, a police state situation”, demonstrating the convergence of anti-establishment, pro-Trump and conspiracy theorist narratives and the move towards a “big tent” enemy. Thus, the commonalities of anti-vaccine narratives across various IMVE actors demonstrate the increasing convergence of such ideologies.

²³⁶ Neil MacFarquhar, “Far-Right Extremists Move From ‘Stop the Steal’ to Stop the Vaccine”, *The New York Times*, 29 March 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/26/us/far-right-extremism-anti-vaccine.html?smid=tw-share>

Mobilising Factors

The 6 January insurrectionists shared common narratives and ideologies but were brought together under specific circumstances by a diversity of mobilising factors. IMVE actors not only presented common narratives in the run-up to the insurrection, but demanded actions and solutions, asking more of their followers than just belief. This section will discuss the contextual factors that established the conditions for building a mass movement and the mobilisation factors used by IMVE social movements to recruit followers towards the insurrection.

COVID Denial Mobilisation

Action-oriented movements, such as extremist groups, have often capitalised on crises, utilising existing panic and fear to mobilise vulnerable people into action. Scapegoating, conspiracy theories and disinformation are evidenced across various ideological streams of the far right, which has used the pandemic for mobilisation, contributing to the presence of a multi-ideological mass movement on 6 January.

Particularly in the case of the coronavirus pandemic, the recorded growth in extremist material present on social media and the socio-economic shockwave generated by lockdowns may well have contributed to increased attempts from IMVE actors to radicalise masses.²³⁷ The imposition of specific health measures in order to stem the spread of the pandemic, such as mandatory face mask use, was utilised by IMVE groups as evidence of a national or global conspiracy, which emphasised the responsibility of individuals to oppose a growing threat to individual freedoms.²³⁸

In extreme right circles, apocalyptic narratives are used to entice new followers and agitate for systemic change, with one Telegram chat commenting that “the more things destabilise the easier they are to continue to keep in flux ... now is the time to push when things are already teetering on the edge”.²³⁹ This comment is indicative of extremist movements accelerationist desires to further societal discord to the point of collapse. Especially in the American context, delayed responses and repeated disinformation from the Trump administration itself deepened the public’s confusion, creating more opportunities for extremist exploitation and mass mobilisation and generating the conditions for the 6 January mass movement.

Discontent with Presidential Election Results

The Stop the Steal movement was not only motivated by insidious anti-democratic conspiracy theories, but also simply by the loss of policymaking control over issues that were priorities to the MAGA movement. In this way, the broader context of the presidential

237 Abdul Basit, “The COVID Pandemic: An Opportunity for Terrorist Groups?”, *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* vol.12 no.3, April 2020: pp.7–12

238 Lauren Aratani, “How did face masks become a political issue in America?”, *The Guardian*, 29 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/29/face-masks-us-politics-coronavirus>

239 Jason Wilson, “Disinformation and blame: How America’s far right is capitalizing on coronavirus”, *The Guardian*, 19 March 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/19/america-far-right-coronavirus-outbreak-trump-alex-jones>

election and key debates in American political discourse cannot be ignored as mobilising factors.

For example, research conducted by the Chicago Project on Security and Threats has shown, across three studies, that Great Replacement narratives, which argue that white Americans are being replaced by immigrant communities in a “white genocide” orchestrated by liberal political elites, are the most consistent driver of participation in the Capitol riots.²⁴⁰ Such narratives have been instrumental in discussions on immigration and refugee rights and treatment during the Trump presidency, which were key issues at the ballot box.

A second policy area in which the Trump movement saw dim prospects under the new Biden administration was the gun lobby. For militia movements, gun ownership is framed as a basic freedom and any attempt to confiscate arms or modify relevant legislation is viewed as unconstitutional. With the election of a perceived anti-gun administration, militia members who saw gun confiscation as imminent would have been further mobilised to protest the confirmation of the election results.

In these ways, contextual events and narratives, including the presidential election, a subsequent misinformation campaign and the existing pandemic context, mobilised individuals to participate on 6 January. These unique factors explain the presence of diverse IMVE narratives at the insurrection and mobilising techniques used by organised groups and existing social movement leaders to encourage attendance.

Looking ahead beyond the first 100 days of the Biden administration, research by the Chicago Project on Security and Threats has shown that 4% of its nationally representative sample of American adults both believe that the election was stolen and are willing to engage in violent protest. It therefore predicts a large mobilisation potential, at least the size of the US National Guard, and up to 3.6 million people in total.²⁴¹ If accurate, such estimations would represent a significant security threat in the United States, especially in light of high social media presence recorded among this 4%, who may therefore be vulnerable to online radicalisation, which could lead to single actor attacks. This has been demonstrated in protests since 6 January, where actors have united around various mobilising factors, such as the 20 March “World Wide Demonstration”, promoted among Telegram channels that advocated for Trump and insurrectionist narratives. Protests in multiple European cities opposing pandemic restrictions, supported by conspiracist movements and extreme right groups, demonstrated the maintained convergence of these previously distinct issues.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² “Anti-lockdown protests erupt across Europe as tempers fray over tightening restrictions”, *France24*, 21 March 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20210321-anti-lockdown-protests-erupt-across-europe-as-tempers-fray-over-tightening-restrictions>

Protesting the Conviction of Derek Chauvin for the Murder of George Floyd

Throughout 2020, online far-right communities have been sensitive and highly responsive to the reignited BLM movement, following the murder of George Floyd. “White Lives Matter” narratives have exploded in reaction, and BLM is seen as a violent enemy. On 20 April 2021, Derrick Chauvin, the officer accused of murdering Floyd was formally found guilty of murder. The guilty verdict was seen as inevitable by many on the far right in a context where governments are perceived to bend to the will of radical leftists and BLM, who are seen to promote black supremacism and violence, and are understood as an existential threat to white America.

For some, the guilty verdict was proof of a leftist chokehold on the courts, where conservatives were complicit in building institutional anti-right bias.²⁴³ Others diagnosed the issue as symptomatic of an anti-white deep-state which seeks to replace white people and is in the pocket of “a sadistic, genocidal Jewish occupation”, as one Telegram user commented.²⁴⁴ These narratives were shared by various previously distinct actors across the IMVE landscape.²⁴⁵

Compounded by the loss of confidence in the executive and legislative branches of government generated by election fraud conspiracies, the far-right movement sharply lost confidence in the judiciary, and many therefore no longer saw solutions within the political system. One 4chan user despaired “well that’s the final nail in the coffin, vote doesnt [sic] matter, courts are rigged, media is completely censored. There is only one path to salvation and it doesnt [sic] involve being peaceful”, showing how some are seeing the Chauvin verdict as an inflection point towards violence. Accelerationist actors also capitalised on the events, commenting on Telegram that “American needs to lose so we can win. Embrace it. We can build a nation later”. A combination of election fraud and judicial corruption narratives generate a concerning capacity for incitement to violence, where no non-violent solution is seen.

Such narratives, which have grown significant support throughout 2020, should be carefully monitored alongside key moments in the BLM movement. Every new video of a black individual shot by a police officer is further proof to IMVE actors of racial conflicts between black and white people, further generating the need for white people to mobilise against the perceived threat. As such, the growth in BLM-related popular narratives is likely to continue to spark the growth in White Lives Matter movements. With the trial of Kyle Rittenhouse, accused of killing two people in Kenosha, Wisconsin, expected later in 2021, IMVE actors are already mobilising, and are “guessing it’ll go the very same way [as the Chauvin trial]”.²⁴⁶ In other words, such actors will manipulate framings of events in order to confirm existing worldviews, and further radicalise on this basis.

243 Hannah Rose and Blyth Crawford, “Today it’s Chauvin, Tomorrow it’ll be Another White Man”: Far-Right Reactions to the Conviction of Derek Chauvin”, *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation*, 21 April 2020, 2, <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ICSR-Insight-Today-its-Chauvin-Tomorrow-itll-be-Another-White-Man-Far-Right-Reactions-to-the-Conviction-of-Derek-Chauvin.pdf>

244 Ibid, 3.

245 @_MAArgentino, “Tweet by Marc-André Argentino”, *Twitter*, 22 April 2021, 12:46AM, https://twitter.com/_MAArgentino/status/1385017069834489856?s=20

246 Hannah Rose and Blyth Crawford, “Today it’s Chauvin, Tomorrow it’ll be Another White Man”, 8.

Anti-Asian Racism, Antisemitism, Misogyny and Transphobia

Various common narratives and mobilising factors that drove the 6 January insurrection have generated specific negative impacts on different groups with protected characteristics. Spikes in anti-Asian sentiment resulting from discriminatory narratives on pandemic origins are well documented. A first section here will consider how such prejudices are integrated into the MAGA movement and insurrection actors. Second, various narratives of antisemitism among insurrectionists will be discussed, moving away from a singular understanding of far-right antisemitism to build and analyse a more complex picture of competing ideologies about Jews and Israel. The centrality of misogyny in this overt and proudly chauvinistic mass movement will be analysed, as well as prevailing narratives of transphobia.

Anti-Asian Narratives on 6 January

Since the start of the pandemic, conspiracy theories whipped up online and in the former President's office concerning China and Chinese people have resulted in increased stereotyping and targeting of Asian-American communities. Such ideas have been incorporated into broader conspiracy theories by IMVE actors, blaming Asian-Americans for the loss of individual freedoms and subsequently inciting hatred against them. In the MAGA movement specifically, there has been a clear direction of influence from Trump to his followers, which has subsequently resulted in greater online and offline abuse of Asian-Americans. This movement has been empowered by the high office of their ideological leader.

Anonymous users on pro-Trump forums, such as patriots.win (which describes itself as a “high-energy rally for supporters of President Trump”), have described elaborate conspiracy theories that intrinsically intertwine anti-Asian sentiment with support for Trump and opposition to Biden. According to one anonymous user, the alleged election fraud originated from the Chinese Community Party's “bio weapon”, with the subsequent complicity of the mainstream media and the Democratic Party. Figure 12 is a screenshot taken by a user and uploaded to the forum, in which the user lays out the breadth of their conspiracy theory, stretching from the origins of coronavirus to election fraud. A second user noted that a “concerted effort to hype up ‘anti-Asian racism’” is clearly a “plan”, perhaps to keep China from blaming them for the “China virus”. Thereby, the conspiracy theory is also used to explain and delegitimise the rise in anti-Asian racism.

Social media data demonstrates how surges in online anti-Asian hate are inspired by Trump and the wider MAGA movement. Analysis of 41 million tweets collected by HateLab from 12 March to 1 April 2020 shows that in the 48 hours after Trump first used the phrase “Chinese virus”, the number of Anti-Asian hate tweets increased by 656%.²⁴⁷ Similarly, data from the Anti-Defamation League showed an 85% increase in anti-Asian sentiment on Twitter following news that Trump had contracted COVID.²⁴⁸ These expressions of anti-Asian sentiment,

247 “COVID political commentary linked to online hate crime”, Cardiff University, 29 March 2021, <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/news/view/2510296-COVID-political-commentary-linked-to-online-hate-crime>

248 “Online Hate and Harassment: The American Experience 2021”, Anti-Defamation League Center for Technology & Society, March 2021, <https://www.adl.org/online-hate-2021>

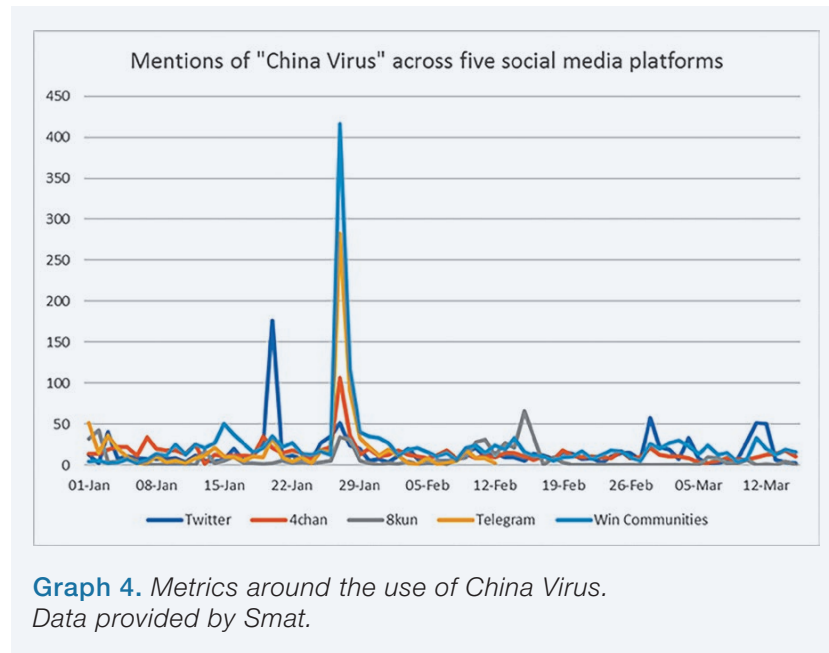
- **The China Virus was a bio weapon** released by the CCP to get Trump voted out because he threatened their plans for economic domination.
- **China virus case/death counts in 2020 were falsely amplified** for political purposes using PCR tests that were too sensitive.
 - PCR test sensitivity was lowered after the election.
- **Democrats used the China Virus to crush the economy with lockdowns** to get Trump voted out and create more government reliance.
- It didn't work. **Trump still won the election by a landslide**, but fraudulent votes and electronic vote switching in Pennsylvania, Georgia, Wisconsin, Michigan, Arizona and Nevada gave Biden the win.
- The fraud also incorrectly **gave control of the House & Senate to Democrats.**
- MSM and social media censored any truth about the virus or the election fraud.

Figure 12. Example of anti-Asian conspiracy theories taken from a pro-Trump forum.

a majority of which were shown to originate in the United States, ranged from blaming Chinese individuals for limitations on personal freedoms to calling for extreme violence.

Hate crime reporting data and social media analysis of anti-Asian narratives has consistently demonstrated a marked increase since the start of the pandemic. Polling from Ipsos in April 2020 recorded that 44% of respondents said that a specific group or organisation is responsible for the pandemic, 66% of whom mentioned China. Some 32% of respondents had witnessed someone blaming Asian people for the pandemic, which rose to 60% among Asian respondents.²⁴⁹ Similar research from Pew Research Center in June 2020 recorded that 31% of Asian-American adults say that they have been subject to slurs or jokes due to their race or ethnicity since the start of the pandemic, with 39% saying that this has become more

249 "Public Poll Findings and Methodology; New Center for public Integrity/Ipsos Poll finds most Americans say the Coronavirus Pandemic is a Natural Disaster", Ipsos, 28 April 2020, https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2021-03/topline_usatoday_covid_and_asian_sentiment_032121.pdf



common since the pandemic's inception.²⁵⁰ Subsequently, first spiking in March and April amid the first lockdown in many Western countries, anti-Asian hate crimes surged by 145% in 2020 compared to 2019,²⁵¹ with the Stop AAPI Hate Reporting Centre recording 3,795 incidents of hate against Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders between 19 March 2020 and 28 February 2021.²⁵²

Anti-Asian Narratives 100 Days into the Biden Administration

The 6 January insurrection reinvigorated discussions about China on social media platforms where IMVE actors are known to be active. Social media data tracking mentions of the term "China Virus" on five such platforms recorded a significant spike across all platforms on 27 January 2021 as shown in Graph 4. This trend followed news the previous day that President Biden was "expected to direct federal agencies to examine if xenophobic references such as 'China Virus' appear in existing policies, directives, or on government websites".²⁵³ Pro-Trump media site Gateway Pundit published an article with the headline "INSANE: Joe Biden Signs Executive Order Banning the Term 'China Virus'",²⁵⁴ and a picture showing Biden wearing a leash being led by Xi Jinping (Figure 13). The article was widely shared on

250 Neil Ruiz, Juliana Horowitz and Christine Tamir, "Many Black and Asian Americans Say They Have Experienced Discrimination Amid the COVID-18 Outbreak", Pew Research Center, 1 July 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/07/01/many-black-and-asian-americans-say-they-have-experienced-discrimination-amid-the-covid-outbreak/>

251 "FACT SHEET: Anti-Asian Prejudice March 2021", Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino, March 2021, <https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/FACT%20SHEET-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%20rev%203.21.21.pdf>

252 Russell Jeung, Aggie Yellow Horse, Tara Popovic and Richard Lim, "Stop AAPI Hate National Report", Stop AAPI Hate, 12 March 2021, <https://stopaapihate.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Stop-AAPI-Hate-National-Report-210316.pdf>

253 Oliver O'Connell, "Biden expected to ban term 'China virus' in crackdown on Covid racism", *The Independent*, 29 January 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/biden-covid-racism-china-virus-b1792937.html>

254 Jim A Hof, "INSANE: Joe Biden Signs Executive Order Banning the Term 'China Virus'", *Gateway Pundit*, 26 January 2021, <https://www.thegatewaypundit.com/2021/01/insane-joe-biden-signs-executive-order-banning-term-china-virus/>



Figure 13. Example of anti-Asian imagery from the Gateway Pundit site.

Twitter, with MAGA supporters urging their followers to “get CHINA VIRUS trending”.

A rise in anti-Asian online hate was felt by the Asian-American community in the wake of the 6 January insurrection. An Anti-Defamation League survey of online harassment conducted by YouGov between 7 and 15 January 2021 found that Asian-American respondents experienced the largest year-on-year rise in severe online harassment of any other minority group measured, rising to 17% from 11% in 2020.²⁵⁵ In the first two months of 2021, the Stop AAPI Hate reporting centre has recorded 503 incidents, demonstrating that the increased levels of anti-Asian hate recorded in 2020 have been sustained.²⁵⁶

Anti-Asian online hate and incitement to violence has translated into offline attacks against the Asian-American community, such as assault and racial slurs against an Asian-American woman in New York.²⁵⁷ A tragically notable incident was the mass shooting at three massage parlours in Atlanta, Georgia, on 16 March. While the Sheriff’s Office announced that the shooter was motivated by a “sex addiction” rather

255 Anti-Defamation League, “Online Hate and Harassment: The American Experience 2021”, ADL Center for Technology & Society, March 2021, <https://www.adl.org/online-hate-2021>

256 Jeung, Horse, Popovic and Lim, “Stop AAPI Hate National Report”

257 “Suspect held for repeatedly kicking Asian American woman in New York”, *BBC News*, 31 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-56587175>

than anti-Asian hate,²⁵⁸ the attacker's over-sexualisation of East Asian women and their places of work was derived from a political context that racialises sexual promiscuity and an online environment in which negative rhetoric about Asian people was commonplace. Following the attack, extremist online spaces used racialised slurs, which depicted East Asian women as inferior and said that the victims deserved to be killed.²⁵⁹ Even if the attacker was not motivated by anti-Asian hatred, his actions were interpreted as such by extremist networks and contributed to the celebration of racist violence online, further radicalising digital communities against Asian people.

Antisemitism and Attitudes towards Jewish People on 6 January

Antisemitism, a common hatred among IMVE actors, does not manifest monolithically, with diverse expressions emanating from different groups and subcultures. Antisemitism monitoring body Community Security Trust noted that "antisemitism was not central to the protests in Washington D.C., although the presence of antisemitic activists has been well documented",²⁶⁰ Although antisemitism was not a primary motivating narrative, various conspiracy theories that were key to the insurrection are reminiscent of old antisemitic tropes. This section will demonstrate the diversity of both positive and negative attitudes towards Jews among the insurrectionists and explore the presence of Jewish individuals, organisations and symbols at the insurrection.

Overtly national socialist and antisemitic elements were certainly present among insurrectionists. A photo of a man, later identified as Robert Packer,²⁶¹ wearing a "Camp Auschwitz; work brings freedom" T-shirt was widely shared on social media. Video footage and photos of the insurrection also show individuals making Nazi salutes,²⁶² and confirmed the presence of known antisemitic actors, such as Nick Fuentes' Groyper Army and social media personality Tim Gionet, known as Baked Alaska.²⁶³ While such figures were not in the majority, the threat of their presence towards Jewish people should be noted. Furthermore, while many people did not participate in overtly neo-Nazi actions, their tolerance of clothing mocking Auschwitz and Nazi salutes is demonstrative of, at the very least, a broad indifference to severe antisemitism.

QAnon antisemitism mirrors age-old tropes about Jewish control of government, media and global finances, as alleged in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Similarly, blood libel, a trope with medieval origins that fantasises that Jewish people kill Christian children in order to drink their blood, has been reappropriated to allege

258 Khaleda Rahman, "Atlanta Suspect Robert Aaron Long Says Motive Not Race, But Sex Addiction", *Newsweek*, 17 March 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/atlanta-suspect-robert-aaron-long-motive-not-race-sex-addiction-1576851>

259 Meili Criezis, "Rhetoric of Hate: A Case Study in Anti-East Asian Bigotry", *Global Network on Extremism and Technology*, 18 March 2021, <https://gnet-research.org/2021/03/18/rhetoric-of-hate-a-case-study-in-anti-east-asian-bigotry/>

260 "Capitalising on Violence: How British extremists reacted to last night's horrific scenes in Washington D.C.", *Community Security Trust*, 7 January 2021, <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2021/01/07/capitalising-on-violence-how-british-far-right-extremists-reacted-to-last-nights-horrific-scenes-in-washington-d-c>

261 United States District Court for the District of Columbia criminal complaint against Robert Packer, 12 January 2021, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Robert%20Packer%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>

262 "Member of mob at Capitol appears to perform Nazi salute", *The Washington Post*, 6 January 2021, 0:47, https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/national/member-of-mob-at-capitol-appears-to-perform-nazi-salute/2021/01/06/2d7e1895-62ba-443c-b21f-9087fa1bf401_video.html

263 Kat Tenbarge, "White nationalist Baked Alaska livestreamed himself from inside the US Capitol as he joined rioters", *Insider*, 6 January 2021, <https://www.insider.com/washington-dc-protest-livestream-baked-alaska-us-capitol-riot-trump-2021-1>

that American politicians are killing children for similar purposes. As Jewish Studies professor Magda Teter notes, although Q's blood libel narrative does not explicitly reference Jews, "people are going to start googling 'killing children for blood'", which "will lead them to antisemitism even if they may not be initially inclined".²⁶⁴ Accusations of blood libel have been used as justifications for anti-Jewish pogroms throughout history.

Among the groups most prominently identified at the insurrection, such as the Proud Boys and Boogaloo Bois, attitudes towards Jewish people and Judaism are not as straightforward. In order to gain acceptance and mainstream support, some IMVE ideologies attempt to move away from an overtly antisemitic image, which is recognised to be unpopular among the public and any potential pool of recruits. Even if such elements are still present, due to the ideological motivations and circumstances behind the insurrection, in movements such as the Boogaloos, "gun ownership and individual liberty generally precede white supremacist and neo-Nazi sentiments".²⁶⁵

Proud Boys leader Gavin McInnes demonstrates key features of a rising trend of far-right philosemitism, which sees Jewish people as allies, both due to perceived whiteness and successful assimilation, and an understanding that Jewish people and Israel are allies in anti-Muslim agendas.²⁶⁶ McInnes presents himself as a strong supporter of Israel's right-wing administration and policies in his video series in Israel for Rebel Media, and claims to support Jewish people, while simultaneously employing various Holocaust revisionist narratives in recounting his trip through Yad Vashem Holocaust museum.²⁶⁷ An Israeli Proud Boys chapter, which has gained little traction, is used to deflect accusations of racism, allowing the group to call themselves a "multi-racial club".²⁶⁸

However, McInnes has shown little political will to moderate antisemitism within the Proud Boys, who continue to attract white supremacists.²⁶⁹ Examples from the 12 December Stop the Steal rally include a Proud Boys member photographed in what appears to be a group-branded T-shirt bearing the slogan 6MWE, implying that the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust were not enough, and another member who attacked a counter-protester while his colleague shouted "fucking Jew". Kyle Chapman, formerly a prominent Proud Boy, also orchestrated a failed coup for control of the group promising to "confront the Zionist criminals who wish to destroy our civilisation".²⁷⁰ This indicates the internal divisions on the issue of attitudes towards Jews. While the Proud Boys, who were integral to the organising and

264 Ben Sales, "QAnon is an old form of anti-Semitism in a new package, experts say", *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 18 September 2020, https://www.jta.org/2020/09/18/politics/qanon-is-an-old-form-of-anti-semitism-in-a-new-package-experts-say?_ga=2.201710289.1156040017.1616171445-149317590.1616171445

265 Alex Newhouse and Nate Gunesch, "The Boogaloo Movement Wants To Be Seen as Anti-Racist, But It Has a White Supremacist Fringe", Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, 30 May 2020, <https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/academics/centers-initiatives/ctec/ctec-publications/boogaloo-movement-wants-be-seen-anti-racist-it>

266 Hannah Rose, "The New Philosemitism; Exploring a Changing Relationship Between Jews and the Far Right", International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, 2020, <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ICSR-Report-The-New-Philosemitism-Exploring-a-Changing-Relationship-Between-Jews-and-the-Far-Right.pdf>

267 Wigan Pierre, "Gavin McInnes: 'I'm becoming anti-Semitic'", YouTube, 30 November 2017, 7:07, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJ79gyvaxWs>; Jeffrey Greg, "Gavin McInnes in Tel Aviv, wishing to be a Nazi", YouTube, 17 March 2017, 4:12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRHNaRxxlTU>; Rebel News, "What Gavin McInnes really thinks about the Holocaust", YouTube, 12 March 2017, 2:21, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coLUicGXbZ0>; Rebel News, "A Nazi Take on Israel", YouTube, 10 March 2017, 2:38, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMCwzthZYI>

268 Molly Boigon, "There's a Proud Boys chapter in Israel", *Forward*, 1 October 2020, <https://forward.com/news/455608/theres-a-proud-boys-chapter-in-israel-stand-by-debate-trump/>

269 "Proud Boys", Anti-Defamation League, <https://www.adl.org/proudboys>

270 Ewan Palmer "Proud Boys Infighting Sees Leading Member Form Breakaway Group to Fight 'White Genocide'", 11 November 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/proud-boys-based-stickman-enrique-tarrio-goys-1546597>

operations of the 6 January insurrection, exhibit varying degrees of antisemitic motivations, their tolerance of more vicious antisemitism demonstrates the spurious nature of their attempts to present as allies to Jewish people.

Despite clear antisemitic undertones to the conspiracy theories that underpinned the insurrection, pro-Israel and Jewish participants were present. Israeli flags were photographed at the protest and in car parades,²⁷¹ demonstrating that the adherents understood pro-Israel narratives to be relevant to the protest. Moreover, Orthodox Jewish people were present at the insurrection, such as Aaron Motofsky, who was pictured wearing fur and a bulletproof vest inside the Capitol building.²⁷² Similarly, various Orthodox groups and individuals were found to have supported and attended the events of 6 January.²⁷³ The appearance of neo-Nazis and religious Jews under the same banner demands researchers to reassess contemporary understandings of IMVE antisemitism and the extent to which far-right groups may choose to accommodate and work with Jewish extremists in order to achieve common goals. The Anti-Defamation League has documented how the presence of Jewish and Israeli individuals and symbols has been utilised by IMVE conspiracy theorists to suggest that insurrectionists were manipulated by Jews in order to discredit Trump and paint “patriot Conservatives” as “terrorists and fascists”.²⁷⁴

This brief analysis has demonstrated that sentiments about Judaism and Jewish people among those present at the 6 January insurrection were not monolithic. While many in the crowd were not primarily motivated by antisemitic ideologies, their complicity in its proliferation and their failure effectively to oppose antisemitism speaks to the rising normalisation of anti-Jewish narratives. While mainstream media coverage has focused on purely neo-Nazi symbols, such as Packer’s Auschwitz hoodie, it has neglected a threat of a different nature: a broader crowd that projects subtler, but no less dangerous antisemitic tropes.

Antisemitism 100 Days into the Biden Administration

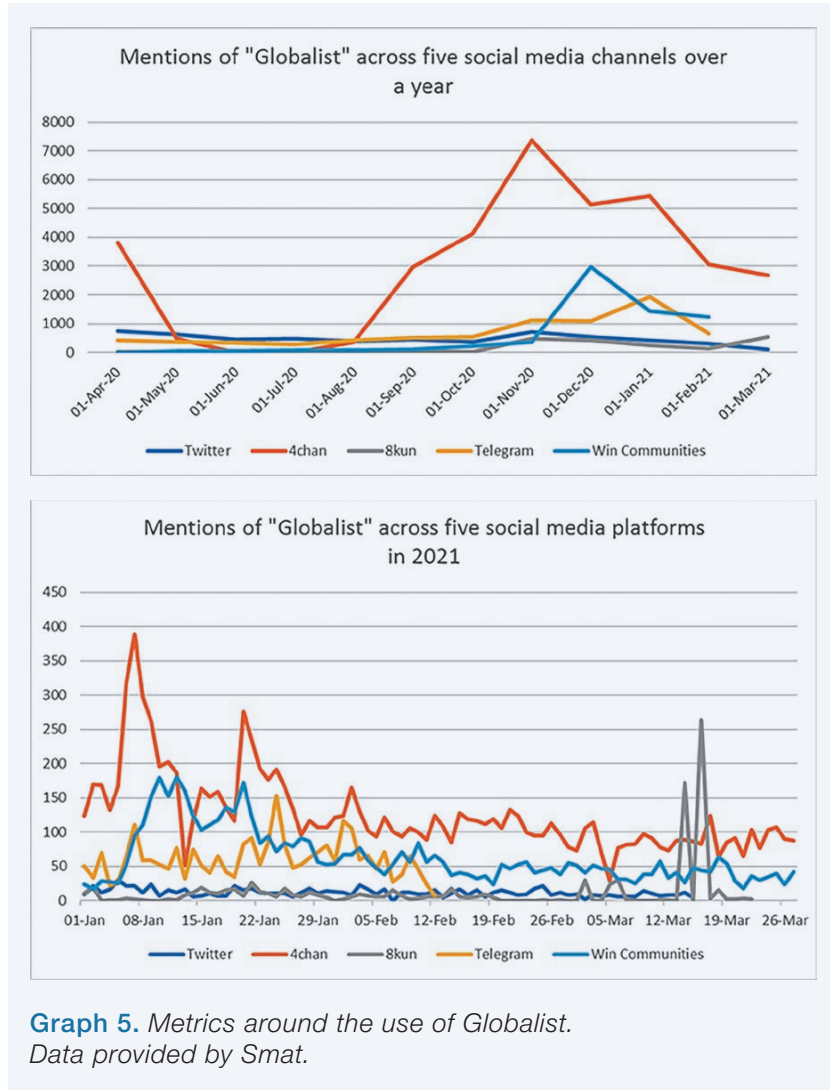
Since the 6 January insurrection, the nature and prioritisation of antisemitism within the American far right has evolved, in line with the merging of distinct conspiracy theories. Data collected using Smat reveals how mentions of the term “globalist” spike across five social media platforms known to be used by radical elements of the MAGA movement during the 2020 election period, with a secondary spike on alternative platforms 4chan and Telegram in January 2021. “Globalists” are described on IMVE Telegram channels as bankers, politicians, communists and monopolistic corporations, all of which are common dog whistles for Jews, depicted in Nazi propaganda as rootless global cosmopolitans. Telegram channels sometimes refer explicitly to the “Judeo-Globalist” system, whose destruction is key to antisemitic conspiracist thinking. Indeed, closer analysis of the post-insurrection period shows this secondary spike to be

271 @andyratto, Twitter, 6 January 2021, 4:19PM, <https://twitter.com/andyratto/status/1346853899169386498>

272 Danielle Ziri, JTA and Shira Hanau, “FBI raids home of Capitol rioter, Orthodox Jewish son of N.Y. judge”, *Haaretz*, 13 January 2021, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/fbi-raids-home-of-orthodox-jewish-son-of-new-york-judge-over-capitol-riot-1.9447361>

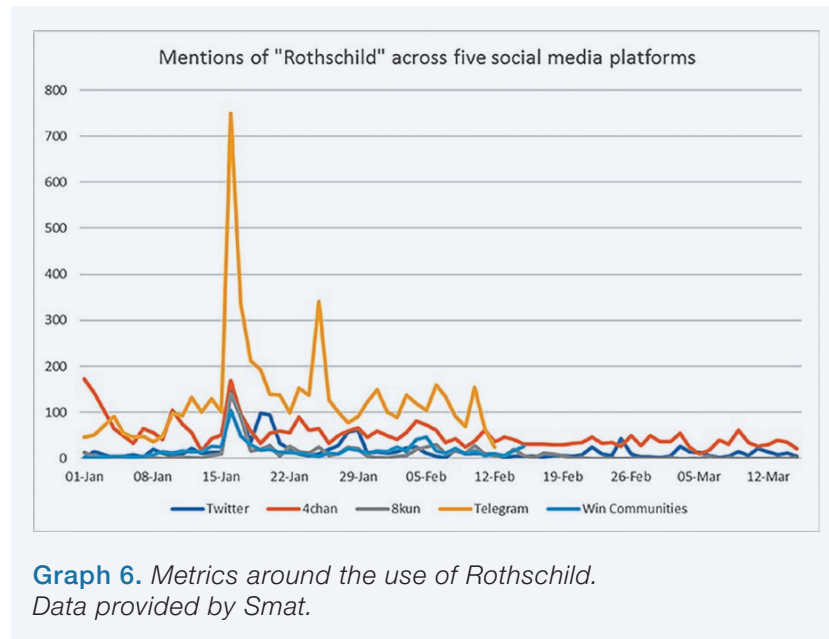
273 Shira Hanau, “Orthodox media support for Capitol mob roils Long Island Jewish communities”, *Times of Israel*, 13 January 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/orthodox-media-support-for-capitol-mob-roils-long-island-jewish-communities/>

274 “Antisemites Implicate Jews, Zionists in DC Violence”, Anti-Defamation League, 7 January 2021, <https://www.adl.org/blog/antisemites-implicate-jews-zionists-in-dc-violence>



influenced directly by the 6 January insurrection, with a maintained higher level of mentions of the term throughout the subsequent months. A specific peak in mentions of the term “globalist” can be seen on 20 January, the day of Joe Biden’s inauguration. Similarly, a Telegram channel with over 100,000 followers that promoted the 20 March World Wide Rally for Freedom stated that its aim was to dismantle “banks, politicians, monopolists, globalists”, showing such conspiracy theories to be central to post-6 January organising.

A significant finding of Smat data shows that mentions of “Rothschild” experience a spike across all five social media platforms on 15 January, the date that Swiss banker Benjamin de Rothschild died. Whereas on mainstream platform Twitter, mentions do not necessarily reflect the level of antisemitism, on fringe forum patriots.win, the vast majority of mentions were accompanied by antisemitic rhetoric. Anonymous user Acala’s comment that “this man was one of the top masters and extremely evil”, and that his death is “incredible news for humanity” was upvoted over 4,000 times. Other conspiracists asked “what the fuck is going on??”, given that “Washington DC is being occupied by troops and now we have a dead Rothschild??”, seeking to connect unrelated events in antisemitic conspiratorial thinking.



Graph 6. Metrics around the use of Rothschild.
Data provided by Smat.

Since *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, antisemitism has been central to conspiracies of excessive elite control of governmental and economic systems, and this trend will continue. Specifically, Jews have often acted as the common enemy of “big tent” conspiracy theories, blamed for any oppression that a far-right group may allege it feels. As various conspiracy theories combine, it may transpire that the common enemy is found to be Jewish communities and a subsequent spike in anti-Jewish conspiracy theories and offline action may occur.

Misogyny

While women have undoubtedly been key players in the MAGA movement, with many making their presence felt at the Capitol insurrection, misogynistic narratives were emboldened under the Trump administration and are demonstrable across a number of IMVE actors in this space. According to the feminist scholar Kate Manne, misogyny is a “political phenomenon” that operates within a patriarchal society, which exists as a mechanism to control, punish and police women who challenge male dominance and patriarchal norms.²⁷⁵ During Trump’s first presidential campaign, traditional masculinity was reasserted, as Trump and his campaign advisers promoted the idea of the “strong man”, with Sebastian Gorka declaring in 2016 that the “era of the pyjama boy is over January 20, and the alpha males are back.”²⁷⁶

Indeed, the numerous allegations of sexual misconduct committed by Trump himself and the brazen sexist comments he made did little to dissuade voters from turning out en masse to vote him into office, including those on the Christian right, who one may not have expected to back such a candidate. The Anti-Defamation League have argued that his victory was a “glorious vindication of

²⁷⁵ Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (London: Penguin Books), 2019, p.38
²⁷⁶ Fox News, “Gorka: The alpha males are back on January 20th”, YouTube, 3:26 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUMQ7hWpX6g>

misogynists' worldview", particularly as it was secured in spite of his bragging about the sexual assault of women in public.²⁷⁷ Further studies have revealed a positive correlation between the male and female endorsement of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal norms and support of Trump,²⁷⁸ in addition to a perceived victimhood and dread that white men feel about their place in the world.²⁷⁹ Throughout his presidency, Trump continued to weaponise gender relations to his advantage, persistently denouncing the #MeToo movement as a scary time for young men in America,²⁸⁰ and once exclaiming to a crowd that men were "petrified" to speak to women anymore.²⁸¹

Arguably, the online ecosystem known as the "Manosphere" has imbued misogynistic and anti-feminist narratives with a new lease of life in recent years, further entrenching these attitudes in more overt political movements in the United States. The Manosphere has been described as a loose coalition of actors that are broadly united by a favouring of traditional roles and a liberation of a life of "feminist delusion". It includes a multiplicity of groups and interests from Men's Rights Activists, Pick Up Artists, Men Going Their Own Way and Involuntary Celibates, known as Incels. Participants of the Manosphere overwhelmingly subscribe to the philosophy of the "red pill", a symbolic act based on a scene in the 1999 film *The Matrix* in which the protagonist chooses to take the red pill and thus wake up to see the world as it truly is.²⁸² If someone is "red-pilled" it means they have been enlightened to the feminist agenda, in which men are the real victims.

This trope of awakening can be witnessed across the alt right, connecting adherents of the Manosphere to this broader extremist identity. Indeed, according to Ashley Matthias, the alt-right deploys misogyny as a first outreach mechanism to potential recruits, conveying a sense of loss and that they are in some way owed something that feminism has stolen from them.²⁸³ It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that findings from a February 2021 survey by researchers at the University of Washington on MAGA supporter beliefs found a robust correlation between sexist attitudes and MAGA membership,²⁸⁴ with over 75% of respondents agreeing that women seek special favours, feminists make unreasonable demands of men and feminists seek more power than men.²⁸⁵

On breaking down the groups involved in the insurrection more specifically, Proud Boys have arguably displayed the most overt forms of misogyny and chauvinism. Members have described themselves as "Western chauvinists", in which prospective members of the fraternity must declare "I am a Western chauvinist, and I refuse to apologise for

277 "When Women are the Enemy: The Intersection of Misogyny and White Supremacy", Anti-Defamation League, p.14, <https://www.adl.org/media/11707/download>

278 Theresa K Vecchio and Nathaniel E C Schermerhorn, "Hegemonic masculinity Predicts 2016 and 2020 Voting Candidate Evaluations", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* vol.118 no. 2, 12 January 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2020589118>.

279 Diana Mutz, "Status Threat, Not Economic Hardship, Explains the 2016 Presidential Vote", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 23 April 2018

280 "Trump Says It's 'a Very Scary Time for Young Men in America' – CNNPolitics", 15 April 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/10/02/politics/trump-scary-time-for-young-men-metoo/index.html>.

281 Jerry Pace, "Donald Trump on Speaking to Women, Spokane, Washington, 5/7/16", YouTube, 9 May 2016, 0:11, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYeibXH7ZbM>

282 Shawn P Van Valkenburgh, "Digesting the Red Pill: Masculinities and Neoliberalism in the Manosphere", *Men and Masculinities*, 4 December 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X18816118>

283 Helen Lewis, "To Learn About the Far Right, Start With the 'Manosphere'", *The Atlantic*, 7 August 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/08/anti-feminism-gateway-far-right/595642/>

284 <https://sites.uw.edu/magastudy/>

285 <https://sites.uw.edu/magastudy/maga-difference/>



Figure 14. A misogynistic tweet from Proud Boys founder Gavin McInnes.

creating the modern world”.²⁸⁶ Proud Boys founder Gavin McInnes has argued that women are “less ambitious” than men and would be happier in domestic roles, at home with their children.²⁸⁷ In a tweet from 2017 he wrote, “Who let these bitches vote?”

Somewhat paradoxically, the group has tried to position itself as defenders of Western values and members have portrayed themselves as guardians of women and gay people from the existential threats of Islamism and immigration. However, the rhetoric and actions of prominent Proud Boys members tells a different story: for example, Joe Biggs was charged with conspiracy related to the insurrection and has consistently voiced his support of rape and sexual violence. In since-removed tweets he wrote, “What Happened to the Good ole days when women just fucked your brains out and made you dinner” and “Every girl at the bar wants to fuck me. They don’t know it yet because the drugs haven’t kicked in”.²⁸⁸

As mentioned above, an Arizona woman charged in connection with the insurrection has claimed that she was recruited by the Kansas City Chapter of the Proud Boys.²⁸⁹ Although it may at first seem puzzling why women might want to align themselves with a group which is apparently misogynistic, this association of women with the group is not an anomaly. For example, Tara LaRosa, a former MMA fighter is a self-proclaimed “den mother” of the Proud Girls. However, despite appearing alongside Proud Boys’ chairman Enrique Tarrío during the Capitol insurrection, it seems members have not embraced her with

286 “Proud Boys”, Southern Poverty Law Center, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/proud-boys>

287 Ed Mazza, “Gavin McInnes, Fox News Guest, Says Women Are ‘Less Ambitious’ And ‘Happier At Home’”, *HuffPost*, 15 May 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/gavin-mcinnis-women-happier-at-home_n_7289048?ri18n=true

288 “New Host For ‘Unofficial Version Of Trump TV’ Encouraged Date Rape And Punching Transgender People”, *Media Matters*, 29 January 2021, https://www.mediamatters.org/right-side-broadcasting/new-host-unofficial-version-trump-tv-encouraged-date-rape-and-punching?redirect_source=/blog/2017/01/04/new-host-unofficial-version-trump-tv-encouraged-date-rape-and-punching-transgender-people/214920

289 Associated Press, “Woman charged in Capitol riot says Proud Boys recruited her”, *NBC News*, 7 February 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/woman-charged-capitol-riot-says-proud-boys-recruited-her-n1258078>



Figure 15. Examples of gendered propaganda from Proud Boys' social media channels.

open arms,²⁹⁰ with a post shared across the group's private channels reading, "Proud Boy's Girls or Proud Girls are both ridiculous ideas. Fuck that. Don't ride our coattails. Want to support us? Get married, have babies, and take care of your family." It is therefore apparent that the hegemonic masculinity and traditional gender norms and masculinity are still dominant.

Other prominent figures of the insurrection include Nick Fuentes of "Groyper" notoriety, who has previously espoused troubling views on women in politics and women's right to vote, and has referred to women as "sluts", "whores" and "stupid dirty bitches".²⁹¹ The presence of misogyny is not as overt in anti-government militias, such as the Boogaloo movement. However, the assertion of traditional masculinity is manifest: from the pro-militia and gun-rights views of its adherents, to their displays of fraternity demonstrated via their "Magnum P.I."-style Hawaiian attire. The Oath Keepers militia similarly exhibits overt masculine traits, styling themselves as "Guardians of the People" and wearing paramilitary attire. Its predominately male members are often pictured displaying their weapons.

Overall, participation in the insurrection and/or membership of any of the most prominent groups and movements present does not automatically make one a misogynist. However, the resurgence of patriarchal norms and traditional masculinity across the Manosphere, which became even more acute under the Trump administration, can be witnessed across several of the groups studied. This was particularly true of the Proud Boys, who have been emboldened to assert their maleness and hatred of feminism as central to their identity.

290 Karim Zidan, "Tara LaRose: the worrying case of MMA's 'Proud Girl'", *The Guardian*, 21 January 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/jan/21/tara-larosa-mma-far-right-proud-boys>

291 @bennyjohnson, "Benny Twitter Post", Twitter, 19 November 2019, 1:44am, <https://twitter.com/bennyjohnson/status/1196605202964582400?lang=en>



Figure 16. A transphobic post shared to the Proud Boys' main Telegram channel which both indicates that Dr Rachel Levine was only appointed to the Biden administration as a "diversity hire", and denies her gender identity, suggesting that trans women are not 'really' women.

Transphobia

Another important gendered narrative that continues to have resonance within the far right is a broad opposition and anxiety surrounding transness as well as transgender, nonbinary and genderqueer individuals. While some groups, such as the Proud Boys, at least publicly claim to be accepting of homosexuality, they repeatedly discriminate and mock transgender people within their propaganda. Anti-trans narratives are one of the most prevalent and common narratives within IMVE ecosystems and yet are one of the least studied. While it would be possible to discuss anti-trans narratives within the far right at great length here, in the interests of brevity, only a small number of common narratives will be highlighted.

During the first 100 days of the Biden administration, much of this vitriol has been channelled towards Dr Rachel Levine, the first openly transgender individual to be confirmed by the Senate, who has been appointed by Biden as assistant secretary for health in the Department of Health and Human Sciences.²⁹² In various social media posts made to the Proud Boys' main Telegram channel, Levine has been the target of open transphobia. Commonly, the group attempts to deny Levine the right to assert her gender identity, by referring to her using male pronouns and repeatedly asserting that she is a biological male. For instance, in one post made by the group, a picture of Levine is superimposed with the words: "Diversity hire: still old white man", insinuating that Levine is not a woman. Other tactics adopted by the group involve "deadnaming" Levine, a tactic whereby members refuse

²⁹² Laurel Wamsley, "Rachel Levine Makes History As 1st Openly Trans Federal Official Confirmed By Senate", *NPR*, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/24/980788146/senate-confirms-rachel-levine-a-transgender-woman-as-assistant-health-secretary>

to refer to her as “Rachel”, instead using the name she was given at birth and went by prior to asserting her gender as female.²⁹³ Adding insult to injury, at times pictures of Levine prior to her transition are also posted in the group. These practices invalidate Levine’s gender and are examples of intentional transphobic hatred.

Much of this anti-trans rhetoric appears to stem from anxiety that the rigidity of traditional gender roles is threatened by transgender individuals. For example, another image shared on the Proud Boys’ main Telegram channel stresses that the way women can support the group is to “get married, have babies, and take care of your family”, indicating that the “women’s role”, as framed by the Proud Boys, is a fundamentally domestic one. Similarly, posts praising the perceived physical beauty of Melania Trump and other cisgender women admired by the group are relatively common on Proud Boys’ social media, whereas posts discussing trans women often attack them by alleging that they are physically unattractive and have conventionally “male” features. Again, here the insinuation is that physical beauty is prerequisite for femininity. Trans people, particularly trans women, are framed as a threat to the gender binary idealised by the Proud Boys and are seen to violate the stringent gendered ideals to which the group adheres.

This threat to traditional gender roles is often conceptualised as a corrosive by-product of modernity which therefore necessitates a return to the assumed values of a past, more pure, traditional era. This is in line with the broad traditionalism present within much of the far right.²⁹⁴ At times the far right also refers to transness as an “ideology” rather than a gender identity, framing trans people as inherently part of a political – and politicised – agenda, and falsely asserting that transness is a choice.²⁹⁵ At the more extreme end of this discourse, trans “ideology” may be framed as a creeping societal influence, orchestrated and spread by Jewish people.²⁹⁶ This narrative marries transphobic hatred with traditional extreme-right antisemitism that contends that a small group of Jewish elites is behind a variety of perceived societal evils with the overarching aim of corrupting or exterminating the white race. The Southern Poverty Law Center neatly summarises this dynamic, stating:

“For far-right extremists, the increased visibility of transgender people is a sign of the growing ‘degeneracy’ of the nation, wrought by ‘cultural Marxists,’ leftists and Jews as part of an assault on white, Christian families and strict gender roles. They believe that trans people, like immigrants and non-whites, are hastening the destruction of an idealized white, Western culture.”²⁹⁷

Another especially important narrative that has gained significant traction within the far right is that transness poses a particular threat towards young children, who are commonly used as symbols of purity

293 Janet Brito, “What is Deadnaming?”, Healthline, 2017, <https://www.healthline.com/health/transgender/deadnaming>

294 Benjamin Teitelbaum, “The rise of the traditionalists: how a mystical doctrine is reshaping the right”, *New Statesman*, 2020, <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/2020/10/rise-traditionalists-how-mystical-doctrine-reshaping-right>

295 Ana Campoy, “A Conspiracy Theory About Sex and Gender is being Peddled around the world by the far right”, *Quartz*, 2016, <https://qz.com/807743/conservatives-have-created-a-fake-ideology-to-combat-the-global-movement-for-lgbt-rights/>

296 Joaquina, “Transphobia and Antisemitism”, *The Social Review*, 2021, <https://www.thesocialreview.co.uk/2021/01/02/transphobia-and-antisemitism/>

297 Cassie Miller, “White Nationalist Threats Against Transgender People Are Escalating”, Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2019/06/26/white-nationalist-threats-against-transgender-people-are-escalating>

within the far-right movement. This point is perhaps best exemplified by the legal battle between Anne Georgulas and Jeffrey Younger over custody of their transgender daughter, who at the time legal proceedings commenced was five years old. Georgulas was accepting of her daughter's gender identity and preference to transition socially, whereas Younger denied that his daughter was trans and alleged that Georgulas was threatening to immediately "chemically castrate" her.²⁹⁸ Younger's hyperbolic accusations gained considerable traction among a number of far-right groups and was widely shared within online spaces, the narrative being that Georgulas, obsessed with "transgender ideology", was robbing her child of innocence and cruelly forcing them to biologically transition against their will.²⁹⁹ The case's framing and subsequent popularity within far-right circles is indicative of the way in which children are frequently framed as victims of an enforced regime of transness.

Transphobic narratives are extremely commonplace within the far right and require increased academic and policymaker attention. Far-right transphobia poses a particularly acute threat, because often it constitutes a more extreme reflection of narratives already common within more mainstream Conservative movements, and which are likely to be utilised by the far right to recruit more followers.³⁰⁰ Trans individuals are also disproportionately at risk of suicidal ideation, a risk factor that is significantly increased when individuals experience discrimination. Indeed, a 2015 study of trans individuals found that 98% of trans individuals who had experienced four or more instances of discrimination and violence in past year had thought about suicide that year; of this group, 51% had attempted suicide over that period.³⁰¹ With this in mind, the continued trend of transphobia within the far right is vitally deserving of increased attention.

Converging Narratives

This section has demonstrated the ways in which distinct but common narratives that were present at the insurrection have used the event as a springboard for increased ideological convergence. With the unification and therefore increased mobilisation and radicalisation power of the mass movement, subsequent attacks and violent protests are to be expected. As the vaccine rollout intensifies and governments navigate the complex landscape of re-opening economies with the possibility of vaccine passports, opposition among both IMVE actors and sections of the mainstream conservative movement is likely to grow, offering a renewed mobilisation and recruitment opportunity.

298 Katelyn Burns, "What the battle over a 7-year-old trans girl could mean for families nationwide" *Vox*, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/11/11/20955059/luna-younger-transgender-child-custody>

299 *Ibid.*

300 Dawn Ennis, "What Donald Trump's Transphobia Really Means For Woman's Sports", *Forbes*, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dawnstaceyennis/2021/02/28/what-donald-trumps-transphobia-really-means-for-womens-sports/>

301 Jody Herman, Taylor Brown and Ann Haas, "Suicide Thoughts and Attempts Among Transgender Adults", 2019, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/suicidality-transgender-adults/>

4 Conclusions

This report has provided an extensive overview of many of the IME and IMVE actors present during the 6 January insurrection and has highlighted the major trends they have followed in the first 100 days of Joe Biden's presidency. While there may be an impulse to assume that these movements have withered to the point of no return now that Donald Trump – who we have argued significantly emboldened them – is out of office, this, unfortunately, is not the case. There are key trends among IME and IMVE movements that must be noted and acted upon by policymakers. By way of a conclusion, this section will briefly detail the main points that should be noted by policymakers, and areas which require greater academic research.

Key IME and IMVE actors continue to feel that the 2020 general election featured mass voter fraud and election tampering. In their minds Joe Biden's presidency is therefore illegitimate. Many factions of the movement feel that their concerns over election security have not been taken seriously, have been ignored or have otherwise “fallen on deaf ears”, and as such – if there are no political solutions – they have framed extreme actions, such as the 6 January insurrection, as a legitimate last resort. Donald Trump played a key role in enabling this response by continually pushing narratives of election fraud that ultimately encouraged violent action; at least some militia members viewed Trump's remarks as a direct call to action. The ramifications of these conspiratorial narratives and Trump's role in directly encouraging them are likely to be long-lasting. The former president and those that were closest to him still have the capacity to influence and mobilise their supporters. Their political objective may not be violent though they can still mobilise groups and individuals to violence unintentionally.

The militia movement is, by definition, inherently conspiratorial and members of some militia groups, such as the Oath Keepers, are fearful that the Biden administration is indicative of an impending New World Order that would seriously encroach on the individual freedoms of American citizens. There is some possibility that these anxieties may intensify and culminate in dedicated members of the group taking up armed defensive positions against perceived governmental tyranny. While fears surrounding the New World Order are by no means a novel concept within the militia movement, they are likely to be particularly intense at the current moment, given the stark juxtaposition between much of the militia movements' embrace of Trump as an icon of their values and the new administration, which is seen to be illegitimately forcing him out of office.

In light of this, there remains a need for a stronger response to and civic education around the disinformation spread by domestic extremists and political actors about electoral fraud. There will very likely be long-term ramifications around the Stop the Steal narrative and movement, which is still active and fundraising. This narrative will continue to erode trust in democratic processes, and as the midterm elections approach, the potential for further acts of violence will increase. This disinformation campaign is significant due to the

role played by Trump in amplifying it, as well as other key political figures in the GOP. Neo-QAnon figures, such as Lin Wood and Sidney Powell, who have amassed large followings in light of their election fraud campaigns, as well as disinformation spread by Ron Watkins and Mike Lindell about Dominion continue to inspire violent narrative around electoral processes. Figures in the former administration should be recognised as emblematic leadership figures within IMVE milieus, with potential to mobilise (intentionally or unintentionally) these actors to take further action against the current administration.

Government institutions will plausibly continue to be favoured targets for IMVE actors. However, we should also consider the potential for militia actors to stage a defensive rather than an offensive campaign against the current administration. Furthermore, militias, in particular the Oath Keepers, are organisations within which women are present in high-ranking positions and are respected as actors capable of extreme action. A refocusing on the gender dimension of IMVE actors should be applied to QAnon, considering the important role played by women within the movement, especially in positions of influence and power. Women play a significant role in some IMVE threat actors and this dimension needs to be further explored.³⁰² With early reports being released on the fallout of the 6 January insurrection, a blind spot that requires more focus is the overlap between IMVE actors and law enforcement or the military (current or former members). Alternatively, close attention should be paid to the trajectory of the Oath Keepers' relationship with law enforcement and a potential deterioration in their respect for law enforcement under Biden's administration.

Gun ownership, seen as a realisation of individual freedoms by the militia movement, maintained stable policy support under the Trump administration. However, the Biden-Harris ticket ran on a platform of increasing gun control, and condemned the "public health epidemic"³⁰³ of gun violence. They pledged a multi-faceted policy to increase firearms regulation, incentivise licensing, ban assault weapons and prevent online sales. With a significant number of mass shootings throughout 2021, including high-profile events in Boulder and Atlanta, on 7 April, the Biden administration announced various initial steps towards regulation and greater monitoring.³⁰⁴ With this administration's intentions clearly stated, the militia movement is likely to strongly oppose current and future attempts to regulate gun ownership, through both political and violent means. This could be a key narrative for the fourth wave of the militia movement, as well as a violent mobilising and radicalising narrative throughout the Biden-Harris administration.

The Boogaloo movement also poses a somewhat unique concern in that, while members were not among the most dominant or visible groups to take part in the insurrection, the insurrection itself is symbolic of many of the key values of the movement's ideology. As such, it is possible that the events of 6 January may directly inspire the Boogaloo movement to orchestrate and plan further insurrectional action.

³⁰² Argentino and Crawford, "The WQmen of QAnon"

³⁰³ "The Biden plan to end our gun violence epidemic", Biden-Harris Democrats, <https://joebiden.com/gunsafety/>

³⁰⁴ "FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration Announced Initial Actions to Address the Gun Violence Public Health Epidemic", The White House, 7 April 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/07/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-announces-initial-actions-to-address-the-gun-violence-public-health-epidemic/>

As one of the other main groups involved in the insurrection the Proud Boys should be considered as “down but not out”, after their intense downward trajectory throughout 2021 and during the first 100 days of the Biden administration. The group has lost a significant portion of its key following after Parler went down, and internal disagreements – particularly those surrounding their chairman, Enrique Tarrío, and his past relationship with the FBI – have caused significant splintering within the group, with various chapters formally disassociating themselves from the organisation. However, they have retained a comparatively large social media following on Telegram, particularly on their secondary channel where more openly extremist content prevails. Furthermore, given the significant boost to their public profile throughout 2020, which can, again, be somewhat linked with Trump, the group remains one of the most well-known far-right organisations in the United States. Certainly, the group is in a far stronger position now than it was following social media takedowns in 2018.

In light of the recent deplatforming of the Proud Boys, the change in leadership and the distancing of some chapters from the main body of the movement, new threat assessments will be necessary, in addition to local threat assessments per chapter in light of the movement’s balkanisation. Particular attention should be paid to attempts made by channels associated with the group to normalise Third Positionism as a political stance within the movement, as this will pose new threat vectors from this community. The Proud Boys’ ability potentially to act as a bridge between the less radical facets of the MAGA movement and the extremist fringes should be carefully monitored.

The insurrection of 6 January 2021 is a stark example of what happens when an ideological movement such as QAnon is taken seriously, especially in the context of how some of its adherents have evolved into an ideologically motivated violent extremist movement. However, due to the mass deplatforming of QAnon, creating a mass exodus to alternative social media platforms, QAnon has balkanised into various ideological ecosystems, thus the threat is not consistent across the board and should be considered as a spectrum. Neo-QAnon influencers like Sidney Powell and Lin Wood, as well as QAnon elected officials Marjorie Taylor Greene and Lauren Boebert, will continue to play an influential role on QAnon adherents and those adjacent to the movement due to their nexus to political power, as well as advancing and adapting conspiracy theories to current political environments. Their future actions will potentially continue to radicalise and mobilise individuals in the QAnon ecosystems to action.

Further research into the fragmentation of QAnon across alt-tech platforms needs to be performed in order to determine which ecosystems are the healthiest, and thus pose the greatest threat. Additionally, the symbiosis between QAnon adherents and other extremist actors on alt-tech platforms requires continued monitoring as there is continued community building that will be taking place and will inform which ecosystems may lead to long term viability especially with the overlap between QAnon and IMVE actors. Threat actors on alt-tech platforms will continue to seek to recruit disenfranchised QAnon adherents to further radicalise and mobilise them to action.

As QAnon and other conspiracy theories continues to grow in salience transnationally and a rapprochement continues to form with more violently inclined threat actors, QAnon and other conspiracy-minded

threat actors will continue to pose a novel threat not only from the perspective of violent extremism, but also to critical infrastructure, public health and democratic institutions.

The convergence of these ideological movements and groups, combined with more disparate elements of the MAGA movement, united on 6 January around various anti-government narratives and anti-COVID conspiracies. In the first 100 days of the Biden administration, this increasing cooperation of different far right elements under one tent has fomented the cross-pollination of narratives on COVID, election fraud, anti-government conspiracy theories and prejudices against groups with protected characteristics. Going forwards, these elements should be understood as a mass movement, with significant mobilising power and proven ability to reach into mainstream political discourse.

With the potential resurgence of Stop the Steal narratives in mid-term elections throughout the Biden administration, subsequent attacks, both through the remobilisation of a mass movement and the online radicalisation of single actors, are possible. A balance between physical security and the effective and uninterrupted running of the political system must be found in order to maintain the integrity and functioning of democratic institutions. As the United States navigates economic re-opening using policy tools such as vaccine passports, opposition to restrictions are likely to grow with the decreasing death and case rates. In order to prevent the manipulation of information and reshaping of conspiracy theories that oppose necessary coronavirus protection measures, governments will continue to need to navigate the crisis in a way that cuts through hard-to-reach and conspiracy-vulnerable communities.

Terrorism researchers were starkly reminded of the prevalence and vitriol of anti-Black and anti-BLM narratives when police officer Derek Chauvin was convicted of the murder of George Floyd. With the anticipated growth of the BLM movement and continued circulation on social media of shootings of unarmed Black individuals by police, narratives of anti-white bias and the promotion of anti-Black racism will also further entrench among IMVE actors. Growing polarisation and tensions threaten social fabrics and the strength of liberal democratic institutions, and may come to a rise at key moments, such as the anticipated trial of Kyle Rittenhouse. Aside from the vital conversations about policing and race relations in the United States, which this report does not seek to analyse, the manner in which IMVE actors seek to usurp popular disorder raises significant concerns for public safety and American democracy.

Emerging from an administration that sought to institutionalise anti-Asian prejudices, a review of existing policies, projects and legislation should seek to understand the extent to which anti-Asian sentiment is present in language and activities. Considering the increase in anti-Asian hate and attacks, the development and promotion of civic education initiatives aimed at combatting anti-Asian hate should be prioritised. Civic education initiatives must be promoted in consultation with Asian-American communities and should seek to invest in grassroots education and inter-community cohesion programmes.

Additionally, in order to understand the nature of the surge in anti-Asian discrimination and hate crime better, comprehensive data collection should be undertaken. By integrating such systems into existing community bodies, data collection should aim to gain community trust, thereby promoting self-reporting and generating greater data accuracy.

With the convergence of various ideologies and actors towards a “big-tent” anti-government conspiracy theory, the emergence of a “big-tent” enemy is likely visualise a Jewish puppet master controlling the various societal ills that they see. While this is not a new phenomenon among IMVE actors, the MAGA movement’s ability to reach in to the political mainstream with extremist framings is likely to radicalise an increasing number of people towards antisemitic conclusions. Tackling the increasing threat must be rooted in civic education initiatives. Whilst National Socialist antisemitism, such as Robert Packer’s “Camp Auschwitz” hoodie, is easy to spot and oppose, more covert antisemitic narratives are supported by a significantly larger mass movement, which often employ dog whistles and euphemistic language to promote anti-Jewish conspiracy theories. National Socialist antisemitism is often the most vicious and overt form of antisemitism, however hatred of Jews on the far right does not manifest monolithically in Nazi language and symbology. Political education, from grassroots to Congress, should focus on helping communities to understand the breadth of antisemitic narratives and oppose them robustly.

Under the Trump administration, misogynistic rhetoric became mainstreamed. Indeed, Trump and his advisors reasserted traditional masculine values during the election campaign, and the numerous allegations of sexual assault by Trump himself did little to dissuade voters turning out to elect him into office. The online ecosystem known as the Manosphere has further entrenched misogyny and anti-feminist narratives over the past five years, as online movements such as Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) and involuntary celibates (incels) have gained in strength and membership. Looking more closely at those involved in the 6 January insurrection, it is clear that a number of groups, in particular the Proud Boys, displayed overt misogyny and chauvinism. This emboldened male identity, sense of victimhood, and entitlement is not unanimous within the MAGA movement, however, there is enough ideological cross-over to warrant it a concern. Going forward, it will be crucial to monitor the presence of misogyny across the various domestic extremist groups, movements, and networks that have grown in strength, and consider how their most prominent narratives may act as mobilisation and recruitment tools.

Of particular note, transphobia should be recognised as one of the major and most ubiquitous narratives around which the far right as a broad movement recruits, mobilises and organises. The appointment of Dr Rachel Levine within the Biden administration should be recognised as an important step forward in normalising the visibility of transgender people, yet it should also be recognised as a rallying point for various far-right groups and narratives. The way in which transphobia is mobilised as a narrative within the far right must be afforded considerably more academic and policymaker consideration. Further efforts should be made to communicate and educate both far-right groups and the general public on the lived realities of various trans experiences. In particular, these efforts should focus

on dispelling myths, such as that children are being forced to transition biologically and surgically at young ages, which are commonly used to mobilise transphobia within the far right.

This report provides a glimpse into the early days of how IMVE and IME spaces have changed since 6 January, and the start of the Biden presidency. These trends are still nascent and may shift as they are evolving during a period of socio-political volatility with the pandemic impacting the world. Additionally, the Biden administration has only just begun to roll out their policies and overturn some that were put in place during the last administration. How IME and IMVE actors will react to policies that will swing towards the opposite side of the political spectrum from the past administration remains to be seen. The findings here should hopefully provide stepping stones for further research into these trends as it remains clear that the threat from IMVE actors is far from gone.



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