



FUNCTION OVER APPEARANCE

EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THE PROUD BOYS IN AMERICAN POLITICS
BEFORE AND AFTER JANUARY 6TH

BY
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Fig. 1 - Picture of the US Capitol, photo by Bjørn Ihler

Executive Summary

Introduction

On February 28th, 2022, the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol requested that The Khalifa Ihler Institute, represented by Bjørn Ihler, Samantha Kutner, and C.L. Murray provide a written statement for the record on the Proud Boys' role and involvement focusing on the following questions:

1. Why did Proud Boys come to DC on January 6th?
2. What Proud Boys activities in 2020 and earlier laid the groundwork for their actions on January 6th?
3. What is the Proud Boys' ideology and philosophy?
4. What do they publicly profess, and what are their underlying ideologies? To what extent are their actions motivated by opportunism, and to what extent are leaders and members "true believers"?
5. How did their public or de facto ideologies evolve or realign in the lead-up to January 6th, and what impact has January 6th had on their ideologies and philosophies?
6. What role does race, white supremacy, and fear of white replacement play in Proud Boys' activities?
7. Did the Proud Boys monetize January 6th? If so, how?
8. What impact has January 6th had on the Proud Boys?
9. What is your analysis of the Proud Boys' organization and objectives as we prepare for the midterm elections and the 2024 presidential election?

This report is intended to provide important insights gained from extensive qualitative and quantitative research on the Proud Boys through a variety of methodological approaches including in-depth interviews, ethnographic research, content analysis of legal documents, social network analysis, and statistical analysis of incidents beginning with the origins of the group to present day.

At the time of this writing, our quantitative data on the Proud Boys (2016-present) comprises 532 incidents, and 1190 networked relationships involving 465 individuals and 199 groups. Our qualitative data span five years and approximately 2,000 hours of in-depth interviewing and ethnographic research.

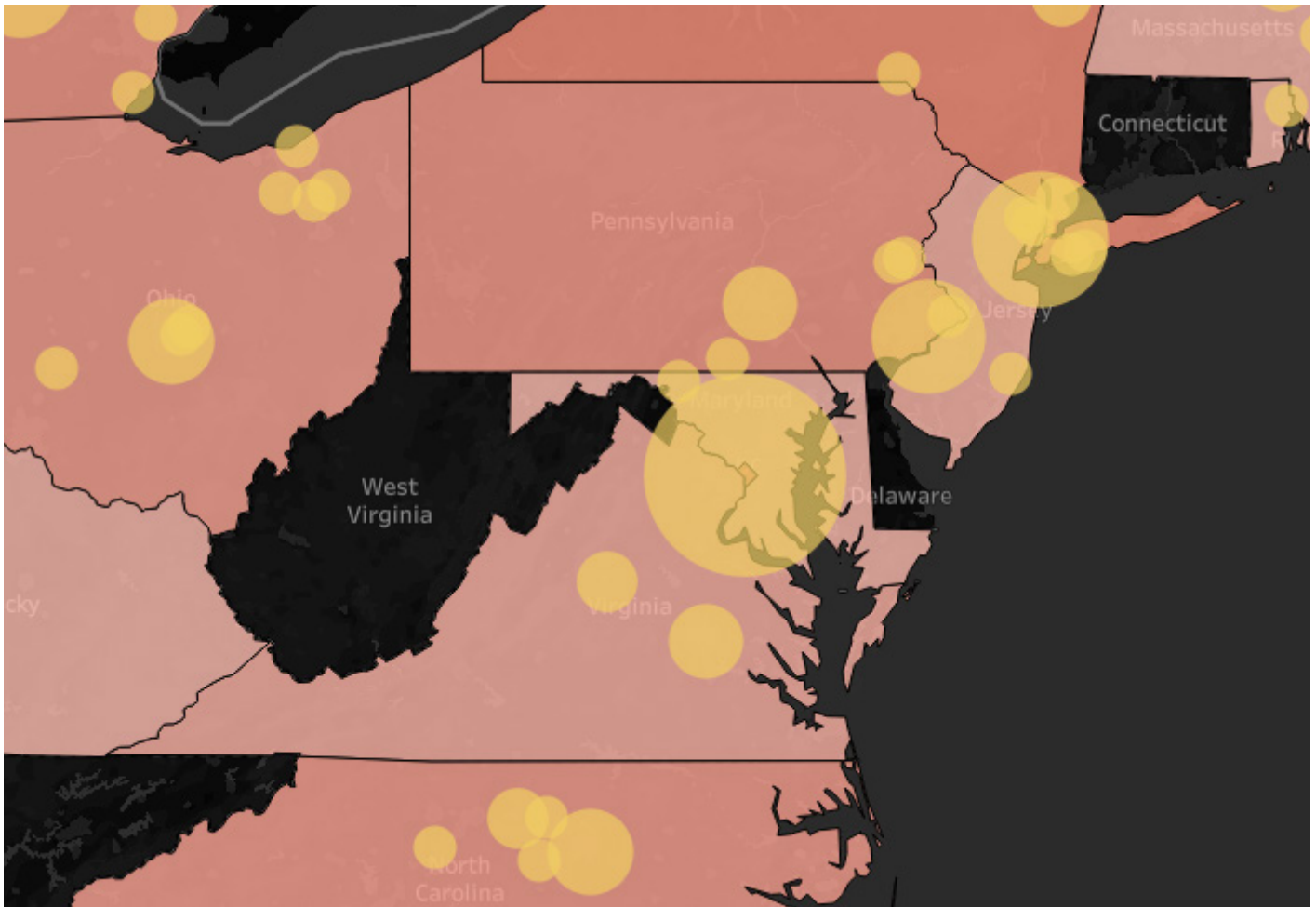


Fig. 2 - An illustration of the number of incidents per state and city with the Proud Boys playing a role as instigators or participants, based on data collected as part of our extensive mapping project. The shade of red in the state indicates the number of incidents at state level, the size of the yellow circles indicates frequency of incidents by city. The yellow circle surrounding Washington DC indicates a relatively high frequency of events taking place in the city.

Why did Proud Boys come to DC on January 6th?

Since the group's inception, members have established a pattern of engaging in tactics designed to provoke their opponents—most often members of Antifa or Black Lives Matter (BLM)—into any reaction that could give them a pretext to react violently. This allows them to argue that they were justifiably acting in self-defense and aligns with their motto, “We don’t start fights, but we finish them.”¹ If attempts to provoke their opponents are unsuccessful, then members known as “Rally Boys” are willing to go a step further and engage in “unlawful conduct”.² The violence serves multiple purposes; among them, at the individual level, participation in “violence on the group’s behalf” allows members to earn their “fourth degree”—the highest rank of membership and an “inherent characteristic of the Proud Boys identity.”³ At the group level, framing their violence as a form of “righteous victimhood”, in which they fought back when no one else would and sacrificed for the “greater good”, serves as a recruitment tool.

To succeed at the second goal, they must be identifiable as Proud Boys, which is easily achieved by wearing “colors”, often coupled with face coverings and tactical gear, while acting as “security” or staging counter-protests. Their “colors” consist of black and yellow clothing, often utilizing “the gold-stripped collar black polo shirt [from brand Fred Perry] as a type of uniform for public group outings.”⁴

Proud Boys departure from past behavior are more instructive regarding the true nature of their intentions on January 6th. On December 29, 2020, Proud Boys Chairman Enrique Tarrío stated on Parler that the Proud Boys “will turn out in record numbers on Jan 6th but this time with a twist... We will not be wearing our traditional Black and Yellow. We will be incognito and we will spread across downtown DC in smaller teams.”⁵

Tarrío ended the post with the words “48 laws of power” followed by the numbers 3, 4, 14, 15, 17, 29, 37, 39, and 48.⁶ This was a reference to the 1998 non-fiction book by Robert Greene described by the publisher, Penguin Random House, as “...the definitive manual for anyone interested in gaining, observing, or defending against ultimate control.”⁷ The numbers in Tarrío’s post correspond to the laws in Greene’s book, emphasizing the concealment of one’s true intentions, plan “all the way to the end”,⁸ and “crush your enemy totally.”⁹

According to the Second Superseding Indictment against Tarrío and his fellow Proud Boy co-defendants, he wasted no time in putting those laws into practice: He and his co-defendants created a new chapter for hand-selected, high-profile members called the Ministry of Self-Defense (MOSD) on an encrypted messaging app. They promptly began preparations for January 6, 2021,¹⁰ which Proud Boy Zachary Rehl stated would be a “completely different operation.”¹¹ Through voice and text messages, the members left no question as to their plans for January 6th: They planned to disrupt the certification of the Electoral College vote by violently “storming the Capitol”.¹²

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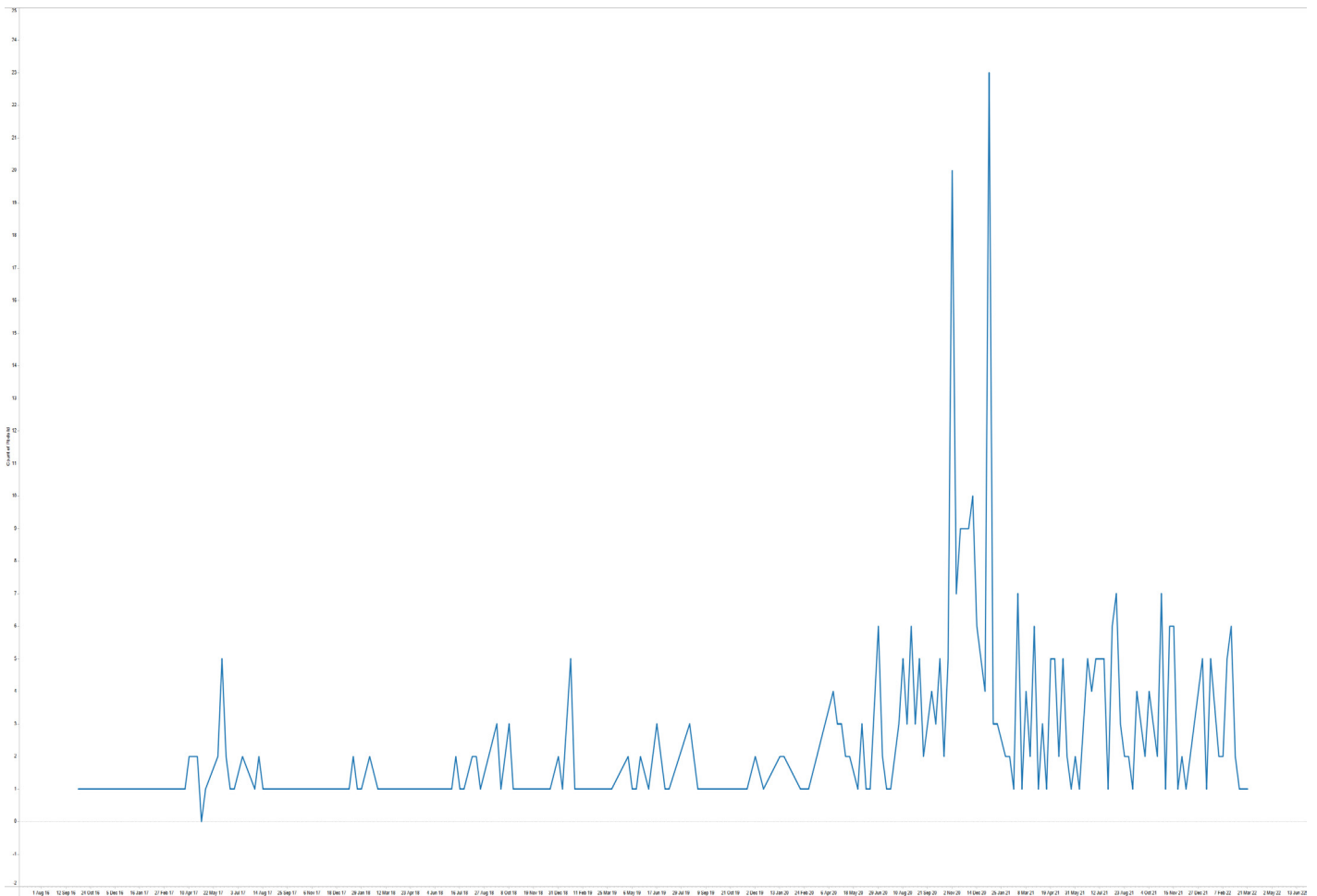


Fig. 3 - Visualization of the number of incidents the Proud Boys have instigated or participated in per week since 2016, based on data collected as part of our extensive mapping project. A marked increase in the frequency of Proud Boys activity can be seen surrounding the 2020 Presidential Election and in the weeks that followed. The frequency of identified events after January 6 is markedly higher than it was prior to the 2020 election.

What Proud Boys activities in 2020 and earlier laid the groundwork for their actions on January 6th?

It takes little effort to identify connections between the Proud Boys and political figures in the Trump-aligned, “MAGA” wing of the GOP. In a special report of the National Gang Crime Research Center, George Knox claims that the Proud Boys “...may go down in history as a state sponsored gang because of their close association with elected officials.”¹³ Our data identify significant overlap between the Proud Boys and individuals in Donald Trump’s political orbit, particularly Roger Stone. Enrique Tarrío, the second leader of the Proud Boys, was the head of “Latinos for Trump.” The Proud Boys often serve as “security” for Roger Stone events, they reference one another on social media, and they engage in similar political tactics. Stone has attended several Proud Boys events; on May 5, 2017, Stone was recorded stating the “Proud Boys Fraternity Creed”, which means he is considered a “1st degree” Proud Boy. A timeline of events detailing this relationship is included in this report.

Likewise, in spite of their arguments to the contrary, one only needs to scratch the surface to identify connections between extremist groups and militias like the Oath Keepers, Threepercenters, the Boogaloo Bois, and others. Our data indicate that they regularly co-attended events throughout the group’s history, and they often reference one another positively via their social media accounts. These close affiliations have allowed all groups to benefit from coordinated efforts to counter-demonstrate against advocacy groups with which they disagree.

This coordination with extremist groups, along with the Proud Boys’ affinity for Donald Trump, were crucial to laying the groundwork for the attack on the Capitol on January 6th. Without the desire to see Donald Trump maintain his presidency, they would not have participated in the attack on the Capitol. Without the long history of coordination with like-minded extremist groups, they would have lacked the numbers and the strategic benefit. Notably, the leaders of the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers met with Trump officials the day before the attack on the Capitol.¹⁴

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What is the Proud Boys' ideology and philosophy?

The Proud Boys publicly profess that their ideology is embodied in the following telegram post (fig. 1)¹⁵ that originated on the Proud Boys Portugal telegram channel before being forwarded and copied among chapters worldwide.

However, both researchers¹⁶ and even other chapters of the Proud Boys have called the U.S. Proud Boys' actual ideological beliefs into question. On May 10, 2021, the Official Proud Boys Ireland telegram channel posted a satirical list of what they called the "PB USA tenemenants [sic]", which included statements such as the following:

1. Saving the west by arguing on telegram chat groups and talking about n___s.
2. Anti racism (unless its [sic] the cool racism)
3. Venerate the housewife (until the bitch steps out of line then I smash her and cry to my bros that she wants to take the kids).¹⁷

Our qualitative and quantitative data suggest that the actions of the group and its leaders do not match their words with regard to their denials about racism, antisemitism, and misogyny.

Many of the members are indeed "true believers", and often have overlapping membership in more overtly racist, antisemitic, and misogynistic groups.

One way in which their ideology has appeared to "evolve" following the January 6th Attack on the Capitol is they have engaged in more efforts to moderate their language, particularly when it comes to racism and misogyny. Along with a shift in strategies from a focus on national politics to a focus on local political issues, there has been an effort to seek legitimacy through coordinating with less extreme far-right groups as well as running for political office.

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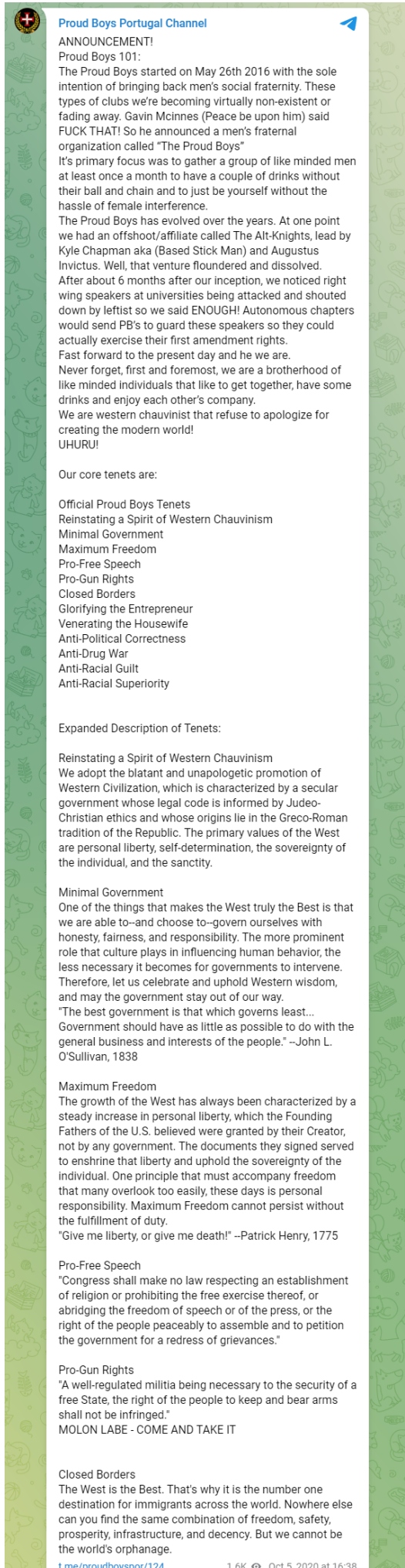


Fig. 4 - Screenshot From Proud Boys Portugal Telegram Chat

What role does race, white supremacy, and fear of white replacement play in Proud Boys' activities?

After the violent demonstration at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville that culminated in the murder of counter-demonstrator Heather Heyer,¹⁸ Gavin McInnes argued that the Proud Boys are not "Alt-Right", but rather "Alt-Lite"; a distinction that meant they did not subscribe to Jewish conspiracy theories or believe that "Western" was necessarily synonymous with "white."¹⁹

Some researchers, such as McCauley (2021), argue that they are "culturalists" (i.e., emphasizing the importance of the supremacy of Western culture) rather than "racists" (i.e., groups such as the Aryan Nations that are explicitly white supremacists), a conclusion that he reaches due to their willingness to allow people of multiple cultural backgrounds to join.²⁰ In part, he relies on the Anti-Defamation League's characterization of their ideology as "primarily misogynistic, Islamophobic, transphobic and anti-immigrant"; but leaves out the following sentence: "Some members espouse white supremacist and antisemitic ideologies and/or engage with white supremacist groups."²¹

However, McInnes' background is clearly rooted in transgressive humor that is racist and antisemitic while at the same time granting its author the "plausible deniability" of arguing that it's "just a joke." In an analysis of discourse among many Alt-Lite figures, including McInnes, Ma (2021) found that the statements endorsed "the idea that white people are superior without those words ever needing to be said aloud",²² concluding that in reality, those figures employ "mitigating strategies" to "obfuscate their views and to dodge accusations of racism."²³ This allows them to avoid deplatforming—or to be able to claim "victimhood" once they are deplatformed—as well as to appeal to "a wider cross-section of viewers."²⁴ Some of those strategies include "performatively" elevating or aligning with "minoritized communities or individuals when it suits their purposes,"²⁵ such as emphasizing non-white members or their relationships with people of color in order to deflect blame, as McInnes often does with his multi-racial family.²⁶ Another strategy involves using humor, such as when McInnes produced a video for Rebel News in blackface, then invoking "humor, irony, and satire" to shield himself from criticism and "frame progressives as overly sensitive whiners who can't take a joke."²⁷

DeCook's (2018) analysis of Proud Boys memes has similar findings, claiming that the group's attempts to distance themselves from more overtly racist and antisemitic groups among the Alt-Right are likely to be "intentional, image-saving" efforts to "remain appealing to the larger public and to attract more members."²⁸ DeCook argues that "despite their explicit denial of their affiliation as well as highlighting their non-White members, they still reproduce certain social structures with these linguistic moves."²⁹

Park's analysis of language used in McInnes videos finds that by focusing on male supremacy, anti-political correctness, and protecting

"Western" values, they present an ideology that does not discriminate against any men, which can be attractive to "men of color who seek a space to vocally protest" those ideals.³⁰ However, Park also notes that the degree to which racism exists in each chapter differs, noting that the Wisconsin Proud Boys "have been exposed as having extremely racist tendencies," but due to the secret nature of chapter meetings and discussion, it is difficult to ascertain the racist or antisemitic views of each individual chapter.³¹

As the Proud Boys have grown more decentralized in the period following the attack on the Capitol on January 6th, this certainty is even more difficult. However, our data suggest they continue to be willing to co-attend rallies with explicitly racist groups, to associate with explicitly racist public figures, and to continue sharing racist tropes on social media.

As noted by Park above, individual chapters do vary in terms of the content they share on encrypted Telegram channels, but even a cursory search will uncover posts that are thematically indistinguishable from those shared by explicitly racist and antisemitic organizations. Common themes shared among several chapters from Ohio, Arizona, Washington State, New Jersey, and Long Island include white people—especially women or girls—being attacked by black men^{32, 33, 34, 35} and racist stereotypes (sometimes framed as jokes).^{36, 37, 38, 39} Posts often emphasize the beauty of white women compared to women of color and other narratives that have gained traction among adherents of the "Great Replacement"/White Genocide conspiracy theory (covered extensively in our report), such as a post featuring a forward depicting two black men running away from a murdered white farmer with the caption:

*Blacks in South Africa are allowed to openly wage a slow war (https://t.me/SouthAfricaReports/2096) against Whites.They are allowed to call for action under the guise of metaphors, "struggle songs", and other communist rhetoric.As a result, since the war is never declared explicitly, Whites in South Africa are sitting ducks who are not allowed to react accordingly.*⁴⁰

A particularly troubling post appeared on the Arizona Proud Boys official telegram channel on May 18, 2022. The group posted the full video of the Buffalo, New York gunman's first-person livestream as he murdered black shoppers,⁴¹ followed by the following comment: "This guy really doesn't like black people... I wonder why."⁴²

Interviews with members highlight confusion regarding what is, and is not, racist. In a 2018 interview, a member of the Proud Boys asked Samantha Kutner, "If someone cuts you off in traffic, and you yell, 'N****r,' is that racist?"⁴³

Ultimately, we concur with researchers who consider the Proud Boys to be a white nationalist organization that uses coded language and humor to obfuscate their true ideology. We believe this is done for the purpose of gaining membership and deflecting racist labeling that would make them less palatable among the American right-wing.

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Did the Proud Boys monetize January 6th? If so, how?

The Proud Boys engaged in fundraising efforts prior to and after the January 6th attack on the Capitol for various reasons; reasons that are not clear, from sources that are not disclosed, and used in ways that are difficult to ascertain. Members pay dues that they were told would be used for food and locations for “meet-ups”; the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law claimed they went to “illegal activities.”⁴⁴ Platforms like Give Send Go have been used to fund events such as the “Travel Expenses for upcoming Patriot Events” that was used for “protective gear and communications” at the January 6th attack on the Capitol as well as funding for members who are incarcerated for their involvement with January 6th. Will Carless identified a particularly large amount of donations amounting to \$86,000 from Chinese Americans prior to the attack.⁴⁵ Members continue to share donation links and hold events to raise money for the “January 6th Political Prisoners”; how that money is used is unclear.

Sources

44. Michael Kunzelman, “Officer: I quit Proud Boys over fears of ‘far-left attacks,’” *Business Insider*, November 13, 2019. <https://www.businessinsider.com/officer-i-quit-proud-boys-over-fears-of-far-left-attacks-2019-11>

45. Will Carless, “Proud Boys saw wave of contributions from Chinese diaspora before Capitol attack,” *USA Today*, May 4, 2021. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/05/04/proud-boys-chinese-americans-community-support-donations/7343111002/>

What impact has January 6th had on the Proud Boys?

The most significant impact on the Proud Boys has been the shift from a focus on national politics to one that emphasizes local politics, particularly regarding COVID-19 policies, Critical Race Theory, and various local causes. Whereas prior to the attack on the Capitol, events were more likely to be occur at multiple locations on the same day in a coordinated fashion (i.e., the “March against Sharia” protests that were held in multiple cities nationwide), our data show more events on different dates that adhere to similar principles. For example, school board meetings across the country have been attended by Proud Boys members wearing their signature colors and tactical gear. These events do not coincide with the organized marches in the past; rather, they occur when certain topics are being discussed, such as LGBTQ+ issues, Critical Race Theory, masking, and lockdowns.

They have created and strengthened connections to more “legitimate” right-wing political advocacy groups, particularly local grassroots organizations interested in issues relating to CRT, LGBTQ+, and COVID-19 mandates. At the same time, they have continued to engage in acts of violence. Several local chapters have been employing increasingly violent rhetoric directed at journalists, local politicians, educators, and opposition activists.

Despite predictions that the Proud Boys would decline after being tied to the Attack on the Capitol, their semi-autonomous chapters have grown. Numbers within these chapters have also appeared to grow—although there is no public national database for membership, our

data find that there has been a rise in the number of encrypted Telegram channels dedicated to different cities and states, each of which has seen an increase in membership in the past year.

What is your analysis of the Proud Boys’ organization and objectives as we prepare for the midterm elections and the 2024 presidential election?

Following the Unite the Right Rally, the Proud Boys attempted to distance themselves from the Alt-Right by moderating racist and antisemitic language in order to maintain a degree of legitimacy. Following the January 6th attack on the Capitol, they have shifted tactics again for the same purpose: To maintain legitimacy and preserve the group as a whole. They have sought out affiliations with local advocacy groups that are less overtly racist or antisemitic, but remain committed to violence and intimidation as means to achieve their goals.

In keeping with the “Big Lie” conspiracy theory, Proud Boys members have also engaged in several efforts to “protect” the vote, such as acting as poll watchers (either in an official or unofficial capacity) in multiple states. Some members, such as John Fischer in Johnston County, North Carolina, have even run for office while openly admitting their status as an active Proud Boys member. Efforts to increase their legitimacy through campaigns and affiliation with campaigns must be countered at both the national and local levels.

With regard to conspiracies, the Proud Boys continue to be both source and distributor of narratives that align with QAnon, anti-government militias, and racist/antisemitic groups. They continue to question the results of the 2020 Presidential Election and claim that a cabal of Democratic elites are planning to steal elections in 2022 and beyond.

Efforts to counter disinformation campaigns on social media will be vital to disrupting efforts to spread conspiracy theories about the upcoming elections. Furthermore, our data show that they have already attempted to engage in intimidation at polling locations and are likely to do so in the future. With their shift to a more decentralized structure, it will be more difficult to predict and counteract polling intimidation, as events are unlikely to be planned and organized to occur simultaneously across the nation. Therefore, this will require increased monitoring and enforcement by local entities to avoid election interference and intimidation at polling locations.

Ultimately, the Khalifa Ibler Institute believes that the potential threat to democracy posed by the Proud Boys has not waned—in some ways, it has grown. The following report details the group’s ideology, tactics, and strategies both before and after January 6th and concludes with suggestions to counter their attempts to subvert democracy.

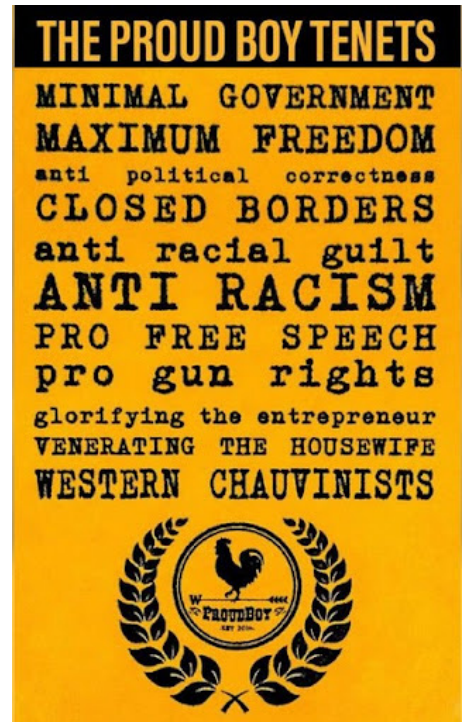


Fig. 5 - The Proud Boy Tenets

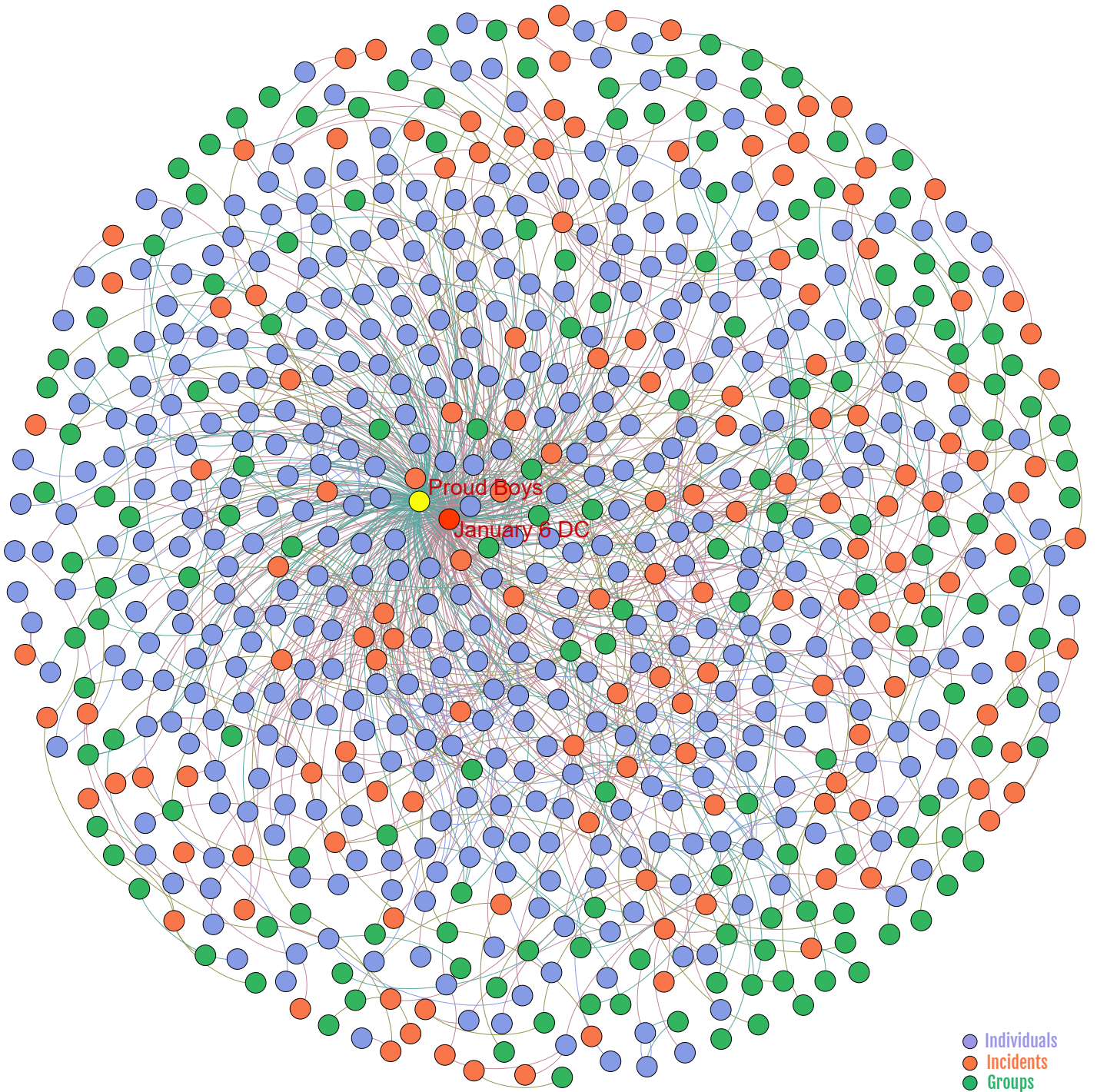


Fig. 6 - This visualization illustrates the connections between groups in the network surrounding Proud Boys. The full Proud Boys dataset contains all known incidents Proud Boys have organized, attended or targeted. This visualization demonstrates the strong ties between individuals, groups and incidents related to the Proud Boys and the attack on the Capitol on January 6th. This is based on the Proud Boys subset of the KII HateMap data (<http://www.hatemap.io/>)

Who Are The Proud Boys?

The Proud Boys are a neo-fascist violent extremist⁴⁶ organization with semi-autonomous chapters in America, Canada, Oceania and Europe. Their current organizational structure is built on a strategy common among extremist groups in the United States called “leaderless resistance”; it advocates for small groups to act autonomously while also being “united by a common mission”.⁴⁷ In their own words, they claim that each group is autonomous, but all follow a common set of “core tenants” (see figure 1).⁴⁸ In addition to their stated ideology, they have co-opted several high-profile issues over the course of their existence: Pro-Trump, anti-Antifa, anti-abortion, anti-indigenous, anti-mask, anti-“grooming”, etc

For many individuals, the Proud Boys have served as a “gateway” to more violent extremist ideological movements and are often viewed as “a ‘stepping stone’ group to more extremist alt-right [groups].”⁴⁹ Since the group’s inception in 2016, several notable members - including Jason Kessler, self-identified accelerationist⁵⁰ Austin Gillespie, Kyle Chapman, Jovi Val, Tim Gionet (better known by his alias, Baked Alaska), and Jason Lee Van Dyke have joined or attempted to join more explicitly antisemitic and white supremacist violent extremist movements.⁵¹ Since Enrique Tarrio’s arrest in March 2022 on charges of conspiracy related to the January 6th attack, some have tried to push the group in a more openly racist and antisemitic direction.⁵²

In 2022, the Proud Boys continue to function as a vector for far-right radicalization, having mainstreamed their tactics and mobilized massive sections of the population from the populist center position to the far-right. After January 6 2021, splinter cells began to form, embracing and utilizing even more militant forms of radicalization and accelerationist ideologies. The push towards “applied populism”, a term coined by Trump architects, represents part of a constellation of an ever-growing threat of violent mobilization

The Four Degrees of the Proud Boys

The group’s official bylaws list four degrees of membership:

- The first degree requires an initiate to state the Proud Boys’ fraternity creed;
- The second degree requires the initiate to be punched until he can name five breakfast cereals. Once the initiate succeeds, he is an official member;
- The third degree involves the new member getting a tattoo with Proud Boys phrases or symbols;
- The fourth degree requires the member to engage in violence on the group’s behalf.

Source: Kutner, “Swiping Right: The Allure of Hyper Masculinity and Cryptofascism for Men Who Join the Proud Boys”

Analyzing the organization through offline behavior, leadership and trusted spokespeople reveals the self-presentation of the group and the espoused beliefs that attracted its members and followers. We’ll start with offline incidents and examine Gavin McInnes’s radicalization process below to describe the role of replacement/white genocide conspiracy theories. In the ideology section, we will cover how tactics shifted under McInnes’s successor, Enrique Tarrio

Gavin McInnes

Gavin McInnes, the founder of the Proud Boys, has been described as “...more or less the Men’s Rights subreddit manifested in human form.”⁵³ McInnes is a Canadian extremist who revels in his ability to manipulate public perception. McInnes’ ability to launder extremist ideology is why many self-identified white nationalists credit him for being their gateway to more hardline white nationalism.⁵⁴ Gavin McInnes frequently espoused great replacement and white genocide narratives on Twitter before he was removed from the platform. “This attitude [fringe feminist pro-abortion ideas] + Immigration = white genocide in the west. South Africa’s version is much more intense.”⁵⁵

Hate Literature, White Nationalism And Optics

Before forming the Proud Boys, McInnes concealed aspects of his ideology while cultivating the more palatable components for potential converts. One form of concealment involves the Proud Boys’ core tenant identifying them as “western chauvinists” as opposed to “white supremacists”. “Western” functions as a coded term for white, as evidenced in McInnes’ own words when he wrote the following about his brief work experience in Taiwan: “Being white in Taiwan is like being famous. Actually, they get mad if you say white because that’s politically incorrect. The term is Western.”⁵⁶ It is likely he adopted this strategy to evade detection from two sources: (1) Jim Goad, and (2) His attendance at the 2006 white nationalist .American Renaissance conference

In 1994 McInnes famously co-founded Vice Magazine in Montreal, with co-founders Surroosh Alvi and Shane Smith using “money from a government welfare program.”⁵⁷ Vice was originally a counter-cultural punk -rock magazine, and McInnes was the creative force responsible for its “editorial voice.”⁵⁸ For this, he looked to authors writing edgy literature - the .more politically incorrect, the better

McInnes is a long-time admirer of Jim Goad,⁵⁹ a Portland, Oregon author known for transgressive writing style and whose work was popular among the founding members of Vice during its formative years. In the first version of his memoir, McInnes wrote fondly about the literature that influenced the tone of Vice in its’ early days

A Danish magazine called Sewer Cunt seared our eyeballs with graphic depictions of murder, and an American Zine called FUCK was so harsh it gave our brains third degree burns, but nothing charbroiled our souls like Jim Goad’s ANSWER ME! He didn’t give a shit about what anyone

thought and wrote about rape as if he was .contributing to reader’s digest

Gavin McInnes, *How to Piss In Public*, Page 90⁶⁰.

Goad’s most famous book, *The Redneck Manifesto*, is considered by McInnes to be “one of three ‘required’ books on modern Western culture, alongside Pat Buchanan’s *The Death of the West and Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* by Charles Murray.”⁶¹ It is important to note that all three books share similar themes: White victimhood and the belief that minorities are unfairly favored in our society (to the detriment of poor whites in particular). Charles Murray is a proponent of scientific racism and the author of *The Bell Curve* which proposes a genetic explanation for racial differences in IQ. Buchanan’s book is based on the same premise as the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory—that the West is “dying” due to “[c]ollapsing birth rates in Europe and the U.S.”, “population explosions in Africa, Asia, and Latin America,” and “unchecked immigration”.⁶²

McInnes’ Vice articles reflected his desire to emulate Goad’s transgressive, un-politically correct writing style. He reveled in pushing boundaries in ways that made it difficult to tell whether he was serious or not, a style that remains his trademark today. A failed stand-up comedian, McInnes has characterized his “over-the-top expression” as only comedic in terms of tone, not substance. One article concluded: “It would seem clear, then, that McInnes’ persona is rooted in genuine conservative extremism, but it’s still impossible to remove all doubt.”⁶³ Therefore, to dispel any remaining ambiguities about McInnes’s radicalization, it is important that we also examine his behavior.

In 2006, Gavin McInnes attended the white nationalist American Renaissance⁶⁴ conference, hosted by pseudo-intellectual white nationalist Jared Taylor. An article from *The Forward* posted on American Renaissance’s website defined the worldview of attendees as being “united by a common belief in black intellectual inferiority, opposition to non-white immigration and ardor for maintaining America’s white majority.”⁶⁵ This belief system is referred to by white nationalists as “race realism,” and feeds into the historically held, and yet wholly imaginary, idea that black and brown men serve as existential threats to white male supremacy.

The white nationalist American Renaissance conference provided a cognitive opening⁶⁶ for McInnes, and the 2006 conference was particularly notable because a long-simmering fractious divide among adherents of white supremacy finally bubbled to the surface.⁶⁷ From the first American Renaissance conference in 1994, pseudo-intellectual approaches to justify the supremacy of whites and white culture over blacks, Hispanics, and Muslims were regularly promoted. However, Jared Taylor, the founder of *American Renaissance Magazine* and host of the biennial conference, had long attempted to ensure antisemitism was not part of his organization, going so far as to embrace Jewish conference speakers and explicitly forbid discussions of the “Jewish question” at conferences, in his magazine, or on his website.⁶⁸

The Southern Poverty Law Center’s 2006

Intelligence Report detailed a tense situation in which former KKK Grand Wizard, David Duke, alluded to the conspiracy theory of Jewish domination over media and government and was promptly called a “fucking nazi” by Jewish astrophysicist and notable white separatist Michael Hart, who was described as a “long time-attende” at former conferences. After this conference, Taylor was forced to take a stand between “[t]hrow[ing] out the anti-Semites [who embrace Jewish conspiracy theories] and try[ing] to build a larger movement with electoral possibilities like those increasingly seen in Britain and Germany; or openly join[ing] hands with the very energetic neo-Nazis even though that mean[t] the loss of any remaining shred of respectability.”⁶⁹ In response, the SPLC reported that, “Taylor issued a nonsectarian statement in which he said that all sorts of extremists would be welcome at his conferences as long as they acted appropriately.”⁷⁰ The “Jewish Question” schism at the 2006 conference likely inspired McInnes’s cryptofascist⁷¹ strategies that have come to define the Proud Boys and large swaths of the New Right.

Though McInnes cites “creative differences”⁷² as the reason he left Vice, former Vice writers believed that McInnes’s American Renaissance conference was the seminal event that led to being bought out.⁷³ When Vice expanded and merged with Viacom, McInnes was viewed as “a liability,” by his co-founders. His settlement with Vice was finalized in 2008.^{74, 75} This is consistent with McInnes’s correction to the claim that he was “fired” by Vice. He writes:

Wasn’t fired. Viacom was actually worried about me being ousted and thought it was a dangerous move because I was the brand. It would be more accurate to say: ‘His constant fraternizing with extremists (on the right and the left) was making advertisers uneasy.’ Vice was getting too big for its britches and associating with the far right was bad for business (far left wasn’t an issue, apparently).⁷⁶

Years later, he published *The Death of Cool*, a memoir in which he described his use of the term “Western” as a stand-in for white.⁷⁷ Additional evidence of McInnes’s racist, ethnonationalist views can be seen in his 2013 memoir. Here, he portrays Islam as intolerant and violent:

Every time I think about [my friend] Sprague, [who was traumatized assisting in the clean-up of ground zero], I think of what many call a “religion of peace” where a good 25 percent think suicide bombing is sometimes or often justified. Twenty Five percent of the 1.5 billion Muslims in the world is 375 million. Holy shit.⁷⁸

The law enforcement demographic McInnes hoped to recruit most were cops post 9/11, when Anti-Muslim bigotry and paranoia were often confused with patriotism.

McInnes Steps Down

In 2017, Anti-Muslim bigotry was the most salient factor in Proud Boys organizing. Proud Boys attended incidents organized by Canadian Coalition of Concerned Citizens to protest motions to condemn Islamophobia in Canada and were present nationwide in

Marches Against Sharia, organized by ACT For America.⁷⁹ They also attended incidents by Worldwide Coalition against Islam. It was through these Anti-Muslim events that the transnational network of Proud Boys grew. The incident map data reflects that Anti-Muslim incidents, while higher in volume, did not receive the same level of attention as the murder of Heather Hayer in Charlottesville. Kutner notes one such incident.⁸⁰ On July 8, 2017, Proud Boys acted on conspiratorial content from the Canadian Free Press and the Clarion Project—two outlets criticized for spreading disinformation and anti-Muslim rhetoric.⁸¹ Proud Boys used these sources to justify their descent into Islamberg, believing it to be an Islamic training ground.⁸²

This intimidation campaign received very little scrutiny. The scale of Anti-Muslim incidents did not prompt as much scrutiny or garner much pressure on Proud Boys’ leadership. In 2018, the fear of the second Unite the Right Rally,⁸³ coupled with the suspension of Proud Boys accounts on Twitter,⁸⁴ and Proud Boys well documented violent gang activity that ultimately led to Gavin McInnes stepping down.

On October 12, 2018, Proud Boys fought Antifascists outside of a speaking event at The Metropolitan Club. Proud Boys were arrested on gang violence charges, and the NYPD opened a criminal probe into the group. McInnes stated he was cooperating with law enforcement and stepping down in order to alleviate sentencing for the Proud Boys involved in the gang assault. “At the very least, [stepping down] will show jurors they are not dealing with a gang and there is no head of operations,” McInnes said.⁸⁶ He emphasized that the group had black and brown members and repeated that the group had no ties to white nationalism, both claims easily refutable by data. Enrique Tarrío was unanimously voted in as Chairman the following month.⁸⁷

Enrique Tarrío

Multi-racial members of the Proud Boys advance the same causes and follow the same trajectory as white supremacists, regardless of their personal justifications for being a member.

Tarrío has explained that politics was part of his culture growing up,⁸⁸ and proudly stated he was “the descendant of proud commie killers,” who fled the Castro regime.⁸⁹ Enrique Tarrío became politically active in the early 2000s. Early in his career he became affiliated with Roger Stone. He campaigned for one political candidate he did not name before working on Ron Paul’s campaign in 2008.

Tarrío joined the Proud Boys on May 5th 2017 after being recruited by Proud Boy Alex Gonzalez⁹⁰ while volunteering for Roger Stone at “Cinco de Milo,” an event announcing Milo Yiannopoulos’s lawsuit against Simon and Shuster. Roger Stone, Jack Posobiec, a naval intelligence officer with ties to white nationalism,⁹¹ Faith Goldy, Lucian Wintrich, and Ali Alexander were among notable individuals present. Hours before the event Jack Posobiec had broken the news of the Emmanuel Macron leaks on Twitter.^{92, 93} Cinco de Milo was also the event where Roger Stone stated his first degree pledge and became an honorary Proud Boy.

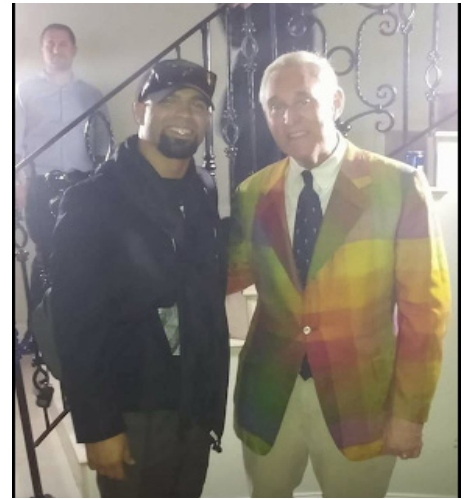


Fig 7 - Enrique Tarrío and Roger Stone May 5th, 2017, attending the “Cinco De Milo” event.

After joining, Tarrío became part of the paramilitary arm of the Proud Boys, the Fraternal Order of The Alt Knights (FOAK), which formed as the tactical arm of the Proud Boys after the Battles of Berkeley⁹⁴ and served as militia security in Charlottesville.⁹⁵

Tarrío was present at the 2018 storming of the democratic campaign office, where elected officials and Proud Boys aggressively confronted Nancy Pelosi, calling her a “piece of shit,” and “fucking communist.” They filmed Pelosi as she entered the building.⁹⁶ Members were described as hecklers, but their actions are more indicative of an attempt to intimidate elected officials. Tarrío made headlines where he espoused the narrative that Proud Boys were a, “drinking club with a patriot problem.”⁹⁷ At this event, Tarrío shouted “you don’t belong here, you f-----g communist! Get the f--- outta here!” to Nancy Pelosi. Pelosi was able to make it into the building, after which Nelson Diaz, the Chairman of the local Republican party, and a few others pounded on the door as Tarrío narrated, “open up, it’s the Proud Boys in here!”⁹⁹

On November 24th, 2018, Tarrío was unanimously voted in as the Proud Boys Chairman.¹⁰⁰ Proud Boys claim to abhor identity politics from the left because it allows for genuine inclusivity; Tarrío represents the far right counter to this, providing the illusion of inclusivity by being an Afro-Cuban man. According to Meadhbh Park, “By incorporating people of color, the far right and white supremacy become ‘a more durable force.’”¹⁰¹ Tarrío is just as aware of the power of optics as Proud Boys founder, Gavin McInnes.

The appointment of Tarrío to Chairman while serving as the Florida State Director for “Latinos for Trump” marked not only a shift in leadership, but also in the group’s strategic priorities. In an article “Hate Goes Mainstream,” Tarrío stated his job as chairman was to “bring false stories to light, combat media narratives that the Proud Boys are a white-supremacist group and descriptions that “make self-defense look like assault.”¹⁰² Tarrío’s words in the December 2018 article telegraphed his intent to target Antifascists, the group’s perceived opposition, and command the narrative. This shift towards more aggressive confrontation against Antifascists and continued messaging strategy would become more apparent in 2019 and build momentum into 2020.

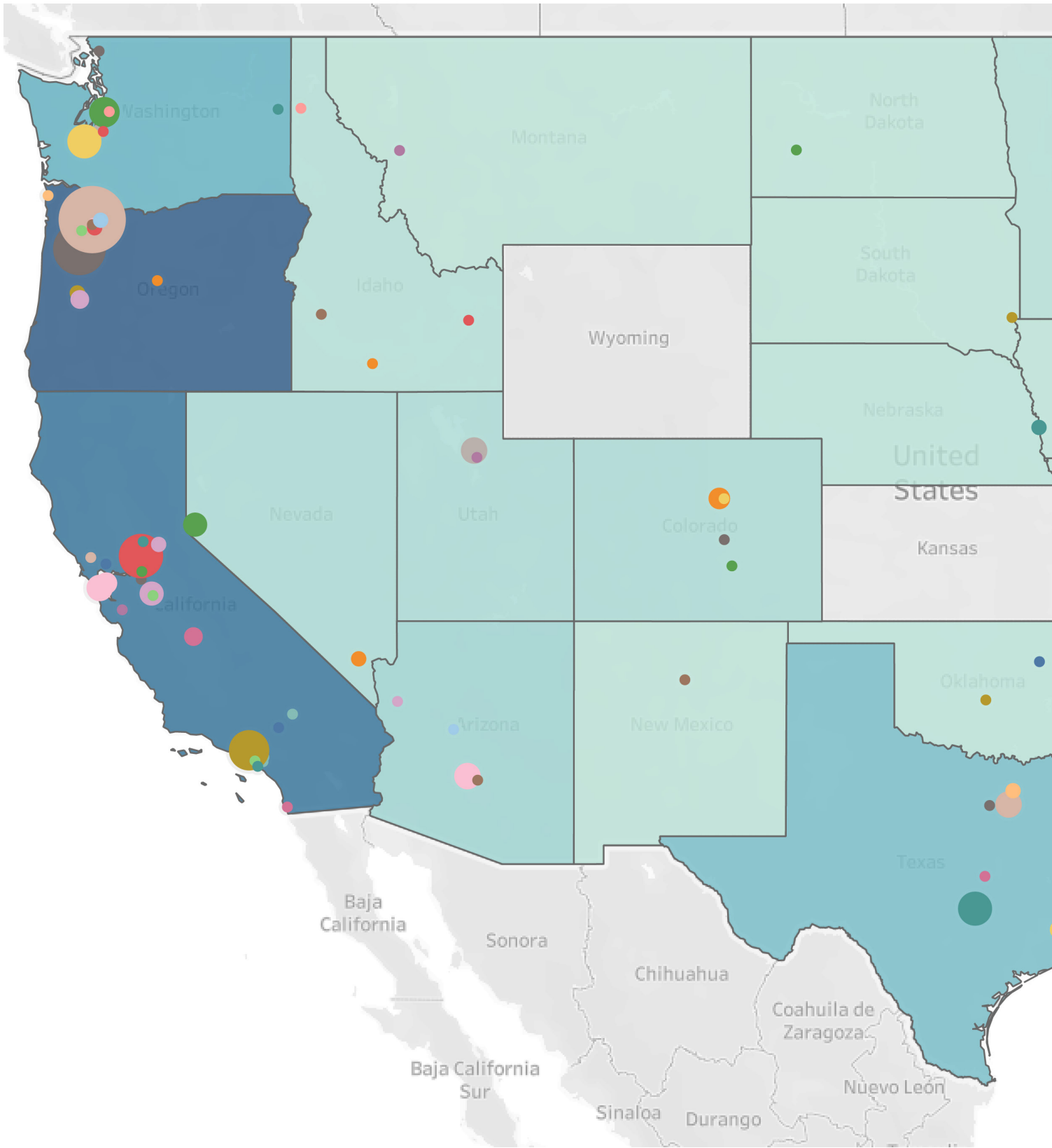
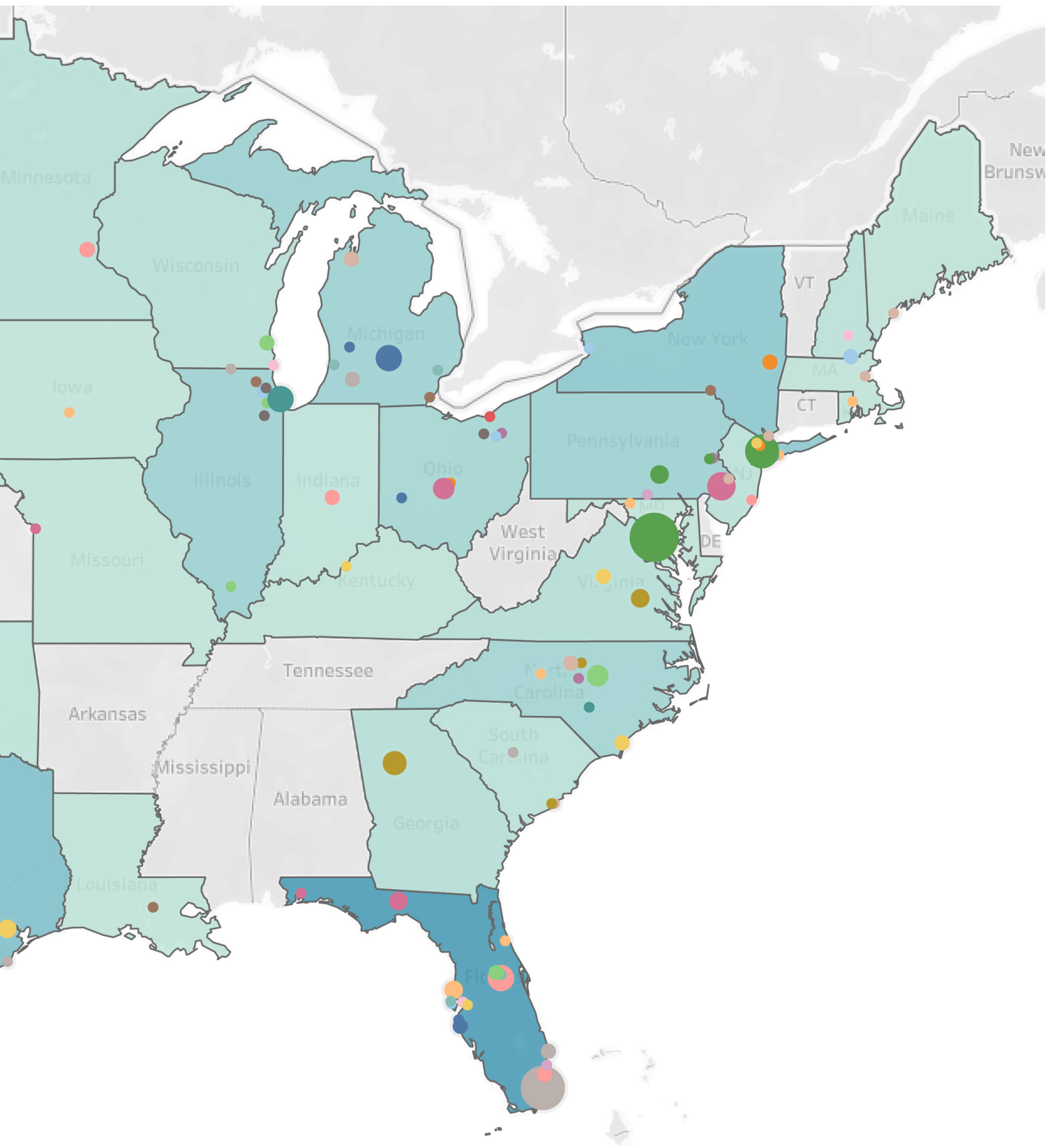


Fig. 8 - Map illustrating the frequency of incidents and events instigated or participated in by the Proud Boys in the US by State and City. The darkness of each state's shade indicates the frequency of incidents, the size of the circles indicates the number of incidents per city, and the color of the circles indicates separate cities. The map demonstrates significant activity in the Pacific Northwest Region, Texas, and Florida, in addition to Portland and Washington DC. Based on the Proud Boys subset of the KII HateMap data (<http://www.hatemap.io/>)



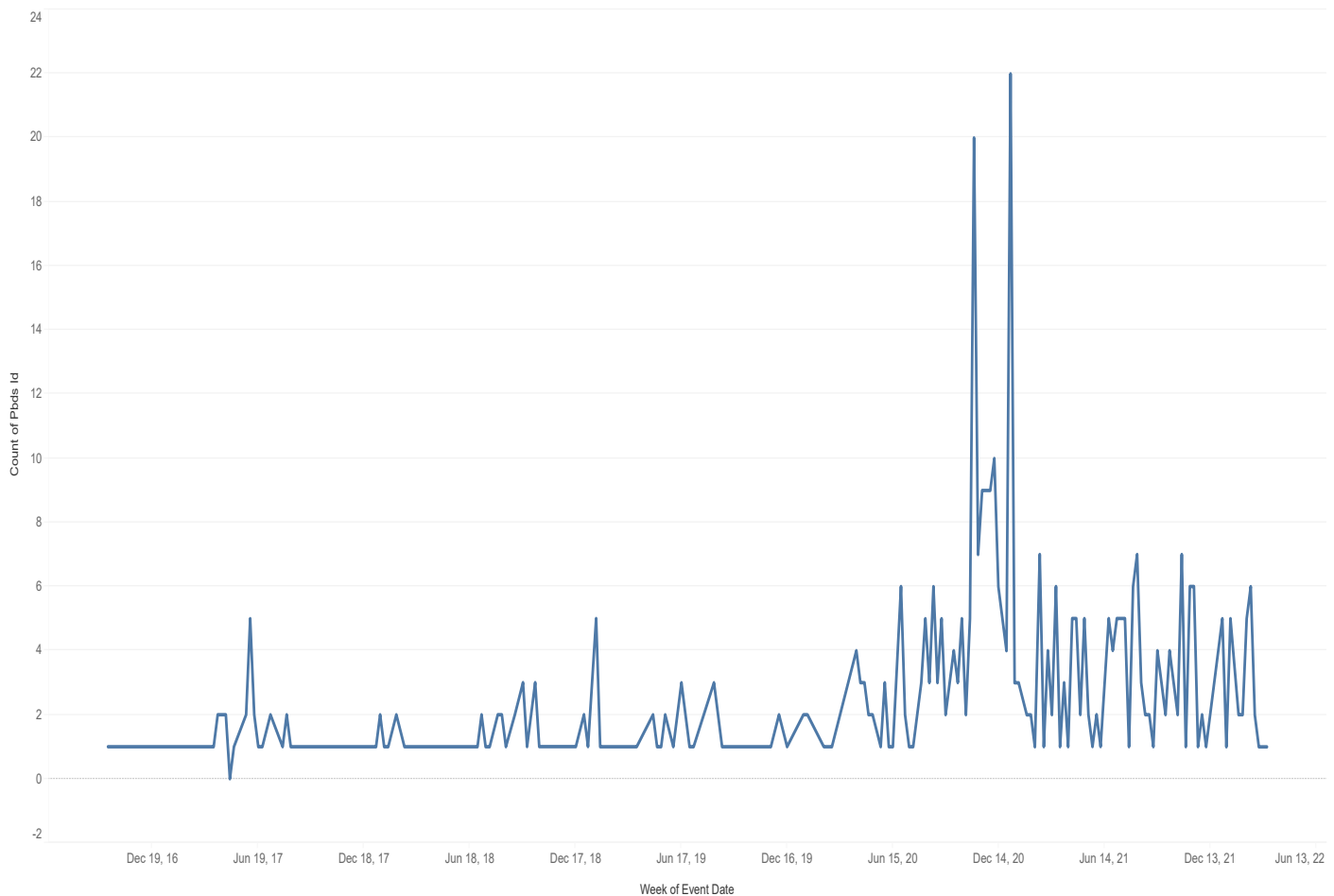


Fig. 9 - Graph showing the frequency of Proud Boys' events in the Hatemap dataset by week. Between the inception of the group in 2016 and June 2022 only one week saw zero events. The frequency of events peaked in the week of January 6th, and in the time-period surrounding the 2020 US Presidential Election. Activity is maintained to date. More data can be seen in the KII Hatemap (<http://www.hatemap.io/>).

What role does race, white supremacy, and fear of white replacement play in Proud Boys' activities?

The Great Replacement Theory and Gavin McInnes

There are several paths to understanding the beliefs of the Proud Boys and their relationship to white supremacy. The "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory argues that white culture is being replaced by people of color. This is sometimes cited interchangeably with the term "white genocide".¹⁰³

Gavin McInnes, has argued that the Proud Boys are distinct from the alt-right in that they do not adhere to Jewish conspiracy theories and do not believe that "Western" is synonymous with "white".¹⁰⁴ Members are expected to believe that "whiteness" is not the problem, and to accept that "West is best" As Park (2022) noted, the group "allows non-white men to join so long as they believe systemic racism does not exist and that there should be no 'racial guilt,' as the Proud Boys put it."¹⁰⁵ In spite of this assertion, many researchers have concluded that their actions, symbols, and relationships to overtly white supremacist groups belie their true intentions, and that the

use of rhetorical strategies to distance themselves from the "alt-right" is simply a tactic to attract a wider audience and frame themselves in a more "legitimate" light.¹⁰⁶

Researchers are not alone; the U.S. Proud Boys' true underlying ideology has even been called into question by members of international Proud Boys chapters. On May 10, 2021, the Official Proud Boys Ireland telegram channel posted a satirical list of what they called the "PB USA tenemenants [sic]", which included statements such as "Anti racism (unless its the cool racism)" and "Venerate the housewife (until the bitch steps out of line then I smash her and cry to my bros that she wants to take the kids)."¹⁰⁷

When white nationalist Emily Youcis¹⁰⁸ was a guest on The Gavin McInnes Show, she got him to recite the 14 words.¹⁰⁹ McInnes replaced "white" with "western.", but otherwise complied. In 2021, Youcis railed against the perceived threat against white people in the Waukesha shooting. In a telegram post, she claimed "the race war has already begun long ago, decades ago. Every year that blacks are allowed to senselessly slaughter whites in cold blood is another year of this one-sided, hidden war."¹¹⁰ This belief of white extinction aligns with "The Great Replacement Theory," a conspiracy that has its origins in French Nationalism. It was popularized in 2011 by Renaud Camus, who wrote, "Le Gran Replacement," in 2011.¹¹¹

The "Great Replacement Theory" is a far right conspiracy theory that proposes that "white women are not having enough children and that falling birth rates will lead to white people

around the world being replaced by nonwhite people".¹¹² For the far-right, black and brown people are seen as an existential threat to the future of white people and white culture. The "Great Replacement" is sometimes used interchangeably with the term "white genocide," and has inspired some of the worst terrorist attacks and mass shootings in recent history.^{113, 114, 115, 116, 117}

Gavin McInnes has demonstrated in word and deed that he subscribes to the myth of "The Great Replacement" and has championed William Petzer, one of the largest purveyors of the replacement/white genocide narratives.¹¹⁸ On August 12th, 2017, Gavin McInnes collaborated with Mike Peinovich¹¹⁹ on the logistics of the Unite the Right Rally, "I like the idea of unity and I'm outraged at white genocide," he wrote, "but there may be some misgivings from the group."¹²⁰ Peinovich responds to McInnes's comments with an observation that many Proud Boys "seem on board with white nationalism."¹²¹

Male Supremacy

Male supremacy is one of the most salient features of the Proud Boys ideology, yet it is often the least articulated component of the group's belief system. This ideology asserts itself in the aggressive policing of women who step outside of the rigid gender norms constructed for them. Patriarchy is defined as a, "system of government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it."¹²² According to Mann, "sexism seeks to rationalize and justify the Patriarchy,"¹²³ while misogyny acts as "the law enforcement branch of patri-

archy.”¹²⁴ A man can harbor sexist views without acting upon them. Sexism can involve tacit acceptance of gender inequality like many men who support the overturning of *Roe v Wade*, or are inclined to distrust female victims of rape. Misogyny is action oriented and directed against female targets.

Pat Buchanan, an ultra-nationalist author frequently cited by Proud Boys members online and at chapter meetings, perceives equality and women’s liberation as a direct threat to their desired social order. This is a claim echoed by New Right figures like Curtis Yarvin who view progressives as the real fundamentalists.¹²⁵ Proud Boys members push back against equality through a combination of anti-feminist rhetoric and offline enforcement. Proud Boys engaged in offline enforcement at the 2019 “Pro-Life Rally For The Innocent,” where Proud Boys, dressed as Clowns were photographed with signs that said, “Abortion isn’t funny,”¹²⁶ and the 2018 Night For Freedom event, scheduled the same day as the Women’s Marches.¹²⁷

They share memes that celebrate offline enforcement of gender norms which often includes violence or death. Internally, members will colloquially refer to this mechanism as “thot patrolling,” a vulgar call to action against women they perceive as promiscuous. At the same time, they attempt to obfuscate their misogynistic views by claiming they are “venerating the housewife”, as McInnes wrote on his telegram channel in 2020: “We venerate the housewife. Many people read this as us being misogynists, especially when they don’t bother to look up the word chauvinist, but what we mean by this is that women who chose to be housewives and mothers should be celebrated for that choice.”¹²⁸ He went on to say that “We do not claim that is the only valid choice and many of our wives are very successful career women. In today’s world too many men do not prioritize having families but we do. We like sex, we want wives and we want babies. We encourage each other to find good wives and to be good husbands and fathers.”¹²⁹

Proud Boys opposition to gender equality and progressive values is a hallmark of the male grievance communities that view men as victims under feminism. Their desire to push back against an imagined oppressor can be seen in the group targeting women’s marches, organizing anti-abortion rallies, and their celebrating violence against women who violate traditional gender norms.

Opposition to progressivism is one of the defining features of the New Right.¹³⁰ However, their resentment against women can’t be understated. Their misogyny—their desire to police women’s behavior and restrict their access to power, gets transformed into their opposition to all government efforts that strive for equality. Anti-egalitarianism is why the New Right embraces efforts that seek to hasten societal collapse. In the next section, we will cover the gender dynamics behind radicalization, anti-egalitarianism, and misogyny feed into an accelerationist worldview.

Militant Accelerationism

Matthew Kriner, The Managing Director of the Accelerationism Research Consortium, agrees that it is accurate to classify Gavin McInnes as an accelerationist, though he states it is

important to differentiate between “political accelerationism versus militant accelerationism.”¹³¹ Militant accelerationism is defined as, “a set of tactics and strategies designed to put pressure on and exacerbate latent social divisions, often through violence, thus hastening societal collapse.”¹³²

After *Unite the Right* in Charlottesville, McInnes positioned the Proud Boys as Alt-Light as opposed to the more explicitly Antisemitic Alt-Right. Through an act of rhetorical tap dancing, he disavowed members who were present at the *Unite the Right* rally while appealing to the same grievances of its attendees by blaming the media for contributing to the event by their repeated demonization of Western Civilization.¹³³ After Heather Heyer’s murder, McInnes urged *Unite the Right* attendees to shift their focus. “Let’s get back to dismantling the government and not get lost in rhetoric. It gets people killed.”¹³⁴ Four years later, Gavin McInnes maintained this position, when he told a reporter, unprompted, “I hated the government; I still hate the government. I want to burn it to the ground.”¹³⁵

Richard Spencer, a prominent Alt-Right figure, got Gavin McInnes his job at *Taki’s Magazine* in 2007. *Taki’s Magazine* which has been allied with the Greek Neo Nazi Party *Golden Dawn*.¹³⁶ Richard Spencer got Gavin McInnes hired at *Taki’s Magazine* after he left *Vice* in 2007. After Charlottesville, it became too costly for him to maintain his involvement. He wrote his last article for the Alt-Right publication twelve days after Heather Heyer’s murder. From here he revealed his central philosophy surrounding free speech.¹³⁷

Probing Inconsistencies

Although the Proud Boys put significant effort into denying a connection to racism or sexism, there is significant evidence to the contrary. The enforcement of traditional gender roles is inextricably linked to maintaining white supremacist hierarchies.¹³⁸ One way gender is enforced is through the glorification of a particular type of femininity. In its construction, Maxwell and Shields note “contradictory messages in which women are both esteemed and virtuous, yet better suited to simpler positions.”¹³⁹ Gavin McInnes plays on this old misogynistic trope quite well; he glorifies traditional gender roles while he and other members of the Proud Boys publicly question the value of women in the workforce. A woman’s value becomes confined to her ability to reproduce. On encrypted platforms, the group’s hatred of women becomes less sanitized. One image circulating in Proud Boys chapters evidences their hatred of women: the meme is a screenshot of a news story where a woman, after being caught cheating, tragically committed suicide.

Above the headline reads, “When you thot patrol yourself.” Through circulating this meme, they asserted that once a woman violates gender norms, her death is simultaneously of no consequence, and, indeed, a source of entertainment for them.

It is important to allow McInnes to demonstrate who he is through his own words. When asked to comment on the Toronto shooter, controversial academic Jordan Peterson, suggested “enforced monogamy” as the solution to incel terrorism.¹⁴¹ For McInnes, violent

When you thot patrol yourself



Fig. 10 - Proud Boys Meme Collected During Ethnographic Research, 2018¹⁴⁰

misogyny is as deeply held a belief as much as it is a marketing tool. In 2018, Gavin McInnes defended Peterson’s views on enforced monogamy. In this defense article, he wrote, “And all of these writers, like Amanda Marcotte and all of these, Nellie Bowles, and the woman [Taylor Lorenz] who exposed Pamela Geller’s kids, all these spinsters, they think they’re living this too cool, empowered Watergate-journalist life. But you’re not. You’re just a colostomy bag for various strangers’ semen.”¹⁴² His words highlight how, in the worldview of gender supremacy, a woman is reduced to body parts; her worth confined to her ability to reproduce. This feature of Proud Boys’ ideology is what has allowed chapters to form loose alliances with anti-abortion activists. There are several instances of Proud Boys providing security for anti-abortion speakers and serving as body guards to facilitate anti-abortion activist’s harassment of women,¹⁴³ in one instance even as women sought services at planned parenthood. Proud Boys’ anti-egalitarian view is informed by delusions of victimhood; a view that begins with their redpill entry to recruitment, described below.

The Redpill

“Taking the redpill” is a reference to *The Matrix* in which the main character takes a literal red pill in order to learn the truth about his society. In this context, the redpill refers to men awakening to the reality of male subjugation by women under feminism. The redpill provides a form of pseudo empowerment to men looking to navigate relationships without feeling a need to develop a sense of agency. Being a victim allows them to relinquish control and accept their fate that there is nothing men can do to improve relationship outcomes. The redpill is a victim narrative that dovetails with the fear that white men will lose their standing in a world they cannot dominate and lose their women to Black or brown men. Once again, this fear goes back to common terms in white supremacist circles—white genocide or “The Great Replacement”.¹⁴⁴ White genocide or “The Great Replacement” is the concept that changing racial demographics are leading to white extinction. This erasure is believed to be facilitated by a Jewish cabal pushing the immigration of non-white individuals in order to further emasculate white men.¹⁴⁵

The redpill assumes a position of subservience to women under feminism, where feminism is viewed as a ploy to emasculate men. This feeds into other conspiratorial thinking like “The Great Replacement”, which situates Black and brown bodies as an existential threat. Proud Boys emphatically claim, “The

West is the Best,” while echoing Buchanan’s fears in the decline of western civilization;¹⁴⁶ “Western Civilization” is used as code for “white”. Proud Boys who read from Pat Buchanan’s book, *Death of the West*, share his lamentations over the perceived decline of Western Civilization.¹⁴⁷ The fear of changing racial demographics has always aligned with the desire to control women’s bodies. Under feminism, when choice and free will are championed, insecure white men fear their women will choose black and brown men over them. The redpill offers the foundation for Proud Boys’ conspiratorial thinking. Once one subscribes to the notion of hidden agendas crafted by a scheming cabal of women, it is easier to embrace a range of conspiracy theories. It is why 9/11 trutherism, QAnon, Pizzagate, the Kalgari Plan and COVID-19 disinformation circulate so freely in Proud Boys’ rhetorical spaces,^{148, 149} and why they champion disinformation vectors like Jack Posobiec¹⁵⁰ and Alex Jones.¹⁵¹

Michael Malice, a self-described anarchist who embedded himself with the “New Right” states that “[o]ne of the problems with the redpill is that once you see everything as a lie, it’s often hard to navigate to the truth.”¹⁵²

The conspiratorial worldview, through the redpill entry to recruitment, makes Proud Boys the perfect vectors for spreading disinformation.

Their suggestibility is why Roger Stone, Jeff Giesa, Steve Bannon and the wave of New Right architects saw Proud Boys as valuable to advance their agenda. Vitolo-Haddad described how McInnes and the Proud Boys gathered to watch the outcome of the 2016 election results, viewing his election as validation of their *raison d’être*: “Spellbound by demagogic rhetoric and the mythos of ‘the West,’ the Proud Boys interpreted Trump’s election as tacit authorization to follow a pathway to neoliberal self-empowerment achieved through violence.”¹⁵³ On election night in 2016, McInnes stated, “If Donnie wins the Proud Boys will own America. We’ll just walk into the White House.”¹⁵⁴

Function Over Appearance

Vice was once described as hating everyone equally Proud Boys represent a form of all-inclusive extremism where anyone can be radicalized through a bias of their choice. The group has never articulated an ideology or dogma beyond the patchwork of libertarian tenants surrounding limiting government under the veneer of patriotism. Their amorphous positioning allows them to attach to many groups. Their rallies, however, feature hyper-nationalist chants against immigration, Islam, Black Lives Matter, women, and trans people. Their lionization of Augusto Pinochet, the Chilean dictator, is a common theme in their tee shirts. Their antagonization and deliberate dress style seeks to bait opponents into confrontations.¹⁵⁵ In claiming they’re “just trolling” or “triggering liberals,” Proud Boys have been allowed to “try-on” extremist tenants of many forms. This, along with the increasing mainstreaming of viewpoints that formerly existed only in extremist circles are how they have been able to hide in plain sight.

A Radicalization Vector

Having the freedom to try on extremism is also how the group has been able to radicalize members in a relatively short amount of time. The following section will cover Proud Boys as a way to spread the contagion of extremism most efficiently, marking the group’s function as a radicalization vector.

In this interview transcript, Proud Boy participant 7 (cited in prior research)¹⁵⁶ acknowledges the reality of radicalization within the group:

Proud Boy: However we clearly aren’t for everybody’s taste and that’s ok. Some people like a glass of wine with dinner and some people like a shot of cheap whiskey. Our humor is the cheap whiskey. It may not be refined or taste that good with a salad, but it’s fun to do and rebellious to the social norms.

Kutner: Let’s continue this analogy. I was thinking more in terms of what is palatable. Where, the American public equals wine or beer, Proud Boys equals cheap whiskey, and white supremacists equals moonshine. If one develops a taste for cheap whisky, can one not also develop a taste for moonshine?

Proud Boy: I think they would prefer to huff stolen gasoline out of a 1986 Honda Civic actually. They have no humor at all

Kutner: So, cheap whiskey to huff. Is it possible? Have you seen it happen?

Proud Boy: I would like to answer your previous question. Are you asking if our brand of humor is inline with neo-nazi’s or have I ever met one? I don’t mind answering the question, I just want to fully understand your question. I could answer both if that’s what you intended me to do.

Kutner: I was thinking more in terms of what is palatable. If you have a taste for cheap whisky for example... Would it not be difficult to develop a taste for huff, despite them being separate substances, as it were? And for the other question Have you seen members develop a taste for ‘huff’? having started with only a preference for cheap whisky?

Proud Boy: Yes to both questions.

Each chapter is influenced by the specific social, historical, cultural, and political issues of their community. Some remain on the lower tier of involvement and remain passive consumers of content. Some have mobilized offline at rallies. The regional differences become clearer through incident map data, where different chapters champion different causes alongside the groups they hope will maximize their visibility. The data we’ve collected on the other groups present at Proud Boys incidents highlights both the regional differences in ideology, and the role of opportunism in their group.

- Groups
- 2 Million Bikers
 - 211 Bootboys
 - ACT for America
 - Action 4 Liberty
 - Alamance County Taking Back Alamance County North Carolina (ACTBAC NC)
 - American Action Force 3%
 - American Civil Defense
 - American Conservative Union
 - American Freedom Keepers
 - American Freedom M/C
 - American Guard
 - American Warrior Revolution
 - American Wolf
 - Anti-Communist Action
 - Apopka Police Department
 - Arizona Liberty Guard
 - Battalion 49
 - Berkley College Republicans
 - Bikers for Trump
 - Black Panthers
 - Blacks For Trump
 - Blue Lives Matter
 - Boca Raton Republican Club
 - Boogaloo Bois
 - Breitbart News
 - By Any Means Necessary
 - Carlisle Light Infantry
 - Cascade Legion
 - Chicago Fraternal Order of Police
 - Children’s Health Defense
 - Citizens Against Political Persecution
 - Concerned Utah Citizens
 - Confederate White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan
 - Conservative Update
 - Democrats for Trump
 - FiftyFifty Tactical
 - Flat Earthers
 - Fraternal Order of Alt-Knights
 - Freedom Angels
 - Gateway Pundit
 - Gays for Trump
 - Groypers
 - Heirs to the Confederacy
 - Hell Shaking Street Preachers
 - Hiwaymen
 - Identity Dixie
 - Identity Evropal/American Identity Movement
 - III% Security Force
 - III% Three Percenters
 - Infowars
 - Jewish Defense League
 - Ku Klux Klan
 - L.A. Coalition for Trump
 - Last Sons of Liberty
 - Latino Exit From the Democratic Party
 - Latinos For Trump
 - League of The South
 - Liberate Minnesota
 - Liberate Nevada
 - Liberty First
 - Liberty Revival Alliance
 - Look Ahead America
 - Loyal White Knights
 - Metropolitan Republican Club
 - Miami Trump Volunteers
 - Michigan Liberty Militia
 - Multnomah County Republican Party
 - Nation of Islam
 - National Socialist Movement
 - New Hanover County Council of Concerned Citizens
 - New Port Richey Police Department
 - NYU Anti-Fascists
 - NYU College Republicans
 - Oath Keepers
 - Omaha Police Department
 - Orange County College Republicans
 - Orphans Republic MC
 - Patriot Prayer
 - Philadelphia Police Union
 - Plaquemines Parish Sheriff’s Office
 - Police
 - Pro-Trump supporters (General)
 - QAnon
 - Re-Open NC
 - Red Elephants
 - Redneck Revolt
 - Republican Party
 - Resist Marxism
 - Rise Above Movement
 - San Francisco GOP
 - Save the Tower Theater Group
 - Seattle Police Department
 - Socialist Rifle Association
 - Soldiers of Odin
 - South Carolina Light Foot Militia
 - Stand Up For Your Constitutional Rights
 - Stokes County Militia
 - Stolen Voices Foundation
 - SWFL Keep America Great
 - Texas United For America
 - Texas Freedom Force
 - Texas Patriot Network
 - The Base
 - The Oregon GOP
 - Tick Licker Firearms
 - Traditionalist Worker Party
 - Turning Point USA
 - Utah Patriots
 - UW College Republicans
 - Vanguard America
 - Vets for Trump
 - Virginia Citizens Defense League
 - Walk Away Movement
 - Warriors For Freedom
 - Women for America First
 - Women For Trump
 - Worldwide Demonstration

remarking that antifascists, would be responsible for destroying cities. In stating this, Tarrío acknowledged that Proud Boys' mere presence was considered an act of provocation. During the summer of 2019, he explained to Kutner the group's sustained pressure campaign. He referred to this campaign as "stress testing" or exhausting the resources of the city under the pretext of restoring "law and order."¹⁶⁹

As Tarrío explained to Kutner, "Draining cities of taxpayer resources"¹⁷⁰ proved a cost-effective way to weaken a city's resolve to respond to extremist threats.

2020: An overview of Proud Boys Tactics Leading Up to January 6th

Proud Boys followed similar organizing strategies in prior years: Co-attend events with like-minded groups and stage counter-demonstrations in locations and at events where their presence was most likely to spawn violence. The year began with Pro-Trump rallies, pro-second amendment rallies, and anti-abortion rallies.

On April 15th, 2020, Proud Boys played a central role in Operation Gridlock to protest Governor Whitmer's stay-at-home-order. Proud Boys promoted the Michigan chapter as they blocked the hospital entrance at Sparrow Hospital. This incident was partially funded by the Devos foundation. One Republican House Speaker also participated.

Robert Mercer is a hedge fund billionaire described as, "[A] Christian conservative, gun enthusiast, a climate change denier, religious, small-government proponent and a man who despises the political establishment as incompetent and corrupt."¹⁷¹ He has donated over \$100 million (£84 million) to various right-wing candidates and think-tanks.¹⁷² Proud Boys participated in a wave of anti-lockdown and Re-open protests across the country, which were tied to special interest groups funded by the Mercer Family, among others.¹⁷³ Many of the anti-lockdown protests occurred at governors mansions, state Capitols, or outside city halls.

In late May, after the murder of George Floyd, Proud Boys began targeting Black Lives Matter protestors while outwardly aligning with Back the Blue, and espousing pro-cop narratives. They claimed they were protecting businesses, but they were looking for a new narrative to exploit and a new pool of potential recruits who would be sympathetic to their movement.

Independence Day, 2020 came with a flurry of activities involving the Proud Boys. Proud Boys attended an event in Prescott Arizona alongside House Rep. Paul Gosar, who was photographed with members of the group. On that same day, other Proud Boys members were in Washington, D.C. attending Trump's Independence Day Event. A performance artist who sought to play on conservative fears created fake posts insinuating that Antifa would come to Gettysburg to burn flags. The flag burning hoax was amplified by Stone Protege and Proud Boy Jacob Engels. Approximately 200 individuals, including the Pennsylvania Volunteer Militia, Boogaloo Boys, and Proud

Boys gathered in Gettysburg organized under the guise of protecting civil war monuments. This cluster of activity on July 4th highlights the tactic of holding simultaneous events in multiple cities to further the appearance of large numbers. Disinformation and fears of Antifa, as in prior years, played a significant role in offline organizing. This disinformation served as pretexts used to justify violent shows of force.

Throughout the summer of 2020, Proud Boys continued to capitalize on the momentum of George Floyd's death, animus against Black Lives Matter and Antifa, support for Back the Blue, and opposition to Confederate Statue removals. In the process, they built coalitions with Boogaloo adherents and continued to organize alongside Oath Keepers and the Three-percenters.

Anti-cop sentiment is hidden within the Boogaloo aesthetic. This otherwise hidden language was revealed by one Boogaloo member, who asked the rhetorical question, "What do you roast at a luau?" It was a subtle identification of cops as pigs. The Proud Boys' organizing with anti-cop, pro-civil war Boogaloo¹⁷⁴ and pro-cop Back the Blue, and against police defunding highlights the opportunism of the group.

On August 29th, 2020, Proud Boys attended an event titled "Patriots Against Pedophilia" in Modesto, California. Their primary target was planned parenthood, which they claimed engaged in "black genocide"; this was an attempt to malign abortion access with implicit QAnon narratives and mobilize segments of the black community. Other attempts to mobilize this segment relied heavily on disinformation to promote vaccine hesitancy in black communities, banking on the historical distrust of medical institutions. There were five recorded incidents on this day in Nevada, Ohio, California, North Carolina, and Wisconsin. The ideological purposes of these events were pro-Trump, Pro-Back The Blue, Anti-Mask and Pro-QAnon, respectively.

On September 3rd, Donald Trump called for poll watching on the debate stage: "I'm urging my supporters to go into the polls and watch very carefully," he said. "They're called 'poll watchers.' It's a very safe, very nice thing."¹⁷⁵ In the Khalifa Ihlér dataset available on <http://www.hatemap.io/>, there is at least one known instance of a Proud Boy, dressed in identifying Proud Boy's clothing showing up as a poll watcher on election day.

On September 26th, roughly 1,000 Proud Boys and MAGA activists gathered for the "End Antifa" in support of President Donald Trump's re-election campaign in an effort to call for domestic terrorism. Three days later, Trump endorsed the Proud Boys in his refusal to disavow the group, claiming that someone needed to do something about "Antifa" and the infamous, "Proud Boys, stand back and stand by," comments.¹⁷⁶ On September 30th, Donald Trump invited his followers to register as Trump election poll watchers, echoing similar voter intimidation efforts in 2016.^{177, 178}

On October 18th, Cubans for Biden were intimidated by Latinos for Trump and members of the Proud Boys. The group supporting the Biden Harris ticket had guns pointed at them, were brake-checked, and were intimidated to

get off the road. This incident was similar to Proud Boys were a part of the mob aggressively intimidating the Shalala/Pelosi campaign outside of democratic during the 2018 midterms.¹⁷⁹ Republicans denounced that incident, while claiming to not know who the Proud Boys were.¹⁸⁰

On October 28th, a self-identified Proud Boy sent letters threatening to blow up a voting location in Dickinson, North Dakota. On November 3rd, a Proud Boy showed up in his "colors" as a poll watcher and was spotted loitering outside of a Nebraska polling location, suggesting that members of the group heeded Trump's call to become poll watchers.

On November 5th, FreedomWorks and Proud Boys held a "Stop The Count" protest where they spread election denialist claims. FreedomWorks for America is a super PAC that "empower the leaderless, decentralized community of the tea party movement as it continues its hostile takeover of the GOP establishment".¹⁸¹ FreedomWorks is endorsed by Senator Ted Cruz, a member of the GOP establishment. Cruz has ties to Proud Boys and attempted to pass legislation declaring Antifa as a Domestic Terrorist organization in 2019.¹⁸²

On November 7th, "Stop the Steal" protests occurred in Florida, California, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, and Arizona. The largest election denialist rally was Arizona, with over 1000 protestors outside of Maricopa County's Election Office. That region was heavily influenced by QAnon narratives that circulated across social media platforms and converged with Trump's election denialist claims.

Social media amplification of "Stop the Steal" correlates with Proud Boys incident map data and the election interference incidents on November 5th, November 14th, November 21st, and the seven "Stop the Steal" incidents in multiple cities on December 12th.¹⁸³ All events were crucial for building momentum leading up to January 6th. On November 28th, Proud Boys provided security for "Conservative Thanksgiving w/ Cooper," a re-open and election denialist protest in Raleigh promoted on Facebook.¹⁸⁴ As noted earlier, the Reopen protests were partially funded by the Mercers.

On January 5th, hundreds of people organized by the Eighty Percent Coalition and Moms for America, including members of the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers, protested in Washington, D.C. There was also a religious protest called the "Jericho March" organized by Evangelical Christians. After a summer of attempting to recruit more police to their group, Proud Boys attend a pro-Trump event where cops are assaulted. This, combined with indictment records, suggest that following January 6th, the Proud Boys' views on police had shifted to the extent that Proud Boys saw police less as allies and more as traitors.¹⁸⁵

Cops are the primary threat, don't get caught by them or BLM [Black Lives Matter], another post said. "It is apparent now more than ever, that if you are a patriot, you will be targeted and they will come after you. The funny thing is that they don't realize that we are coming for them.

-Post in Boots on the Ground Chat, January 5th¹⁸⁶

Did the Proud Boys Monetize January 6th?

According to our research, a cop who left the Proud Boys in 2019 after eight months stated that he “paid dues to a group leader and was told the money would pay for food and a room for “meet-ups.”¹⁸⁷ The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law claimed those publicly visible, online dues payments helped fund the Proud Boys’ “violent or otherwise illegal” activities.¹⁸⁸

On December 17th, 2020, Will Carless reported that nearly 1,000 people with Chinese surnames gave roughly \$86,000 to Proud Boys through the Christian fundraising platform Give Send Go.¹⁸⁹ According to experts in Chinese Affairs, their donations reflect that a “deeply conservative” faction of Chinese Americans, “embrace misogyny and even racist attitudes common among America’s far right.”¹⁹⁰ This percentage of Chinese donors also believe Proud Boys’ narratives of protecting the country from Antifascists.

It is unknown how much of the late December’s donations from the Chinese diaspora went to financing the January 6th Attack on the Capitol. However, this late December wave of donations reflect the continued tactic of Proud Boys deliberately provoking and then using their target’s reactions to recruit and crowd-fund.¹⁹¹ What is known is that on December 30, 2020, Zach Rehl posted a link to an online fundraiser with the campaign name of, “Travel Expenses for upcoming Patriot Events.”¹⁹² The campaign generated over \$5,500 in donations between December 30, 2020 and January 4, 2021.¹⁹³

According to indictment records, ten days after the Chinese American donations came in, Ethan Nordean created an online crowdfunding campaign that solicited donations for “Protective gear and communications” to be used by the Proud Boys on January 6th, 2021.¹⁹⁴

Why did Proud Boys Come to D.C. on January 6th?

The Proud Boys came to DC. on January 6th to prevent the Joint Session of Congress from certifying the election results.¹⁹⁵

“Every normal man must be tempted, at times, to spit upon his hands, hoist the black flag, and begin slitting throats.”
- H.L. Menken, Prejudices, 1919

On November 12, 2020, Indictment records show Tarrío posted a message that read, “Fuck Unity. No quarter. Raise the black flag.”¹⁹⁷ His post reflects a level of dehumanization of their perceived political enemies to the extent they are seen as enemy combatants. Tarrío’s call to “raise the black flag” mirrors language referenced by H.L. Menken. The origin of this reference highlights the insurrectionary nature of the group. The combination of desensitizing memes, conspiracy theories, and disinformation in their alternative media ecosystems pushed them to further levels of dehumanizing action.

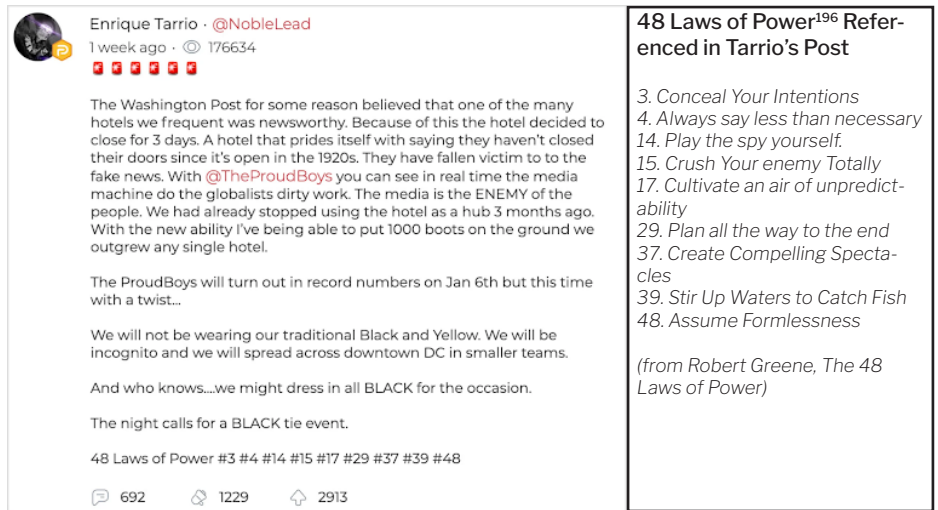


Fig. 12 -Post by Enrique Tarrío on Parler, Late December 2020

Prior to the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, right wing media amplified verifiably false information about Dominion Voting Systems rigging the election against Trump along with a range of conspiracy theories that fall into the broader category of “election denialism”.¹⁹⁹ Proud Boys spread this disinformation and conspiracy theories in their insular media ecosystems before, during, and after the election. Sharing disinformation became an act to reaffirm their identity as “Patriots” and paint establishment figures as traitors.

Part victims and part vectors, the Proud Boys, by virtue of their insular media ecosystems, were able to gamify¹⁹⁸ themselves out of accepting the election outcome.

Each element of disinformation added to the common narrative within the group and built a collective identity opposed to what they perceived to be a corrupt government attempting to “steal” the election. In contrast to non-radicalized communities, Proud Boys were incapable of accepting the objective reality of the election outcome because it would mean a rejection of not only Donald Trump, but of their core group identity. On the night of Trump’s election in 2016, McInnes had framed it as an existential crisis: “Tonight, we either take the country or we lose the country to the establishment.”²⁰⁰ They could not accept that the country had rejected Trump and their form of patriotism—a vital component of their identities—so it was easier to accept a conspiracy instead. In the immediate aftermath of the 2020 election, several high-ranking members failed to accept the results and began plotting in operational cells to come to DC on January 6th.²⁰¹ They sought to overturn what they perceived to be fraudulent election results, and they chose to do it by force.

*“It’s time for f**king War if they steal this sh*t.”²⁰²*
- Joe Biggs, November 5th 2020

“The spirit of 1776 has resurfaced like the and has created groups like the Proudboys and we will not be extinguished. We will grow that guides us. We are unstoppable, unrelenting and now . flame that fuels us and spread like love . . unforgiving. Good luck to all you traitors of this country we so deeply love ... you’re going to need it.”²⁰³
- Ethan Nordean, November 27th, 2020

“Hopefully squads for the traitors that are trying to steal the election from the American people.”²⁰⁴
- Zach Rehl, November 27th, 2020

November 7th, 2020 “Standby Order Has Been Rescinded”

On November 7th, 2020, the race is called for Joe Biden. Trump refuses to concede and begins circulating election fraud narratives.²⁰⁵ “Stop the Steal” narratives also peak on this day across Facebook and Twitter. The same day, Enrique Tarrío posts, “We’re rolling out. Standby order has been rescinded.” Their response communicates that they heeded Trump’s call on September 30th when Trump refused to disavow White Nationalists and told the Proud Boys to, “Stand Back and Stand By.”²⁰⁶

On January 5th, in the “Boots on the Ground” encrypted chat, Proud Boys identified cops as a threat and told others not to get caught by them. This warning shows that prior to January 6th, Proud Boys stopped seeing cops as beneficial to their cause.²⁰⁷

Proud Boys were part of the first wave that breached the Capitol, using a police riot shield to break the window, which enabled Proud Boys and other rioters to get in. Indictment records show that in contrast to Proud Boys, Oath Keepers leadership was waiting for Donald Trump to declare martial law, but eventually took matters into their own hands.²⁰⁸

Seditious Conspiracy

According to the Second Superseding Indictment against Tarrío and his fellow Proud Boy co-defendants, he and his co-defendants created a new chapter for hand-selected, high-profile members called the “Ministry of Self-Defense” (MOSD) on an encrypted messaging app. They promptly began preparations for January 6, 2021,²⁰⁹ which Proud Boy Zachary Rehl stated would be a “completely different

operation.”²¹⁰ Through voice and text messages, the members left no question as to their plans for January 6th: They planned to disrupt the certification of the Electoral College vote by violently “storming the Capitol.”²¹¹

During ethnographic research, some members claimed that the Proud Boys came to hear Trump speak.²¹² Indictment filings against Tarrío and co-conspirators conflict with this statement, suggesting that many Proud Boys not only “missed Trump’s speech at the Ellipse,” but instead gathered at the Washington monument as planned in their Telegram chats.²¹³ According to the indictment, the following message was posted in both the “New MOSD Members” group²¹⁴ and the “Boots on the Ground” group: “Everyone needs to meet at the Washington Monument at 10am tomorrow morning! Do not be late! Do not wear colors! Details will be laid out at the pre meeting! Come out at [sic] as patriot!”²¹⁵ In the Statement of Offense accompanying the guilty plea of Charles Donohoe, a prominent member of MOSD, he claims that Ethan Nordean, a Proud Boys Elder, announced at the meeting that the group would be “marching to the Capitol but would be returning for the speech. It soon became evident to Donohoe that Nordean and [Joseph] Biggs did not intend to lead the group back to President Trump’s speech.”²¹⁶

If any doubts remained about the intentions of the Proud Boys on January 6th, the aforementioned indictment and statement of offense contain a wealth of evidence suggesting that the Proud Boys carefully planned and executed the Capitol breach. As already referenced, planning took place on encrypted messaging apps. There were different groups with different tiers of involvement based on how “trust-worthy” members were deemed to be: The “MOSD” (Ministry of Self Defense) group, the “MOSD Leader’s Group” and the “New MOSD Leaders Group” were comprised of the most senior members who were privy to the most sensitive discussions. The “MOSD Prospect Group” was created to recruit potential “rally boys” who would be willing to engage in “unlawful conduct to achieve an objective.”²¹⁷ Later, the “MOSD Members group” was created for accepted recruits who were deemed loyal; this group contained at least 65 members.²¹⁸ The “Boots on the Ground” group was intended for any Proud Boys members attending the January 6th protest in person.²¹⁹ All members understood that they were “to follow the commands of leadership” and if they did not, they would be removed.²²⁰

Prior to the event, they distributed handheld radio equipment among teams.²²¹ Lower-ranking leaders regularly checked in with higher-ranking leaders throughout the day about the “plan”. Around noon, they positioned themselves roughly two blocks away from the Capitol and awaited orders. At approximately 1:00 p.m., members of the Proud Boys began attempting to breach the Capitol, and at least one member-identified in the indictment as Dominic Pezzola-used a riot shield to smash windows to gain entry to the Capitol for the expressed purpose of halting the peaceful transfer of power.²²² Proud Boys [along with others] were able to temporarily disrupt Congress’s certification of the 2020 electoral results.²²³

Deflection Strategies

Embedded in the ethos of the Proud Boys, among others through their use of the 48 Laws of Power by Robert Greene,²²⁴ is a range of deflection strategies commonly employed by domestic abusers, psychological abusers and sexual offenders. Among these is the Deny, Attack, and Reverse Victim and Offender, or DARVO²²⁵ strategy, described by psychologist researchers including Sarah J. Harsey, Eileen L. Zurbriggen and Jennifer J. Freyd.²²⁶

In attempts at deflecting from their own role and responsibility in the acts on January 6th, while also explaining their own actions the Proud Boys employed two key narratives, namely that Antifa stormed the Capitol, and that FBI agents instigated the attack.

Antifa Stormed The Capitol

Proud Boys charged in the conspiracy bragged about being able to “rile up normies,”²²⁷ by capitalizing on fears of Antifa, which were magnified more each year. This was a continuation of the trend reporters noticed during the Million MAGA March on December 12th, also another day where “Stop the Steal” peaked on Facebook and Twitter.²²⁸ This narrative of Proud Boys protecting against Antifa and BLM hoards was established in 2017 when members began providing security for far right provocateurs on and off campuses nationwide as documented on <http://www.hatemap.io/>. In prior incidents in November and December 2020, where Proud Boys claimed anti-fascists were roaming the streets looking to target supporters of the “Make America Great Again” movement, Proud Boys were there to protect them.²²⁹ They regularly attempted to frame themselves as the “good guys”, the “Patriots” protecting people and businesses against the violence and vandalism of Antifa and Black Lives Matter, whom they equated with Nazis and the KKK. The purpose of this, according to DeCook, was to imply both that they were not similar to Nazis and the alt-right, as well as to paint Antifa and BLM as terrorist organizations.²³⁰ “In this way, they were positioning themselves as ‘the good guys’ (imposing a moral order) in comparison to not only the larger alt-right, but other groups as well.”²³¹

The tactic of deflecting blame served the Proud Boys well in the past; in fact, this even prompted Republican Senators Ted Cruz and Bill Cassidy to introduce legislation to designate Antifa a terrorist organization in 2019.²³² However, for January 6th, they enacted a different plan to achieve a similar goal: They set themselves up to argue that the attack on the Capitol was either perpetrated by Antifa, BLM, or federal agents that were part of the “Deep State”.

On December 29th, 2020 Tarrío gave the order on Parler for Proud Boys to show up without their colors and alluded to the possibility of members dressing in all black, like their Antifascist and Black Lives Matter counterparts.²³³ Blending in with the crowd is an insurgent tactic. In entertaining the possibility of Proud Boys dressing as antifascists, Tarrío departed from their actual plan, which was to dress to blend in with the average Trump supporter. That same day, Joe Biggs issued similar

instructions, “You won’t see us. We’re going to look like you and smell like you. The only thing we’ll do that’s us is think like us! Jan 6th is going to be epic.”²³⁴ Leadership coordinated the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol via a top down, centralized command structure.²³⁵

As the events of January 6th unfolded, misinformation spread through the crowd that it was antifascists, not members of the pro-Trump crowd, that had entered the Capitol.

After the events of January 6th, Proud Boys’ tactical dress-code and misinformation surrounding Antifa, BLM, and the “Deep State” cast doubt on the role of the Proud Boys in the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol. The narrative of antifascists being the aggressors has no basis in reality, as there were no antifascists in the arrest records.²³⁶ Regardless, these narratives were widely shared on Telegram among the extreme right-wing ecosystem of conspiracy theorists, right-wing media outlets, and various Proud Boys chapters.

On January 7th, the Wisconsin Proud Boys telegram forwarded a post from Tommy Robinson News purporting to show Trump supporters trying to stop Antifa from vandalizing the capitol: “More footage of Trump supporters calling out Antifa smashing windows of the capitol building. Preplanned anarchy to silence and oust President Donald Trump, all aided and abetted by the media and politicians.”²³⁷ On January 9th, the Ohio Proud Boys telegram forwarded a post from a right-wing extremist channel stating the following: “Lieutenant General Thomas McInerney, speaking at the White House yesterday says special forces were mingled with Antifa at the capitol building and they took Nancy Pelosi’s laptop which has left her in a frantic state...”²³⁸ Several posts²³⁹ identified John Sullivan as a “Black Lives Matter Activist” inside the Capitol building, including one from the Seattle Proud Boys, stating “They have not been arrested or charged for their role at the capitol, even though they were also heard on video encouraging people to break through according to reports.”²⁴⁰ Others claimed the involvement of the FBI²⁴¹ or FBI “assets.”²⁴² The Wisconsin Proud Boys telegram also forwarded a claim from Roger Stone’s telegram channel, claiming that, “Facial recognition firm claims antifa infiltrated Trump protesters who stormed Capitol.”²⁴³

This is a broader effort among those in the extreme right to deflect responsibility. This messaging tactic remains prominent in narratives today,²⁴⁴ and follows a pattern of “false-flag” narratives made popular by Alex Jones after the Sandy Hook massacre, where Jones claimed the mass shooting was staged to promote a gun control agenda.²⁴⁵ Right wing influencers circulated disinformation blaming Antifa.²⁴⁶ Two central claims are Antifa instigated the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol and colluded with the police and the Black Lives Matter movement in organizing the attack. Data shows a repeated pattern of excessive force by police against and human rights violations against Black Lives Matter activists.²⁴⁷ Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the persistence of these false narratives is reflected in polls showing as much as 61% of Republicans place a lot of blame for the attack on the Capitol on left-wing groups.²⁴⁸

FBI Agents Instigated the Attack on the Capitol

Revolver.news is a conspiratorial site that has promoted the conspiracy theory that FBI agents instigated the attack on the Capitol to malign Pro-Trump supporters. The false “Capitol Riot Theory” was promoted by Trump in a campaign email.²⁴⁹ Revolver.news is run by Darren Beattie, Trump’s former speechwriter who left his position after his ties to white nationalists were discovered.²⁵⁰

What impact has January 6th had on the Proud Boys?

Indictment records show that few if any Proud Boys express remorse for the death and violence that occurred on January 6th. They believe themselves to be victims of the state. They have created encrypted Telegram groups to “Free the Boys”, framing them as political prisoners, as in this post from the official Proud Boys USA channel: “From the beginning the media has lied...The prosecutors have regurgitated these lies to the judges and grand juries...And these judges just nod their head and put us in gulags. As time progresses we find more and more truths. But you know who suffers from these lies and this corrupt system? The Proud Boys and other patriots. They lock them in solitary for 24 hours a day like they’re some fucking dogs. They feel as if these men are expandable pawns in the establishments [sic] bid for re-elections.”²⁵¹ Posts about incarcerated members are regularly shared along with links to various fundraisers. All are desensitized to violence and dehumanization as a function of their insular messaging and media ecosystems. These ecosystems glorify violence, embrace more openly fascist tenants, and subdue natural reactions to violence through toxic masculinity and veiled irony. The material effects of this ecosystem are being felt in our midterms and will be felt in our primaries.

The Political Objectives of the Proud Boys

In 2016, Roger Stone warned there would be a bloodbath if Trump was not elected President, couching his language in figurative terms to avoid the appearance of violent calls to action.²⁵² In 2020, “Stop the Steal” events orchestrated by Ali Alexander, and Stone primed sympathetic viewers to anticipate a rigged election. Pro-Trump sympathizers have now been flooded with six years of election denialist rhetoric, and it has been working.

Both Proud Boys and Pro-Trump individuals still live in the conspiratorial milieu where they believe the election was undoubtedly stolen. They view the 2024 election as the pathway to restoring Trump to power and further legitimizing their group.

The Stone Plan

On March 13, 2022, Roger Stone announced his plan for Trump to regain power. Like Proud

Boys, Trump has provided the structure and stance for others to emulate and is found to be coordinating with Proud Boys. Proud Boys, complicit in the effort to overturn democracy are part of decentralized conservative networks that intermix with mainstream conservatives; conservatives who must appeal to a more increasingly radicalized base.

National Trends

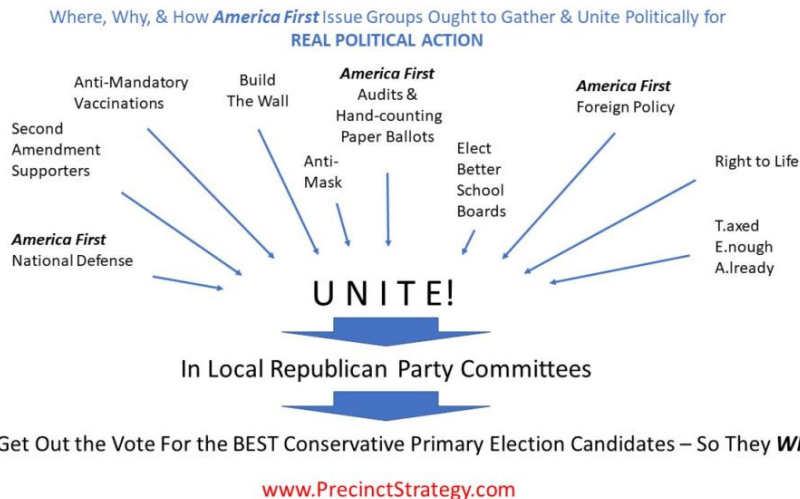


Fig. 13 - Graphic shared on Precinct Strategy Website

Decentralized Networks

Roger Stone announced his plan on the Reawaken America tour. The organizer of this event is Michael Flynn’s who is continuing to mobilize Christian Identity, Christian Evangelical and QAnon adherents²⁵³ in a decentralized network of self-professed patriots, MAGA, and America First candidates. This is advantageous for all extremist groups implicated in January 6th, including Proud Boys. Proud Boys know how to ride the wave of social movements like “Stop the Steal” and embed themselves among other extremists who hold similar conspiratorial views. The failure of the January 6th coup was not the end of Proud Boy’s attempts to subvert democracy.

In contrast to narratives speculating on the dismal future of the group, Proud Boys noted a surge in recruitment after January 6th.²⁵⁴ They had a freeze on vetting new members until March 2021, but several chapters have begun recruiting year-round in recent months. After January 6th, Proud Boys’ leadership structure became more decentralized. Some members claimed that the group would return to its original men’s group function. The accelerationist chapters in Missouri, Nevada, and Washington D.C. do not trust Enrique Tarrío after discovering he acted as a federal informant in 2012,²⁵⁵ resulting in the successful prosecution of 13 individuals.²⁵⁶ On April 28th, 2022, Proud Boys issued the following statement on Telegram:

NATIONAL PROUD BOYS CHAPTERS DO NOT EXIST If you’ve been contacted about joining a national virtual chapter that has meetups on zoom calls, you have been misled. This is not something we do. We meet in person. We do not have ‘Traveling Rally Chapters.’ Some Proud Boys have attended rallies and some have not over the years. There is not now, and there will never be any

rallying required to be a part of this club.²⁵⁷

Some chapters diverged from the official group structure and bylines and became more overtly Antisemitic and accelerationist. Accelerationist chapters of the Proud Boys were present at the January 23rd 2022 “Defeat the Mandates” rally. Proud Boys have attended events as recently as May 16th, 2022 in both Proud Boys gear and skull masks.²⁵⁸

Regardless of Proud Boys openly embracing accelerationist markers or running for office, they are part of the decentralized networks that serve the same accelerationist function.²⁵⁹ This function is beginning to become more pronounced in our current electoral process, with aspects championed by Steve Bannon, Roger Stone, and Dan Schulz, who’s “Precinct Strategy” we will detail below.

Precinct Strategy

On February 9th, 2021, Steve Bannon had Dan Schultz on the Warroom Podcast to outline his precinct strategy. The goal of the precinct strategy is to return to hand counting at polling locations, mobilize “MAGA Firsters”²⁶⁰ to run for Precinct committeemen, and “taking over” the Republican Party.²⁶¹ On February 27, 2022, President Trump also championed the Precinct Strategy, as “a great way to restore our Republic by transforming our Party from currently at less than half-strength at the precinct level into a full-strength Get Out The Vote powerhouse--as it should be.”²⁶²

Quest for Political Legitimacy

Proud Boys are being absorbed into the decentralized MAGA network and have members running for office. Their presence in local politics is an attempt to ingrain themselves with locals, distance themselves from the January 6th Attack on the U.S. Capitol, and appear like a legitimate option in the political spectrum.

Both decentralization and Proud Boys running for office serve a larger political purpose in the next election, which will be explained in the next section.

“If you’re going to take over the administrative state and deconstruct it,²⁶³ then you have to have shock troops prepared to take it over immediately.”²⁶⁴
- Bannon to NBC News, October 2nd, 2021

Threats to Electoral Integrity and of Electoral Violence

“Applied Populism” and Mass Mobilization of Conspiratorial Networks

Proud Boys adopting QAnon and Sovereign Citizen narratives latching themselves to offline protests should be considered part of the family of tactics used to destroy the legitimacy of elected positions and our electoral process.

Freedom and People’s Convoy adherents view themselves as patriots fighting against government corruption. These hybrid conspiratorial ideologies (e.g., QAnon and Sovereign Citizen) have the potential to subvert democracy in the next election cycle.

Allie Mezei, a legal expert on QAnon, has stated, “Sovereign Citizen is absolutely a mobilization tactic.”²⁶⁶ Given the opportunism inherent in Proud Boys, both their involvement in the People’s Convoy and members running for office speak to the mobilization tactics they will use to gain legitimacy.

The mass mobilization/destabilization efforts post-January 6th have included disruption of school board meetings under the guise of being opposed to critical race theory and anti-vaccine and anti-mask mandates. Protestors claim mask mandates are hurting children. There is a pervasive belief that opposing mandates is an expression of one’s patriotic duty. Protestors are encouraged to join the fight against a corrupt government; who are using COVID as a pretext to shut down small businesses and instate a “new world order.”²⁶⁷

People’s and Freedom Convoy

In addition to the language of “draining the swamp” that echoes 2016’s Trump campaign (and later, QAnon conspiracy theories), Proud Boys aligned with other pseudo-populist movements that began injecting Sovereign Citizen ideology into their mobilization narratives. The narrative circulating in the People’s Convoy and Freedom Convoy was the reinstatement of the constitution and the end of vaccine mandates.

In the People’s Convoy, truckers have embraced the “great reset narrative,” which willfully misinterprets the World Economic Forum’s Global COVID recovery efforts into a global plot to destroy small businesses. The People’s convoy plans to return to DC on May 16th and have alluded to being more violent.²⁶⁸

On May 19th, David Riddel, a Proud Boy, replaced Brian Base as the convoy leader. Nicknamed “Santa” referred to convoy-goers as the “new minutemen,” and proudly claimed the convoy “had no exit plan.”²⁶⁹ The rebranded DC convoy is now called, “The 1776 Restoration Movement” and states their aim is to restore a constitutional republic. On May 21st, “Oreo Express,” another Proud Boy, was filmed harassing tourists in downtown DC.²⁷⁰



Fig. 14 - Image Taken at White Lives Matter Rally, May 15th, 2022

Christian Nationalists, Anti-Abortion Activists, and Proud Boys

The fact that Roe v. Wade has been overturned could set the precedent for attempts to overturn same sex marriage, interracial marriage, and contraception. This coincides with the anti-egalitarianism of the New Right, which contains technocrats like Elon Musk, oligarchs like Peter Thiel. Some in the Republican Establishment have pushed back against the New Right and their concerted effort to overturn gender equality policies.

Proud Boys have provided security for anti-abortion rallies in Portland.²⁷¹ Sean Feucht, a Christian Nationalist who had Proud Boys provide security at his 2021 “Let Us Worship.”²⁷² He is hosting “Hold the Line,” events across the country. In DC, there is overlap between the second Wave of the Convoy and anti-abortion activists,²⁷³ including one Proud Boy nicknamed Oreo Express.^{274, 275}

Proud Boys’ Shift to Local Strategies

As described earlier, Proud Boys’ true ideology can be viewed through the lens of a constellation of tactics, some of which support the views they espouse and others which cast doubt on their assertions; it is clear that the Proud Boys are not reliable narrators of their own story.

Following the January 6th Attack on the Capitol, the Proud Boys shifted their tactics to focus on local issues. Although members of the Proud Boys have argued that they no longer maintain any national leadership, there are reasons to doubt this assertion. According to Proud Boys member Jeremy Bertino, as quoted in a New York Times article:

“The plan of attack if you want to make change is to get involved at the local level,” said Jeremy Bertino, a prominent member of the Proud Boys from North Carolina.²⁷⁶

The group had dissolved its national leadership after Jan. 6 and was being run exclusively by its local chapters, Mr. Bertino said. It was deliberately involving its members in local issues, he added.²⁷⁷

Given his well-documented involvement with the Proud Boys national leadership, Bertino is

an interesting source for this information. The Second Superseding Indictment that explicitly named Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs,

Zachary Rehl, Charles Donohoe, Enrique Tarrío, and Dominic Pezzola also included information about an individual identified as “PERSON-1”, an as-of-yet unindicted co-conspirator. PERSON-1 suffered a knife wound in an altercation on December 12, 2020,²⁷⁸ was among the “hand selected members” who were initially added to the “MOSD Leaders Group” in the encrypted messaging app,²⁷⁹ was designated a regional leader,²⁸⁰ was visited by Pezzola in December to be presented with a “decorative shield”,²⁸¹ added members and posted important messages to all the groups involved in the January 6th attack on the Capitol,²⁸² and was identified in both the indictment²⁸³ and in Donohoe’s statement of offense as a “regional leader of MOSD.”²⁸⁴ Bertino has been identified as PERSON-1 due to the information regarding his stabbing during the December 12 altercation.^{285, 286, 287}

Furthermore, in March 2022, the FBI conducted two raids on Bertino’s home and job site, seeking Buccal swabs (for DNA), fingerprints, telephone/electronic communication, firearms, and ammunition. As a convicted felon, Bertino is not permitted to own firearms. The warrant alludes to the fact that this raid is connected to the investigation surrounding the attack on the Capitol on January 6th.

Bertino’s connection to the Proud Boys supposedly dissolved leadership is one factor among many that casts doubt on the lack of any degree of centralized organizing. Another factor is the simultaneous confluence of multiple like-minded groups into a focus on local politics—particularly local school boards and sheriff races. (Some examples of these recent trends in candidacies and primary results highlighting the shared strategy will be detailed below).

As evidenced earlier in this report, from the early days of the Proud Boys their connections to establishment political figures in Donald Trump’s political orbit—particularly Roger Stone—have been clear. Whether or not there is direct collusion is up to debate. There is, however, a wealth of evidence that links them ideologically, strategically, and corporeally. In the wake of the January 6th Attack on the Capitol, both Stone and the Proud Boys have adopted causes shared by the QAnon conspiracy movement: Mask mandates in schools make children easier prey for sex traffickers,²⁸⁸ and

that school board policies—especially those supporting LGBTQ+ youth, are geared toward “grooming” children.^{289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295}

Roger Stone and Michael Flynn are closely linked with the “ReAwaken America Tour”—likely referencing the “Great Awakening” conspiracy popular in QAnon lore—as are Eric Trump and Donald Trump, Jr.²⁹⁶ This tour is one of many prongs targeting people who were formerly activated by QAnon; local political offices are another, as noted by a Time Magazine investigation²⁹⁷ the National Education Association.²⁹⁸ A Sarasota County Sheriff was photographed with a “prominent supporter of QAnon”,²⁹⁹ a school board trustee peddled QAnon theories on their personal Facebook,³⁰⁰ and a newly-elected Michigan school board member was protested against after evidence was found linking her to QAnon conspiracy theories.³⁰¹

Members of the Proud Boys and adherents to QAnon conspiracy theories are not the only extremist groups targeting local offices; so, too, are extremists linked to the Three Percent militia. Two members were recently elected to the five-person School Board in Eatonville, Washington.³⁰² Every office won goes further toward mainstreaming the conspiracies touted by members of these extremist groups.

At the local level, decentralized networks mobilizing through shared narratives are part of Bannon’s applied populism strategy. Here are a few cases that highlight overlapping narratives espoused by Proud Boys and decentralized networks that contain Proud Boys.

Michigan

Dinesh D’Souza’s 2000 Mules is circulating fraudulent claims of ballot harvesting. These election denialist narratives are being promoted by individuals on social media. They are sharing links to the extended film and encouraging others to be Precinct Delegates, Poll Watchers, and Election Inspectors. They are also sharing links to sites where you can “audit” your vote. They are also stating their plan on social media is to decertify the 2020 election.³⁰³

Nevada

Influence networks circulating disinformation that inspires intimidation of elected officials, violence against poll workers, and continues to interfere with our electoral process are all likely scenarios as we approach the 2022 midterms. In Nevada, fraudulent election claims have already morphed into justifications for intimidating elected officials, including threats against Governor Sisolak.^{304, 305}

According to an IREHR³⁰⁶ Report, Seven Nevada Republican lawmakers are members of at least one far-right Facebook group.³⁰⁷

North Carolina

Proud Boy member John Fischer unsuccessfully ran for Johnston County’s Board of Education.^{308, 309} He did not hide his affiliation with the Proud Boys; in fact, he prominently linked to a Proud Boys website (<https://proudboys.club/>) on his official campaign page³¹⁰ and was one of the few members of the Cape Fear

Proud Boys who regularly attended events without covering his face. The Cape Fear Proud Boys have repeatedly disrupted school board meetings in New Hanover County, starting with anti-covid measures in 2021 and continuing with anti-critical race theory and QAnon narratives.



Fig. 15 - Proud Boy with visible weapon in his pocket at New Hanover County Board of Education Meeting November 9th, 2021

Georgia

The Georgia Chapter of the Proud Boys has endorsed Kandiss Taylor, a QAnon Candidate for Congress.³¹¹ Other Georgia Congresswomen espousing QAnon narratives are circulating Taylor’s Proud Boys endorsement.³¹² Taylor has used the QAnon invective of accusing Joe Biden of being a pedophile and repeats false claims that Donald Trump won.³¹³ On Twitter, Taylor identified herself as a “Proud Boys Girl”.³¹⁴

In addition to support from Proud Boys, she also enjoys support from those in Trump’s political network. On Facebook, others are sharing her event with Mike Lindell.³¹⁵ On Twitter, Kandiss Taylor is promoted on Trump’s Patriot Party network.³¹⁶ On Facebook, she writes, “I am the ONLY candidate bold enough to stand up to the Luciferian Cabal. Elect me Governor of Georgia, and I will bring the Satanic Regime to its knees— and DEMOLISH the Georgia Guidestones. Join me in my fight to #TearThemDown!”³¹⁷

Kandiss Taylor wants to assign 10 executive orders that would encourage voter intimidation, force Christian teachings in classrooms, and impose grooming legislation to threaten trans students.³¹⁸

She has since refused to concede.³¹⁹

Florida

As of 2022, Florida has 68 hate groups.³²² Floridians First is the name that Proud Boys in South Florida are running under. Proud Boys are recognized as a hate group by SPLC.³²³ There is overlapping membership and affiliations with Miami GOP’s executive committee. Floridian’s First website has since been taken

down, but their archived mission statement is as follows: “Floridians First mission is NOT to create a 3rd party as some are doing, but rather to TAKE OVER the local GOPs by having America First Constitutional Conservatives³²⁴ apply in numbers to out vote the Republicans In Name Only (RINO’s).” In their private Instagram account, they shared instructions for how to be a part of their execution plan.³²⁵

New York

Payton Gendron killed 10 people in a predominantly black neighborhood in Buffalo, New York. His manifesto is found to have plagiarized from other white supremacist terrorists,³²⁰ experts note that he became radicalized during the pandemic and discovered “Great Replacement” conspiracy theories. In his diary, he detailed how he sought to murder as many black people as possible.³²¹ Proud Boys, who read news articles to look for narratives to exploit, took to their newly created accounts on Twitter where they attempted to disavow the Buffalo Shooter attack and launder the reputation of their group:



Proud Boys Long Island @PBL... · 4h

The Proud Boys also condemn the forces, both informal and institutional, that encourages and actively funds this type of behavior that leads to extremism and white supremacy.

The Proud Boys are not an extremist group. One of our core tenets is antiracism

Reuters @Reuters · 5h

Suspect in racist shooting in Buffalo was detained for mental health check last year reut.rs/3FLKeIM



Fig. 16 - Proud Boys Twitter Post, (Suspended Account) May 15th, 2022

Fundraising Efforts

On April 28th, 2022, the administrator for a Patriot Telegram channel described the Patriot Mail project as a nonprofit created during the Bundy trials to give hope to prisoners. Cliven Bundy is a rancher who led an armed standoff against federal agents over cattle grazing near his ranch in 2014.³²⁶ The Patriot Mail Project Facebook group shares updates on the status of Proud Boys and other January 6th rioters and provides options for donating. They share records of known defendants who have charges to help fundraise for them. The Patriot Mail Project Facebook group was created on July 26th, 2021.³²⁷ Their website lists links to Telegram, Facebook, and Gettr.³²⁸ Members of this group share fundraising links on Facebook through Give Send Go.³²⁹

On July 6, 2021, a channel was created on Telegram called “Free The Boys” with the following description: “A place for all the charity pages, fund raising and News regarding all the Proud Boys that have been unjustly imprisoned, their constitutional rights taken away from them and being tortured on a daily basis. Free the Boys”.³³⁰ That same day, it linked to donations for Zachary Rehl³³¹, Joseph Biggs³³², Ethan Nordean³³³, and Nicholas Ochs³³⁴. On August 17, 2021, they added William Chrestman³³⁵ and Nicholas Kennedy³³⁶. They asked for people to share the channel, claiming that “[a]ll of our boys that are in jail need your help and support.”³³⁷ On October 4, 2021, they shared a post from Nicholas Ochs where he stated that his fundraisers had been shut down, so he offered to sell a “genuine, unopened bottle of Trump Vodka signed by Milo [Yiannopoulos]” for \$7,000 in order to raise money for his “legal troubles”.³³⁸ These requests are widely shared among the official Proud Boys channel and on several chapter channels.

Ethan Nordean has done many interviews about his “unjust treatment”, including with Gavin McInnes,³³⁹ and on “TikTok News”, both of which were shared on various Proud Boys telegram channels.³⁴⁰ Nordean also spoke with representatives of the “Patriot Mail” Telegram channel to describe his condition and further the narrative that Proud Boys and others are being unjustly treated.

In addition to all the organizing we’ve seen narratives for “Justice for January 6th” being seeded by Proud Boys and adjacent networks. In a Proud Boys official Telegram message, admins forward a video clip of Gavin McInnes’s show. The caption below the clip reads, “Starting May 17th through May 24th, ten of the January 6th prisoners including our brother Rufio are going to be doing a spiritual fast drinking only water. They’re asking for your support while they do this and that the truth will come out and they get their freedom back. If you’d like to join them in fasting, please be careful and make sure you know what you’re doing and good luck. #FreetheBoys.”³⁴¹

Infowars, a cornerstone of right-wing media ecosystems, has been given over \$8 million dollars by an anonymous crypto donor. His claims of false flag operations after Sandy Hook have been devastating for victims’ families. SPLC has reported he is slightly more cautious with his wording after the mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas, but he is alluding to the same false flag operations.³⁴²

Poll Watchers & Precinct Delegates on Social Media

The Hall County, Georgia GOP is organizing election-related intimidation efforts outlined by Trump’s voter fraud claims.³⁴³ On social media they’re calling on poll watchers for May 24th to attend what they call a “training class.”³⁴⁴ It is part of a cross-platform “Call To Action” through Gettr³⁴⁵ where the Precinct Strategy becomes more apparent.³⁴⁶

In Michigan, individuals are encouraging others to become precinct committeemen. Their calls to action are laden with disinformation and QAnon linked narratives and information about the film 2000 Mules, which peddles fraudulent election claims about ballot stuffing.³⁴⁷

Concerned Citizens’ Councils: Historical Precedent and Concerns about the Future

“It has been said that history repeats itself. This is perhaps not quite correct; it merely rhymes.” - Theodor Reik³⁴⁸

Although it is tempting to conclude that the current political climate is unprecedented—and there have certainly been events, such as the Attack on the Capitol, which do fall in this category—historical analysis suggests otherwise. Many of the strategies employed by groups like the Proud Boys, such as their increasingly decentralized structure, mirror strategies employed by groups in the past. However, unlike those in the past, today’s political actors have the benefit of examining history to see not only how those strategies were employed, but also to understand where those strategies failed and how they can be adapted for better outcomes in the future. Anyone hoping to counter modern extremism would be remiss if they did not do the same. In this section, we will examine historical precedents from several scholars to better understand the parallels to today.

Byman (2022) noted that white supremacists “have been most successful when they have tied themselves to the broader political establishment, as they were in the pre-civil rights era in the United States.”³⁴⁹ Although the Proud Boys claim they are not white supremacists—a claim that we have already addressed in this report as being dubious—they have no doubt benefitted from the adoption of strategies that worked in years past.

Byman goes on to explain several ways that extreme groups can use the “instruments of democracy to achieve an undemocratic result.”³⁵⁰ Political campaigns, whether won or lost, can “normalize extreme ideas and serve to mobilize potentially violent communities.”³⁵¹ If won, elected officials can gain “visibility and legitimacy”, and can pass laws and put in place policies to achieve the agenda of the group, or groups, they associate with. Campaigning helps by spreading the ideologies of such groups, and if those ideas are found to be popular among the populace, then “other parties may move in its direction to siphon off the group’s support, giving it an indirect political victory.”³⁵²

Our research has found that the Proud Boys have not only worked independently to counter local issues such as CRT and mask mandates; they have also worked openly and cooperatively with local right-wing political activist groups. Some of these groups have called themselves “Concerned Citizens’ Councils”—a name that either intentionally or unintentionally harkens back to the period of American history following the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* in Topeka in which the first Citizens’ Council was first created in Mississippi. The movement against school integration was called “maximum resistance”, and was promoted in newspapers. The proliferation of councils eventually became known as the “council movement”—and these movements were organized efforts that coordinated with politicians and extremists alike...efforts that ultimately resulted in bloodshed. Regardless of the chosen name of these groups or their countermovement against desegregation, their function is eerily similar to modern-day efforts against CRT and LGBTQ+ “grooming” in terms of their strategies, their scapegoats, and their ideology.

“Respectable Means for Unrespectable Ends”

Smith (2009) explained that Citizens’ Councils, also known as “White Citizens’ Councils” and “the hoodless klan,”³⁵³ “began as a small group of 14 men and quickly grew to an organization that boasted tens of thousands of influential political and business leaders who effectively provided a visual and rhetorical image of legitimacy to the ideology of white supremacy for a regional audience.”³⁵⁴

Halberstam (1956) noted the similarities between the council movement and the Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction, but also emphasized one key difference: “The Councils have an almost self-conscious desire for respectability. They struggle to achieve a constitutionally illegal purpose by ‘all legal means’ and shun the Klan’s affinity for violence.”³⁵⁵

The Proud Boys have employed similar tactics to distance themselves from what they see as more overtly violent groups, particularly following the Unite The Right rally.

Decentralized Strategies for Recruitment

Walton (2009) examined the use of Public Relations by the Citizens’ Council in Mississippi, arguing that the leaders “relied heavily on a deliberate and strategic PR initiative to gain support for its ideals” using “traditional public relations tools and becoming savvy users of developing media technologies,”—in other words, they utilized the creation and dissemination of the official newspaper, *The Citizen*, all over the south.³⁵⁶ According to Smith, the circulation of the paper was up to 40,000 nationwide by 1956.³⁵⁷ Walton claimed that the “printed pieces afforded the organization a controlled message delivered directly to its publics as well as the opportunity to quickly reach a large number of individuals.”³⁵⁸ When television became more widely available, they used that, too, to spread their message.³⁵⁹

Local politicians were targeted by councils if they were seen as integrationists. In March 1965, hundreds of members of the Citizens’

Council of Louisiana applied political pressure to the governor to denounce a voting right's bill. They also organized white communities against black politicians.³⁶⁰ In order to reach a broader audience, they moderated their language to instead utilize "a broader, conservative, and supposedly colorblind jargon on freedom of (school) choice and individual liberties, welfare and fiscal responsibility, law and order, and morality."³⁶¹ In May 1967, the Citizens' Council of Greater New Orleans organized several events as part of a "crusade to save our children". In 1969, they "appropriated civil rights rhetoric" when they staged a "peaceful sit-in" to protest the removal of the Confederate flag at city hall.³⁶²

Local school boards were often targeted with disruption and eventually with political campaigns seeking to seat council-approved segregationists. McMillen (1971) noted that the "embattled school board remained the focus of the controversy."³⁶³ A group called the "Mother's League of Central High" joined with the Capital Citizens' Council of Little Rock, Arkansas, to recall moderate board members. In December 1958, half of the newly-elected board enjoyed the endorsement of the council. They subsequently sought to purge administrators and teachers who supported integration, a measure that thankfully got them voted out in favor of more moderate members.³⁶⁴

Protectors of White Civilization

In his profile of the Capital Citizens' Council in Little Rock, Arkansas, Cope (2002) described the larger council movement's creation and its goals:

The council movement was born in Mississippi shortly after the Brown decision of May 1954 reversed a longstanding precedent and outlawed racially segregated schools. Its intent was to uphold a racial status quo commonly described as the southern way of life. Seeing school integration as a first step towards the demise of white civilization through "mongrelization," it spread swiftly through Dixie [the south]. Equally disquieted by the actions of federal courts presumed to be meddling in matters outside of their constitutional responsibilities, council members joined forces with champions of states' rights and determined to resist and change to the world as they knew it.³⁶⁵

Lewis (2004) examined the movement in North Carolina where opponents of desegregation claimed that "school desegregation would lead inexorably to interracial breeding and the destruction of the 'purity' of the white race," an outcome that must be avoided at all costs.³⁶⁶ A professor and leader of the movement was quoted in the New York Times Magazine claiming that school integration was a "Communist-clerical conspiracy to promote miscegenation and thereby the ultimate downfall of America's civilization."³⁶⁷ He quoted a Florida politician named LeRoy Collins, who denounced integration as "a communist conspiracy to destroy the moral fibre of the nation by creating a 'mongrel' race incapable of preventing a red take-over."³⁶⁸

Scapegoats

According to Cope, the Capital Citizens' Council claimed that "outside agitators" were to blame for the changes coming to their community: the NAACP, communists, and atheists.³⁶⁹ Smith stated the council argued that membership was the duty of "all patriotic white citizens." The enemy was "constitutionally wrong, un-Christian, un-American, and most likely Communist."³⁷⁰ They framed the narrative as a battle between good and evil: Pro-segregationists were "best citizens", "responsible", and "decent". References to "blacks, the NAACP, or integrationist causes" included "arrogant Mulattos," "un-American," "Communist," "race-mixers," and "left-wing."³⁷¹ Brückman (2019) identified similar scapegoats; she noted that "segregationist politicians, grassroots activists, and their media outlets" denounced "civil rights activists as communist agents, condemning what they perceived as a liberal conspiracy against states' rights" and "portraying integrationists as outside agitators or lawless rabble rousers."³⁷² In Brückman's profile of councils in Louisiana in the 1960s and 70s, she summarized the narrative that the "Black Power" civil rights movement of the late 1960s and 1970s was "detached or substantially different from the earlier, non-violent civil rights struggle."³⁷³ Likewise, McMillen (1971) noted that the Capital Citizens' Council linked desegregation with "black militants", and at one rally a speaker argued that the desegregation plan was drafted by "the hidden hand which is the invisible world government,"³⁷⁴ alluding to a common antisemitic conspiracy theory.

In comparison, the Proud Boys regularly denounce Communists and left-wing activists, particularly Antifa. Along with Antifa, the Proud Boys' biggest target are Black Lives Matter activists. On a website for the "Eastside Regulators", their only navigation items are tenants, apply, FAQ, Antifa, and BLM.³⁷⁵ They regularly denounce those groups on their encrypted telegram channels. In a clash prior to the January 6th attack on the Capitol, they shouted "Fuck Antifa" while burning a "Black Lives Matter" banner owned by the Asbury United Methodist church, and later destroyed another BLM banner owned by the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church (both are historic Black churches).³⁷⁶ Joe Biggs claimed on Parler that they were "taking a stand against evil."³⁷⁷ Enrique Tarrio later pled guilty to "destruction of property" for destroying the sign.³⁷⁸

Radical Partnerships

Although they paid lip-service to denouncing violence, councils across the south were not especially concerned about whom they associated with, so long as those individuals or groups shared their segregationist views. This led to cooperation with extremists and militants, and often culminated in violence. Smith said that the "Citizens' Council was the perfect symbol of a 'radical right' organization. The council was a highly organized political unit that depended on tough organization within the states and among the states to strengthen its efforts. One important membership goal was to increase the number of independent, yet affiliated, local Citizens' Council chapters, recruiting many of its members from the John Birch Society, radical right Christian organizations, and anti-communist militants." Brückman noted that "Councilors allied with (fellow) extremist groups like the KKK and

independents, Democrats, and Republicans alike when seeking and establishing ideological commonalities beyond a southern sectional crisis."³⁷⁹ After the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the councils' lost membership and sought to increase their influence by forming alliances with both the KKK and other white supremacist groups.³⁸⁰ At the same time, they attempted to argue that they were not "racist". In April of 1965, the United Conservatives of Louisiana and the Citizens' Council of Greater New Orleans held a joint press conference; the conference moderator, James M. Ellis, argued that a recent rally was "not of a racial nature", but rather a "conservative movement". Ellis was later outed as an active KKK member.³⁸¹

The Proud Boys have engaged in similar tactics. Our data suggests that the Oath Keepers, an anti-government militia, co-attended dozens of events with the Proud Boys at least as early as April, 2017. Furthermore, there are many cases of Proud Boys referencing other extremist groups positively in the ecosystem of online radical networks on encrypted channels like Telegram. For example, on January 23, 2022, the telegram channel "POYMemeFarm" described as "home of the official Cincinnati Proud Boys" forwarded an image depicting a tweet from Luis Miguel, a far-right Florida Senate candidate, stating the following: "I want to make Florida a Sanctuary State for Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, Three Percenters and other patriots being illegally targeted by the corrupt feds." The POYMemeFarm captions this image "Keep the Feds out of Florida. I stand with our Oath Keepers, Threepers, Proud Boys and other patriots. #ResistTyranny."³⁸²

Violence

Cobb stated that although council members wore suits instead of hoods and "forsook violence of any sort, their dire prophecies of 'mongerization' and warnings that 'desegregating the schools will lead to rape' clearly inflamed white racial passions."³⁸³ Given the "good vs. evil" and "end of civilization" narratives, it was only a matter of time before some members engaged in acts of violence. McMillen recounted a series of explosions that began on Labor Day, 1959 in Little Rock:

Then the calm of the sultry summer night was shattered by a series of dynamite explosions—one damaging the school board office, another the front of the building in which the mayor maintained an office, and a third a city-owned automobile parked in the driveway of the chief of the fire department. A fourth and unsuccessful bombing attempt was made on the office of a member of the city manager board. The culprits were readily apprehended; and, during the course of the trial in November, testimony revealed that the dynamitings had been planned at a Ku Klux Klan meeting. But it was E. A. Lauderdale, Sr., a member of the [Capital Citizens' Council]'s board of directors, the owner of a Little Rock lumber company, and a twice-defeated candidate for the city manager board—and not a Klan leader—who was charged as the originator and master mind of the bomb plot.³⁸⁴

In 1960, another member of the nearby Crittenden County Citizens' Council was charged with "planting thirty sticks of dynamite in a classroom at all-black Philander Smith College in Little Rock."³⁸⁵ Cobb described several in-

stances of violence: In May 1955, Rev. George W. Lee was shot to death for helping black citizens register to vote. In August 1955, WWII veteran Lamar Smith was also murdered for encouraging black voter registration. However, the most obvious connection between the council movement, the KKK, and violence involves the murder of civil rights activist Medgar Evers. Evers was murdered in 1963 by Byron De La Beckwith, who was both a founding member of the Citizen's Council and the KKK.^{386, 387}

Although the Proud Boys have attempted to keep a low profile following the January 6th attack on the Capitol, our data suggests that they have continued to engage in acts of violence. Their media presence through podcasts and online encrypted networks reveals increasingly violent rhetoric directed at local politicians, journalists, and opposition activists. They continue to spread violent propaganda and conspiracy theories that have motivated domestic terrorist attacks like the recent racist Buffalo mass shooting.³⁸⁸

Part of white supremacy's power is in maintaining its elusiveness. It is most pronounced when it is threatened. Today, the new face of white supremacy has changed in name and adopted new narratives, but function is the same. Concerned parent groups are proliferating on social media and are mobilizing others to engage in offline disruptions and intimidation. Opponents of Critical Race Theory, harness fears of communism to deflect from what Critical Race Theory actually is. Kutner defines critical race theory as "an attempt to understand the intersection of structural racism and white supremacist terror in the United States."³⁸⁹

The virality of intimidation campaigns is often seeded by an extremely online contingent of the far right, who use disinformation and trolling to support or enhance larger intimidation efforts.³⁹⁰

Disinformation

Opposition to COVID related measures will continue to be used as a vector for election disinformation and mass mobilization. The conspiratorial narratives of fraudulent elections, replacement, CRT, vaccines, and QA-non-related conspiracies have the potential to result in fulfilling the prophecy first made by Roger Stone in 2016 in the next election cycle. This, along with the Supreme Court's upcoming Roe v Wade decision has the potential for Proud Boys to capitalize on the existing anti-abortion groups, as they have done since at least 2019.³⁹¹

From the Seth Rich conspiracy to Hunter Biden's laptop, it is not a coincidence that the Proud Boys have been involved in every psychological operation that has been politically advantageous to the Trump campaign. A range of conspiracy theories introduced since 2016 were promoted by Proud Boys³⁹³ and a visual highlighting the circulation and recirculation of this narrative.

One month after Russia invaded Ukraine, the conspiracy theories around Hunter Biden's laptop resurfaced.³⁹⁴ On March 24, 2022, Proud Boys called on other chapters in

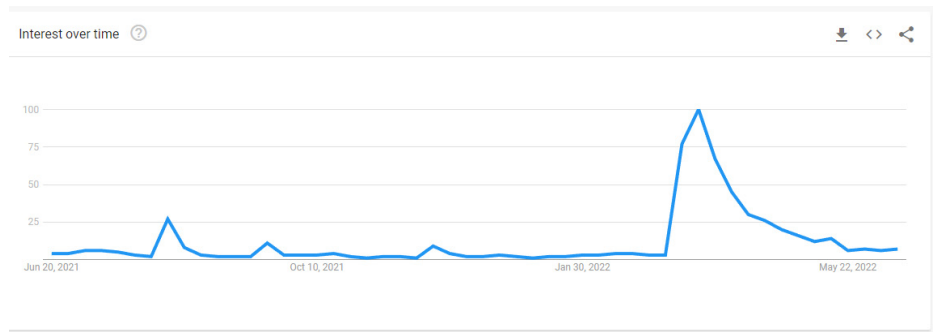


Fig. 17 - Search frequency for "Biden Laptop" on Google from June 19, 2021 to June 19, 2022

Telegram to re-circulate Hunter Biden's emails.³⁹⁵ On March 24th, 2022, Tucker Carlson said on Fox News, "The National Pulse is reporting tonight apparently a private equity firm run by Hunter Biden funded some of the research into pathogens in these bio labs."³⁹⁶ On March 25th, 2022, Russia Today published a news article entitled, "Hunter Biden Did Fund Ukrainian Biolabs, emails published by media suggest." This added a new twist on disinformation attempts to deflect from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and benefits conservatives who want to malign Biden in the months leading up to the midterms.

Disinformation

President Biden has stated he does not want to invest a lot of energy into investigations of President Trump relating to his role in disinformation and the attack on the Capitol.³⁹⁷ His decision is a barrier to the accountability measures needed to prevent future election violence.

In 2022 it is politically advantageous for Republicans to amplify Russian Disinformation. Proud Boys are a part of this amplification network.³⁹²

Revolver.news is one of the largest purveyors of disinformation, and the debunked "Capitol Riot Theory." The outlet has also championed Hungarian officials who have Great Replacement theories built into their policies.³⁹⁸ Hungary sets a dangerous precedent for mainstreaming the same fringe ideology that has inspired some of the worst mass shootings in recent history. Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC) is hosting a conference in the authoritarian country. This choice seems to connote CPAC officials are aligning themselves with decentralized extremist networks that include the Proud Boys to champion Trump as the authoritarian strong man for 2024.³⁹⁹

Unfortunately, there are not many easy answers as to how to counter the spread of disinformation and hate speech. Efforts to create a Disinformation Governance Board were met with widespread criticism from Republican members of Congress, civil libertarians, and extremists alike.⁴⁰⁰ Only three weeks after its creation, the board was shut down by the Department of Homeland Security, and Nina Jankowicz, the executive director, resigned following a coordinated campaign of harassment fueled by right-wing echo-chambers.⁴⁰¹

Timeline on Telegram

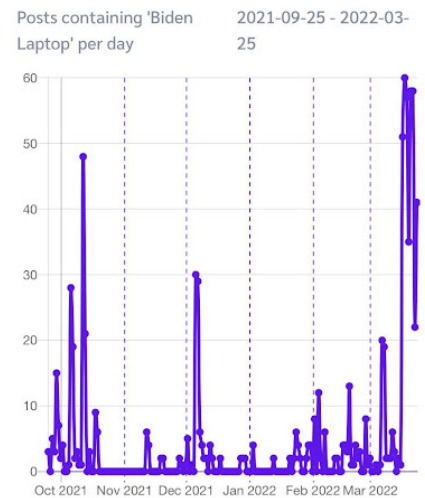


Fig. 18 - Search frequency for "Biden Laptop" on Telegram from October 2021 to March 2022

Suggestions and Policy Solutions

Ensuring Accountability

Although there have been many arguments for criminalizing domestic terrorism, efforts have met with resistance.⁴⁰² Despite this resistance, Proud Boys do not have to be declared a violent gang or an extremist organization to be held accountable by existing federal and state laws. The Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871 introduced the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, including the seditious conspiracy statute.⁴⁰³ These laws were introduced specifically to address the spread of coordinated, hate-motivated violent attacks against black Southerners following the Civil War by groups like the KKK.⁴⁰⁴ Furthermore, state laws against hate crimes can be utilized against many acts of violence, vandalism, and intimidation perpetrated by the Proud Boys.

There needs to be oversight to ensure a clear and consistent enforcement of those laws to prevent further attempts to intimidate and silence those who speak out against white supremacist actions. Ensuring that Proud Boys members are held accountable for their actions will counteract their efforts to legitimize and rehabilitate their image. A consistent, measured response is needed to deter Proud Boys and others who feel the rules don't universally apply to them.

Counteracting Conspiracy Narratives

Conspiracy narratives are the lifeblood of any extremist group; without those narratives, they cannot justify the reason for their existence. J.M. Berger calls conspiracy theories “among the most powerful and ubiquitous tools that extremist ideologues use to explain real or perceived problems”,⁴⁰⁵ and they are also “cumulative, in the sense that someone who subscribes to one is likely to subscribe to more than one.”⁴⁰⁶ These conspiracies are rife with disinformation, and must be countered in traditional media and in social media, which requires cooperation with traditional and social media companies.

For example, according to Facebook’s available community guidelines,⁴⁰⁷ there appear to be enforceable standards concerning poll watching, threats against elected officials, misinformation, and militarized social movements. It is unclear what would make these prolonged campaigns of election interference incidents enforceable offenses; enforceable in a manner that balances free speech with a deeper understanding of extremist tactics.

Counteracting the narratives driving campaigns of intimidation and violence also requires partnerships between disinformation experts and extremism experts; experts who require proper protection and support. As seen with the targeted harassment directed at the executive director of the now-disbanded Disinformation Governance Board,⁴⁰⁸ it can be understood that anyone working to counter conspiracies and disinformation will be subject to abuse. Because this work is vital, protections are necessary to sustain involvement. Those engaging in efforts to mass harass, threaten, and intimidate members should be held fully accountable for their actions. Efforts to establish and enforce policies against disinformation will likely continue to suffer from backlash by those who benefit from it; it will be necessary for any efforts to be fully transparent about and to anticipate and counter false narratives in advance.

Encouraging cooperation at the local, state, and federal level is vital. Miller-Idriss advocates for the involvement of multiple stakeholders—including “law enforcement, advocacy groups, educators, parents, social workers, and mental health experts”—in work toward countering extremist narratives that are used to recruit.⁴⁰⁹ She also notes something that has been recognized by experts for years: Many of these narratives that were once relegated to the dark corners of the fringe have gone mainstream.⁴¹⁰

Due to the ubiquitous nature of these narratives and the predictable backlash efforts to control disinformation are likely to have, Miller-Idriss’s argument for a “herd immunity” strategy holds promise toward preventing radicalization. The “herd immunity” strategy involves the application of early and consistent education to inoculate youth against disinformation and hate. This will help “reduce overall vulnerability to extremist radicalization and change the trajectory of rising hate and extremist violence.”⁴¹¹ This requires that education beginning at an early age to help children recognize misinformation and disinformation as well as “extremist narratives and recruit-

ment tactics” as well as a focus on “empathy, cross-cultural openness, understanding, and a sense of human connection with peers and others.”⁴¹²

Foundational to this approach, however, is to ensure that youth have a “basic understanding of the national histories around racism and white supremacy.”⁴¹³ It is not a coincidence that extremist groups like the Proud Boys,⁴¹⁴ the Three Percenters,⁴¹⁵ and adherents to the QAnon conspiracy theory⁴¹⁶ have all been organizing to stop schools from teaching “Critical Race Theory”—which has become a catch-all term to refer to any history dealing with racism in the United States: These groups rely on those narratives in order to exist.

Conclusion

Vox Journalist Jane Coaston said on the podcast Today, Explained that “Part of this entire thing—of wrapping it in jokey irony—is that when you try to take it seriously, you sound like an idiot.”⁴¹⁷ Between their efforts to “troll” the media^{418, 419} and their absurd “breakfast cereal gang ritual”, it would be easy to dismiss the Proud Boys as a joke. However, their involvement in mob violence, their affiliation with extremist militias, and their proximity to powerful political figures requires that they be taken seriously. The January 6th Attack on the Capitol may represent the pinnacle of their involvement in political violence, but it did not hasten the group’s demise—to the contrary, it may have led them to reorganize in a way that makes them more dangerous, decentralized, and significantly harder to counter.

We know that the Proud Boys are affiliated with extremist groups like the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters, as well as conspiratorial movements like QAnon. We also know that they have coordinated with local political organizations on the far-right and conservative politicians, including the former President of the United States. More recently, they have even run for elected office.

The enduring issue in American politics will be whether transnational online conspiracy communities can continue to generate real world violence and whether free speech can continue to advance hate speech. This is an issue Big Tech and the government will both need to address, a fact that has become increasingly clear in the wake of the Buffalo Supermarket Shooting where the perpetrator professed belief in “the great replacement” theory, claimed to have been radicalized online, posted a diary of his planning to Discord, and live streamed the shooting on Twitch.^{420, 421}

Historical analysis gives us insights into the future; when discussing the Citizens’ Council, Smith concludes the following:

By understanding the rhetorical strategies of the Citizens’ Council, we can better understand and confront the strategic efforts of contemporary voices that echo the racism that has long exacerbated the grade divide in American politics.⁴²²

Smith noted that the “Council” existed as an “integrated national unit”, but was made up of individual chapters that they relied on to “advance their messages.” Each local council had “its own level of activity and propagan-

da.” However, when violent acts occurred, the “Council” distanced itself and argued that those were actions of “individuals”, not the group.⁴²³

The Proud Boys and the groups with which they are affiliated benefit from a similar strategy. Notably, their belief system—once relegated to the fringes of political discourse—are now indistinguishable from the mainstream and are broadcast on nightly-news shows as fact. In 2022, reality can no longer bend to the will of Machiavellian personalities like Gavin McInnes and Roger Stone, ideological shields like Enrique Tarrio and Americans like Jack Posobiec working closely with foreign agents. There are six years of data, ethnographic research, and upcoming books from leading journalists⁴²⁴ on the frontlines of extremism that offer a level of clarity and insight into the violent core animating the group that even the Proud Boys themselves would be hard-pressed to deny.

The Proud Boys have worked to sanitize some of their language and their image. While they have been able to obscure their antisemitic and white nationalist views; they have not moderated their language when it comes to fighting and violence. The Proud Boys frame their ideological narratives in terms of a struggle between good and evil; their issues are conceived as issues of life and death, and this existential crisis serves as a justification for their violence. Whether the Proud Boys decline or whether their efforts toward legitimacy are successful, the tactics they have used to maximize their visibility and evade detection will outlive them, just as it outlived the segregationist councils of the past.

Italian poet George Santayana is often paraphrased with the statement, “Those who do not study history are doomed to repeat it.” The Proud Boys advocate for violence and denounce it in the same breath; this same strategy has facilitated violence in the past. If their narratives remain unchallenged, violence will occur again.

We at the Institute hope that the knowledge of the Proud Boys history, strategies and tactics will contextualize their involvement in the January 6th Attack on the Capitol and highlight the importance of taking the threat they pose to society seriously.

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More information about events and groups, and updated interactive data and visualizations on the Proud Boys and other groups can be accessed on <http://www.hatemap.io/>

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Appendix A – Timelines

Timeline of Roger Stone Influence Operations

**November 22nd
2000**

Brooks Brothers riots, orchestrated by Stone via walkie-talkies, stops the recount of ballots in Florida.⁴²⁵ George Bush wins the 2000 election.

**August 6th
2007**

Stone is caught intimidating Elliot Spitzer's father. Stone is fired from a consulting position after he is caught threatening to prosecute Elliot Spitzer's father if he did not implicate his son.⁴²⁶

**February 13th
2012**

Roger Stone changes his party affiliation from the Republican to the Libertarian Party.⁴²⁷

2015

The Trump campaign hires Roger Stone as an informal advisor.⁴²⁸

Timeline of Blended Operations and Key Events Leading up to January 6th

**January 21st
2010**

Citizens United v Federal Election Commission, The US Supreme Court removes nearly all limits on corporations and individuals donating to politicians.⁴²⁹

- Charles and David Koch, described as, "key funders of the movement to discredit climate science and sow doubt on the scientific consensus that human activities contribute to global warming, who also fund the Tea Party and Americans for Prosperity and have funded efforts to influence election outcomes in America."⁴³⁰

**January
2011**

Charles Koch hosts a secret fundraising seminar where politicians can mingle with wealthy donors.⁴³¹ Prior participants include Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, Paul Ryan and Mike Pence. Prior Donors include Richard and Helen DeVos, and Foster Friess. Friess would later fund Turning Point USA, described as the Conservative Counter Point to Moveon.org.⁴³²

**2012
2012**

Rebecca Mercer, daughter of Hedge fund Billionaire Robert Mercer, joins the non-profit Government Accountability Institute founded by Steve Bannon.⁴³³

**August 27-30
2012**

At the 2012 Republican National Convention, Charlie Kirk, the unfunded co-founder of Turning Point USA, meets wealthy conservative donor Foster Friess.⁴³⁴

**Early September
2012**

Foster Friess Donates \$100,000 to Charlie Kirk.⁴³⁵

cont.

2016

April 5th 2016

Roger Stone threatens to send angry Trump supporters to the hotel room of any delegate who betrays Donald Trump.⁴³⁷

July 10th 2016

Seth Rich, a DNC staffer, dies. Shortly thereafter, conspiracy theories begin circulating regarding the cause of his death.

July 19th 2016

Milo Yiannopoulos, Pam Geller and Geert Wilders, Dutch Party of Freedom founder and MP, Geert Wilders speak at Wake Up! An LGBTQ Pro- Trump event sponsored by Breitbart, The Gateway Pundit, and LBGTrump^{440, 441}.

July 2016

Russian hackers dumped a trove of more than some 20,000+ emails from Democrats onto the internet — producing few damaging revelations but fueling accusations of corruption by Trump⁴⁴².

September 11th 2016

Proud Boys have their second meet up as a newly formed group.⁴⁴⁴ Lucian Wintrich is present.

2017

Proud Boys begin providing security for conservative speakers, far-right provocateurs, and Roger Stone.

October 30th 2017

Lucian Wintrich, Gateway Pundit Reporter circulates conspiracy theories with the headline, "November 4th. Millions of Antifa Super Soldiers Will Behead All White Parents."⁴⁴⁹

October 17th 2018

Proud Boys intimidate Donna Shalala and Nancy Pelosi outside of Florida Democratic campaign headquarters in Coral Gables.⁴⁵¹

October 20th 2018

Engels tweets, "I was assaulted by @AndrewGillum supporters as a gay journalist covering his violent mob. Denounce this rabid attack or admit you condone violence Andrew...the world is watching!"⁴⁵³

November 7th 2018

Journalists covering the midterms cite a last minute release of text messages as one of four obstacles to Gillum's campaign. ⁴⁵⁵.

April 5th 2016

Roger Stone preemptively claims, "we have certified, proven, sworn evidence of massive voter fraud, which will later be presented to the credentials committee in Cleveland in an attempt to unseat delegates who were illegally elected."⁴³⁶

June 15th 2016

Guccifer takes responsibility for the DNC email leaks.⁴³⁸

July 17th 2016

Donald Trump quips, "Russia, if you're listening — I hope you are able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing. I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press. Let's see if that happens."⁴³⁹

July 22nd 2016

Wikileaks releases approximately some 44,000 hacked emails from the Democratic Campaign Committee.

August 9th 2016

Roger Stone Tweets, "Four more dead bodies in the Clinton's wake. Coincidence? I think not.@ClintonsWar"⁴⁴³

October 8th 2016

Lucian Wintrich, a Proud Boy and former whitehouse correspondent for The Gateway Pundit⁴⁴⁵ hosts the Daddy Will Save Us art show, one of the Proud Boys first appearances.⁴⁴⁶

2017

September 26th 2017

The FOAK (Fraternal Order of Alt Knights) forms in response to the "Battles of Berkeley", a summer of the demonstrations and violent physical clashes between progressive groups protesting against controversial speakers (e.g., Ann Coulter and Milo Yiannopolis) and far-right groups advocating for free-speech and hate-speech...some, like Kyle "Stickman" Chapman, framed the protests against conservative speakers as a "war on whites".^{447, 448}

2018

August 30th 2018

Proud Boy and Roger Stone confidante Jacob Engels writes his first article on Andrew Gillum, where he identifies him as a progressive populist with the ability to gain the black vote.⁴⁵⁰ Gillum is the progressive candidate running against Ron Desantis.

October 19th 2018

Proud Boy and Roger Stone confidante Jacob Engels begins his offline political sabotage efforts of Andrew Gillum's presidential campaign. He provokes democrats in the crowd during his speech.⁴⁵²

November 6th 2018

Andrew Gillum loses a close election to ron DeSantis for Governor.⁴⁵⁴

cont.

2019

March 12th
2019

June 19th
2019

Donald Trump launches his official 2020 campaign in Orlando. "The Trump campaign is well aware of the organized participation of Proud Boys rallies merging into Trump events," a disillusioned GOP operative told New York Times reporter Trip Gabriel, "They don't care. Staff are to treat it like a coalition they can't talk about."⁴⁵⁷

Jacob Engels, Roger Stone confidante responds to speculation that Andrew Gillum may run for the Democratic candidate. He writes, "Maybe I will travel to sunny South Florida and bullhorn [Andrew Gillum's] "announcement", maybe not. However, one thing is perfectly clear to me, Andrew Gillum didn't "bring it home" in 2018 and he will not "bring it home" in 2020 as long as I have air to breathe."⁴⁵⁶

June 29th
2019

July 18th
2019

Republican Senators Ted Cruz and Bill Cassidy introduced a resolution to the U.S. Senate condemning the violent acts carried out by members of Antifa and calling for the designation of the group as a domestic terrorist organization.^{458*}

An otherwise peaceful protest held in Portland, Oregon, called "Shake Back the Streets" ends when journalist and provocateur, Andy Ngo, is punched in the face.

Disinformation campaigns begin circulating about cement being added in milkshakes. This circulates in unverified Twitter claims by the Portland Police Bureau, which Fox News then recycles into headlines meant to generate outrage, and subsequently promoted by Donald Trump on Twitter.

In response to the conspiracy theory, Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) and Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) attempt to pass legislation to designate Antifa as a terrorist organization.

July 22nd
2019

Rudy Giuliani begins a pressure campaign to try to force Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to announce an investigation of a Ukrainian gas company associated with Joe Biden's son, Hunter Biden, as part of an apparent effort to weaken the Biden campaign ahead of the Democratic presidential primaries.

July 25th
2019

Trump tries to urge Zelenskyy to initiate a corrupt political probe into Hunter Biden. \$400 million in military aid is withheld for months.⁴⁵⁹

August 17th
2019

Proud Boys "Rally to End Domestic Terrorism" is monitored by Trump on Twitter, who tweets, "Major consideration is being given to naming ANTIFA an "ORGANIZATION OF TERROR." Portland is being watched very closely. Hopefully the Mayor will be able to properly do his job!"^{460*}

2020

March 20th
2020

Proud Boy Jacob Engels engages in further acts of political sabotage, sharing compromising photos of Andrew Gillum with the help of Enrique Tarrío in his Central Florida Post blog, The Orlando Sentinel⁴⁶¹. Gillum lost to Governor Ron DeSantis by less than 33,000 votes in the 2018 race.⁴⁶² ⁴⁶³ Many considered Gillum to run in the 2020 primary as the progressive candidate on the Democrat ticket.

May 31st
2020

President Trump tweeted his administration will designate "antifa," a "terrorist organization."⁴⁶⁵

June 16th
2020

Five members of the Proud Boys attack a civilian in the CHOP region, an autonomous zone in Seattle, Washington, that briefly formed during the George Floyd protests.

July 4th
2020

In a recorded video posted to the personal Twitter account of former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, he and his family are seen reciting the Q Oath, "Where we go one, we go all" around a backyard fire.

September 29th
2020

While on a live broadcast of a Presidential Debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden, Trump declines to condemn the Proud Boys. The moderator, Chris Wallace asked him, "Are you willing, tonight, to condemn white supremacists and militia groups and to say that they need to stand down and not add to the violence in a number of these cities as we saw in Kenosha and as we've seen in Portland?". After attempting to deflect the question, Trump says, "Proud Boys, stand back and stand by, but I'll tell you what, I'll tell you what, somebody's got to do something about antifa and the left because this is not a right-wing problem. This is a left-wing problem."^{466*}

September 29th
2020

In the same televised Presidential Debate, Donald Trump states, "I'm urging my supporters to go into the polls and watch very carefully, because that's what has to happen."⁴⁶⁷

September 29th
2020

Enrique Tarrío writes in Parler, "Standing by sir"⁴⁶⁸ Joe Biggs interprets Trump's comments as a call to action against Antifa, writing, "Trump basically said to go fuck them up! This makes me so happy!"^{468*}

October 14th
2020

The New York Post begins publishing a series of reports on Hunter Biden's business dealings.

cont.

October 19th
2020

Intelligence officials do not deny the authenticity of the emails, but claim the Hunter Biden Laptop narrative has elements of Russian Disinformation.
• The headline misinterprets intelligence officials' comments, reporting, "Hunter Biden story is Russian disinformation, dozens of former intel officials say."⁴⁷⁰

October 27th
2020

Rep. Marjorie Taylor-Greene (R-GA) advocates for violence to uphold freedom on appealing to NRA conspiracy theories surrounding guns, stating, "The only way you get your freedoms back is it's earned with the price of blood."⁴⁷¹

October 28th
2020

A self-identified Proud Boy threatens to blow up a polling station in Dickinson, North Dakota.

November 3rd
2020

A man dressed in the Proud Boy's signature uniform, a black and yellow Fred Perry shirt is spotted loitering outside of a polling place in Omaha, Nebraska. He showed up to act as a poll watcher.

November 5
2020

Proud Boys and FreedomWorks For America staged a protest, "Stop the Count", in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in an effort to "prevent Biden from stealing the election."^{472, 473}

November 7th
2020

November 7: The Presidential election is officially called for Joe Biden. Trump refuses to concede and continues circulating election fraud narratives, known as "The Big Lie"⁴⁷⁴.

November 12th
2020

Tarrio posted a message on Parler that read, "Fuck Unity. No quarter. Raise the black flag."⁴⁷⁶

• Enrique Tarrio posts on Parler, "We're rolling out. Standby order has been rescinded."⁴⁷⁵
• Proud Boys are heavily involved in coordinated "Stop the Steal" Events in Florida, California, Nevada, Oregon, and Ohio.

November 14th
2020

Thousands of Proud Boys and Trump supporters attend the Million MAGA rally to protest Biden's victory.⁴⁷⁸ The events went by several names, including the Million MAGA March, the March for Trump and Stop the Steal DC."

November 25th
2020

Donald Trump announces his pardon of former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn.⁴⁷⁹

December 1st
2020

Michael Flynn and Lin Wood promote a petition calling on President Donald Trump to temporarily suspend the U.S. Constitution, declare martial law and order the military to oversee a national re-vote for the 2020 presidential election.^{480, 481}

December 2nd
2020

On Alex Jones' Infowars, Roger Stone falsely claims more falsehoods about North Korean boats delivering election ballots through Maine. on Alex Jones' Infowars. This use of disinformation was intended to incite fears of a foreign government takeover.⁴⁸²

December 12th
2020

Roger Stone urges followers to "fight to the bitter end," to prevent Joe Biden from taking office. In a marked shift from previous events, security was provided by members of the, with Oath Keepers providing security for Stone,⁴⁸³ a marked shift as Proud Boys previously provided all security for Roger Stone's events.

December 14th
2020

Electors meet in each state to cast ballots for the presidential election. Members of the Proud Boys and other Trump supporters protested in Washington, DC in support of President Trump, while waiting for the election confirmation from the electoral college. Electors in each state were meeting and casting their ballots on that day.

December 19th
2020

Trump tweets, "Big protests in D.C. on January 6. Be there. Will be wild!"⁴⁸⁴

December 30th
2020

Tarrio receives a nine-page document titled "1776 Returns," by an "individual known to the grand jury."⁴⁸⁵

December 30th
2020

Jason Sullivan, communications expert and one-time aid to Roger Stone urged Pro-Trump supporters to make their presence felt at the Capitol in a way that would intimidate members of Congress, telling the group that they had to ensure that lawmakers inside the building "understand that people are breathing down their necks." He also pledged that Mr. Trump was going to take action on his own; the president, he said, was going to impose a form of martial law.⁴⁸⁶

Late December
2020

Tarrio creates an operational chapter called "The Ministry of Self Defense," or MOSD, to plan the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol.

cont.

January 4th 2021

Trump tries to convince then-Vice President Mike Pence to dismiss the Electoral College votes for seven states when he presides over the Joint Session of Congress on January 6.⁴⁸⁷

January 5th 2021

Tarrio meets with Stuart Rhodes, founder of far-right militia organization Oath Keepers, in an underground parking garage roughly half a mile from the Capitol.^{489, 490}

January 6th 2021

- The Attack on the United States Capitol
- Proud Boys meet at the Washington Monument at 10 a.m. as planned
 - Before Trump's speech is finished, Proud Boys make way to the Capitol
 - Proud Boys split up into multiple groups and seek entry points into the Capitol
 - Proud Boy Dominic Pezzola (aka "Spaz, Spazzo, Spazzolini") uses a stolen police riot shield to smash a window in the U.S. Capitol building, providing the opportunity for the mob to breach the capital.
 - Forty-five insurrectionist rallies occur in thirty-two states.⁴⁹²

June 16th 2021

- Steve Bannon telegraphs the post- January 6th strategy as follows:
- Claims the need to "get to the bottom on 3 Nov audits, Wuhan lab, Anthony Fauci."
 - "We've got to stop Critical Race Theory, 1619 Project, Border Invasion and claims we're taking the villages over village by village."
 - Claims "3 Big Lies cited by Warren"
 - COVID Lie
 - Election Lie
 - Collusion and consequent involvement among many at the federal level during the January 6 insurrection.⁴⁹⁴

April 25th 2022

- Roger Stone becomes the Senior strategic advisor for the Ontario party in Canada.⁴⁹⁶
- Stone's stated plan is to take back the house, elect Trump speaker of the house and impeach Biden and Harris, ensuring a Trump victory.

March 24th 2022

Proud Boys encourage others to share and post Hunter Biden disinformation memes in Telegram channels.

May 2nd 2022

2000 Mules, a QAnon Election Denialist Narrative directed by, and based on a book written by, Dinesh D'Souza is being used as a call to action to audit votes.⁵⁰⁰

May 7th 2022

In an opinion piece, Fox News seeded false claims of Antifa violence in an opinion piece with the knowledge that pro choice activists will organize to protest the recent Roe V Wade leaks. Christian Nationalists recirculate the news and elicit a veiled call to action, framed as "F*ck Around and Find Out 2.0."⁵⁰¹ Feucht is a Christian Nationalist has used Proud Boys as security at prior events

2021

January 4th 2021

Enrique Tarrio is arrested for possession of high capacity magazines and property destruction.⁴⁸⁸

January 5th 2021

Proud Boys participating in the Insurrection are instructed to meet at the Washington Monument on January 6 at 10 a.m. without wearing their "colors", or clothing that identifies them as a member of the Proud Boys.⁴⁹¹

January 17th 2021

Rep.House Republican Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) told Mark Meadows via text message that "in our private chat with only Members, several are saying the only way to save the Republic is for Trump to call Marshall [sic] law."⁴⁹³

October 8th 2021

- Steve Bannon speaks about a "new wave of applied populism," at the Annual Priority Conference. He states, "We need you guys to continue to hit on all cylinders. You're essential to taking this country back" from "the corrupt Biden regime."⁴⁹⁵
- Bannon cites election officials, precinct committee members, and school boards as "applied populism's" targets for disruption by MAGA patriots
 - These become the driving narratives behind the "MAGA Patriots" applied populism strategy.

2022

March 16th 2022

Steve Bannon asks a judge to dismiss his contempt of congress case.

- In a press conference outside of court, he details his plan to take down the "illegitimate Biden regime," and claims he wants to destroy the democratic institution⁴⁹⁸. Bannon's Breitbart news has served as the gateway for all the major Alt-Right figures, including Gavin McInnes. Breitbart was also funded by New Right investor Peter Thiel, who has decided to invest in the GOP in 2022 and 2024.⁴⁹⁹

March 24th 2022

Tucker Carlson, on Fox news, remarks, "The National Pulse is reporting tonight apparently a private equity firm run by Hunter Biden funded some of the research into pathogens in these bio labs."⁴⁹⁷

May 4th 2022

Donald Trump hosts a private viewing of 2000 Mules at Mar-A-Lago, with a guest list that includes Rep. Marjorie Taylor-Green, Mike Flynn, Mike Lindell, Rudy Guillian and Kyle Rittenhouse.

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On February 28th, 2022, the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol requested that The Khalifa Ihler Institute, represented by Bjørn Ihler, Samantha Kutner, and C.L. Murray provide a written statement for the record on the Proud Boys' role and involvement focusing on the following questions:

1. Why did Proud Boys come to DC on January 6th?
2. What Proud Boys activities in 2020 and earlier laid the groundwork for their actions on January 6th?
3. What is the Proud Boys' ideology and philosophy?
4. What do they publicly profess, and what are their underlying ideologies? To what extent are their actions motivated by opportunism, and to what extent are leaders and members "true believers"?
5. How did their public or de facto ideologies evolve or realign in the lead-up to January 6th, and what impact has January 6th had on their ideologies and philosophies?
6. What role does race, white supremacy, and fear of white replacement play in Proud Boys' activities?
7. Did the Proud Boys monetize January 6th? If so, how?
8. What impact has January 6th had on the Proud Boys?
9. What is your analysis of the Proud Boys' organization and objectives as we prepare for the midterm elections and the 2024 presidential election?

This report is intended to provide important insights gained from extensive qualitative and quantitative research on the Proud Boys through a variety of methodological approaches including in-depth interviews, ethnographic research, content analysis of legal documents, social network analysis, and statistical analysis of incidents beginning with the origins of the group to present day



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