Function Over Appearance

Examining the Role of the Proud Boys in American Politics Before and After January 6th

By

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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.
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.” 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.” 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.” 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-striped collar black polo shirt” from brand Fred Perry as a type of uniform for public group outings.

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 Tarrio 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.”

Tarrio ended the post with the words “48 laws of power” followed by the numbers 3, 4, 14, 15, 17, 29, 37, 39, and 48. 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.” The numbers in Tarrio’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”, and “crush your enemy totally.”

According to the Second Superseding Indictment against Tarrio 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-select ed, high-profile members called the Ministry of Self-Defense (MOSD) on an encrypted messaging app. They promptly began preparations for January 6, 2021, which Proud Boy Zachary Rohl stated would be a “completely different operation.” 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.”

Sources
5. Quoted from Enrique Tarrio’s Parler account, December 29, 2020.
6. Ibid.
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.” Our data identify significant overlap between the Proud Boys and individuals in Donald Trump’s political orbit, particularly Roger Stone. Enrique Tarrio, 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

Sources
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) that originated on the Proud Boys Portugal telegram channel before being forwarded and copied among chapters worldwide.

However, both researchers 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 tenenemants [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.

Sources & Notes
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,20 Gavin McInnes argued that the Proud Boys are not “Alt-Right,” but rather “Alt-Light,” a distinction that meant they did not subscribe to Jewish conspiracy theories or believe that “White” was necessarily synonymous with “white.”21

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.22 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.”23

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 is “just a joke.” In an analysis of discourse among many Alt-Lite figures, in “Beyond, McInnes, Ma (2023) found that the statements endorsed “the idea that white people are superior without those words ever needing to be said aloud”, concluding that in reality, those figures employ “mitigating strategies” to “obfuscate their views and to dodge accusations of racism.”24 In other words, they are attempting to avoid being called out or to be able to claim “victimhood” once they are deplatformed— as well as to appeal to “a wider cross-section of viewers.”25 Some of those strategies include “performativity” elevating or aligning with “minoritized communities or individuals when it suits their purposes,”26 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.27 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.”28

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.”29 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.”30

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 protect their ideas if and when needed.”31 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, antisemitic views of each individual chapter.32

As the Proud Boys have grown more decentralized in the period following the attack on the Capitol on January 6th, this certainly is even more difficult. However, our data suggests 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.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 foreground 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/SouthAfri- caReports/2096) against Whites. They are allowed to call for action under the guise of metaphors, ‘struggle songs’, and other community-related acts. 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 Kuter, “If someone cuts you off in traffic, and you yell, ‘N**ker,’ 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.

Sources & Notes
17. Samantha Kutner, “If someone cuts you off in traffic, a member of the Proud Boys asked…”, Telegram, May 18, 2022.
18. 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, followed by the following comment: “This guy really doesn’t like black people… I wonder why.”
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24. Ma, “alt-lite?”
25. ibid.
26. ibid.
27. ibid.
32. Proud Boys NJ Coalition (@PBPNJCoalition), “Horrible video of a little girl being brutalized by a black at school This is Lady’s Island Middle School in Beaufort, South Carolina,” Telegram, February 14, 2022. https://t.me/NJPCoalition/1889
36. Proud Boys WA (@proudboys), “There are too many blacks coming to Ireland and I have seen an increase of black women in my neighbourhood as child minders and home help like in Manhattan…,” Telegram, September 25, 2021. https://t.me/peebwa/5135. Note: Forwarded from “Ireland knows”— includes graphic video of a black woman throwing a toddler to the ground and beating her, along with the caption, “There are too many blacks coming to Ireland and I have seen an increase of black women in my neighborhood as home assistants and home help for old people. Do not leave your kids alone with blacks. The combination of a low IQ, short temper and laziness is very dangerous.”
39. Ohio Proud Boys (@OhioProudBoys), “Don’t be fooled the Mississippi River Valley and South has the highest concentration of blacks in America and in (now in 2022) a not-so-subtle illegal immigration population as well.” Telegram, March 17, 2022. https://t.me/OhioProudBoys/7172
44. Kuter, personal correspondence.
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

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 nation have been attended by Proud Boys members wearing their signature colors and tactical gear. These events do not coincide with the same 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 Ilder 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. 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 extremist 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.” In their own words, they claim that each group is autonomous, but all follow a common set of “core tenets” (see figure 1). 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]. Since the group’s inception in 2016, several notable members - including Jason Kessler, self-identified accelerant[1] 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. 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.

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.

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.” McInnes is a Canadian extremist who revels in his ability to manipulate public perception. McInnes’s ability to launder extremist ideology is why many self-identified white nationalists credit him for being their gateway to more hardline white nationalism. 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 + “imperialist” white genocide in North America’s, the white world’s, the white world’s past, South Africa’s version is much more intense.)

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’s 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 the political border. White in Taiwan is like being famous. Actually, they get mad if you say white because that’s the political border. White in Taiwan is like being famous.”

The white nationalist American Renaissance magazine, and McInnes was the creative force behind it. In 1994 McInnes famously co-founded Vice magazine, and McInnes was the creative force behind it. In 1994 McInnes famously co-founded Vice magazine, and McInnes was the creative force behind it. 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 “uncheked immigration.”

McInnes’s 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’s persona is rooted in genuine conservative extremism, but it’s still impossible to remove all doubt.” 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 Renaissance conference, hosted by pseudo-intellectual white nationalist Jared Taylor. An article from The Forward posted on American Renaissance’s website reads: “It is the conference’s view 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.” 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 opening for McInnes, and the conference was particularly notable because a long-simmering fractious divide among adherents of white supremacy finally bubbled to the surface. From the first American Renaissance conference in 1994, pseudo-intellectual approaches to justify the supremacy of white cultural superiority over blacks, Hispanics, and Muslims were regularly promoted. However, Jared Taylor, the founder of American Renaissance Magazine and host of the biannual 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.

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.


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.” 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 “uncheked immigration.”

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-attendee” at former conferences. After this conference, Taylor was forced to take a stand between “[throwing] out the anti-Semitic [who embrace Jewish conspiracy theories] and try[ing] to build a larger movement with electorally 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 the remaining shred of respectability.” 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.” The “Jewish Question” schism at the 2006 conference likely inspired McInnes’s crypto-fascisms’ strategies that have come to define the Proud Boys and large swaths of the New Right.

Though McInnes cites “creative differences” 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. 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. 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 fracturing with extremists (on the right and the left) was making advertisers uneasy.’ Vice was getting too big for its right and the left was making advertisers uneasy.” Vice was getting too big for its right and the left was making advertisers uneasy.

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 per cent of the world’s Muslims of any remaining shred of respectability.”

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. 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 Charlottetown. Kutter notes one such incident. On July 18, 2017, Proud Boys acted on conspire to spread disinformation and anti-Muslim rhetoric. Proud Boys used these sources to justify their descent into Islamophobia, believing it to be an Islamic training ground.”

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 coupled with the suspension of Proud Boys accounts on Twitter, and Proud Boys well documented violent gang activity that ultimately led to Gavin McInnes stepping down.

On October 12, 2018, Proud Boys fought Antifa 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. 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 Tarrio was unanimously voted in as Chairman the following month.

Enrique Tarrio

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.

Tarrio has explained that politics was part of his culture growing up, and proudly stated he was “the descendant of proud commie killers,” who fled the Castro regime. Enrique Tarrio 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.

Tarrio joined the Proud Boys on May 5th 2017 after being recruited by Proud Boy Alex Gonzalez while volunteering for Roger Stone at “Cinco de Milo,” an event announcing Milo Yiannopoulos’s lecture against Sharia, Stutz and Shuster. Roger Stone, Jack Posobiec, a naval intelligence officer with ties to white nationalism, Faith Goldy, Lucian Wintrich, and Ali Alexander were among notable individuals present. Hours before the event Jack Posobiec had broken Michael MacDonald’s leaks on Twitter. Cinco de Milo was also the event where Roger Stone stated his first degree pledge and became an honorary Proud Boy.

Tarrio 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. Members were described as hecklers, but their actions are more indicative of an attempt to intimidate elected officials. Tarrio made headlines where he espoused the narrative that Proud Boys were a “drinking club with a patriot problem.” At this event, Tarrio shouted “you don’t belong here, you f------g communist! Get the f------g 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 Tarrio narrated, “open up, it’s the Proud Boys in here!”

On November 24th, 2018, Tarrio was unanimously voted in as the Proud Boys Chairman. Proud Boys claim to abhor identity politics from the left because it allows for genuine inclusivity; Tarrio 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’.”

Tarrio is just as aware of the power of optics as Proud Boys founder, Gavin McInnes.

The appointment of Tarrio to Chairmanship 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,” Tarrio 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.’” Tarrio’s words in the December 2018 article telegraphed his intent to target Antifa, the group’s perceived opposition, and command the narrative. This shift towards more aggressive confrontation against Antifa 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/)
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.”

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.” 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.” 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.

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 tenements [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).”

When white nationalist Emily Youcis was a guest on The Gavin McInnes Show, she got him to recite the 14 words. 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.” 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.

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.” 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.

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. On August 12th, 2017, Gavin McInnes collaborated with Mike Peinovich 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.” Peinovich responds to McInnes’s comments with an observation that many Proud Boys “seem on board with white nationalism.”

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.” According to Mann, “sexism seeks to rationalize and justify the Patriarchy,” while misogyny acts as “the law enforcement branch of patri-
arch.⁸¹⁴ 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. 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,”³⁰³ and the 2018 Night For Freedom event, scheduled the same day as the Women’s Marches.²²⁷

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.”²²⁷ 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.”²²⁹

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.

Omission to progressivism is one of the defining features of the New Right.³³⁰ 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.”³³¹ 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.”³³²

After Unite the Right in Charlottesville, McInnes positioned the Proud Boys as Alt-Right 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.³³³ 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.”³³⁴ 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.”³³⁵

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.²³⁶ 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.³³⁷

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 has been intricably linked to maintaining white supremacist hierarchies.³³⁸ 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 vilified.¹¹⁶ To simplify, we refer to the redpill positions.”³³⁹ 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 evidence their hatred of women: the meme is a screenshot of a news story where a woman, after being caught cheating, tragically commited suicide.

Above the headline reads, “When you that 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.¹¹⁴ For McInnes, violent

Fig. 10 - Proud Boys Meme Collected During Ethnographic Research (2018). 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.”⁴⁴⁰ His words highlight how, in the worldview of the Proud Boys, women are 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 bodyguards to facilitate anti-abortion activist’s harassment of women,⁴⁴³ 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 man 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.”²⁵⁴ 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.⁴⁴⁵

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
The conspiratorial worldview, through the red pill 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. Vitol-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’etre: “Spellbound by demagogic rhetoric and the myths of ‘the West,’ the Proud Boys interpreted Trump’s election as tacit authorization to follow a path to neoliberal self-empowerment achieved through violence.” On election night in 2016, McInnes stated, “If Donna wins the Proud Boys will own America. We’ll just walk into the White House.”

Function Over Appearance

Vice was once described as hating every- one 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 pantheon of libertarian tenants surrounding limiting government under the veneer of patriotism. Their amoral positioning allows them to attack 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 dictactor, is a common theme in their tee shirts. Their antagonism and deliberative dress style seeks to bait opponents into confrontations. 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) 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 good that 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 whiskey, 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 a preference for cheap whiskey?

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.
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?

Rather than ask what Proud Boys believe, it is better to answer about the following questions:

- What ideologies are beneficial for Proud Boys to claim as their own?
- What narratives are politically advantageous to exploit?
- What causes are beneficial to align themselves with?
- What aesthetics can be adopted to maximize their visibility?

Proud Boys’ tactics are used to exploit the critically unexamined elements of our nation’s history. They adapt as a function of time, context, and region and are quickly outliving the group.

Proud Boy’s underlying philosophy is an extension of America’s culturally normative psychopathy, over two decades of media manipulations orchestrated by their former founder, and their relationship with Roger Stone, a political operative with 40 years of experience in political sabotage. In the next section, we’ll cover Enrique Tarrio’s period of leadership and show how it reflects the evolution of the group’s tactics.

Key Proud Boys Activities Leading Up to January 6th

To answer this question, the Khalifa Ihler Institute has provided a frequency graph of incidents, in addition to two timelines in the Appendices, and the Proud Boys Incident Dataset available on http://www.hatemap.io/, which forms the backbone of the data-visualizations in this report. The first timeline contains Roger Stone’s influence operations, defined as “coordinated efforts to manipulate or corrupt public debate for a strategic goal.” Stone’s influence as a political operative will set the stage for the 2016 formation of the Proud Boys and highlight his influence on Proud Boys activities that led to the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol. (See Appendix A)

Furthermore, Stone’s well-known relationship with Donald Trump and his administration, as well as his continued relationship with the Proud Boys throughout Trump’s presidency, emphasizes the interconnectedness of Trump’s administration with the group. For this reason, we’ve separated Roger Stone’s pre-Proud Boys activities in our first timeline. The Second timeline includes blended operations involving Proud Boys, Roger Stone, Disinformation operatives, elected officials and Pro Trump supporters.

2019 Fighting Antifascists

Under Tarrio, The Proud Boys became a more prominent presence in the Pacific Northwest as they experimented with more strategic goals of violently confronting antifascists under the pretext of self-defense. An unidentified GOP operative noted the Trump campaign’s unofficial endorsement of this confrontation. On June 19th, 2019, during Trump’s 2020 kick-off campaign, a disillusioned GOP operative told a New York Times reporter, “The Trump campaign is well aware of the organized participation of Proud Boys rallies merging into Trump events. They don’t care. Staff are to treat it like a coalition they can’t talk about.”

June 29th, 2019, during clashes between Proud Boys and anti-fascists, the Portland Police Bureau circulated unverified claims about antifascists putting cement in milkshakes. This piece of disinformation was retweeted by Jack Posobiec and Senator Ted Cruz, and reported as truth on Fox News.

On July 17th, 2019, Kutner asked about the August 17th rally.

Kutner: “What is your endgame?”

Tarrio: “Get them [Antifascists] labeled as domestic terrorists at a national level. Make Portland Police do their jobs.”

On 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.

Stress Testing The Government

In 2019, Tarrio was recorded coaching members to not engage in any form of violence when they traveled to the Pacific Northwest. He understood that Proud Boys presence alone would be enough to evoke a reaction from counter protestors or an over-reaction from local government. “We show up, and the left loses their minds,” he told Kutner, before...
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.” He has donated over $100 million (€54 million) to various right-wing candidates and think-tanks. 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. Many of the anti-lockdown protests occurred at governors mansions, state Capitals, or outside city halls.

In late May, after the murder of George Floyd, Proud Boys began targeting Black Lives Matter protests 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 online 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 lulu?” It was a subtle identification of cops as pigs. The Proud Boys' organizing with anti-cop, pro-civil war Boogaloo 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 enraged 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.” The Trump campaign called poll watchers “poll watchers,” “It’s a very safe, very nice thing.”

In the Khalifa Ihler 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, commenting on this day 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 7th, 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.” 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 Terrorism organization in 2019.

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. A 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. 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. 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.

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 5th.
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.” 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.”

On December 17th, 2020, Will Carless reported that nearly 1,000 people with Chinese surnames gave roughly $56,000 to Proud Boys through the Christian fundraising platform Give Send Go. 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.”

It is unknown how much of the late December’s donations from the Chinese diaspora went to finalizing 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. 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.” The campaign generated over $5,500 in donations between December 30, 2020 and January 4, 2021.

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.

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

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

“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 Tarrio posted a message that read, “Fuck Unity. No quarter. Raise the black flag.” His post reflects a level of dehumanization of their perceived political enemies to the extent they are seen as enemy combatants. Tarrio’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.

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.”

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.

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, McNees had framed it as an existential crisis: “Tonight, we either take the country or we lose the country.”

They could not accept that the country had rejected Trump and their form of patriotism—a vital component of their identity—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 D.C on January 6th. They sought to overturn what they perceived to be a corrupt government attempting to “steal” the election.

Seditious Conspiracy

According to the Second Superseding Indictment against Tarrio 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, which Proud Boy Zachary Rehl stated would be a “completely different for January 6, 2021, saging app. They promptly began preparations for January 6, 2021.”

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. “Stop the Steal” narratives also peak on this day across Facebook and Twitter. The same day, Enrique Tarrio 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.”

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.

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.

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Deflection Strategies

Embedded in the ethos of the Proud Boys, among others through their use of the 48 Laws of Power by Robert Greene, 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 defensiveness described in detail by psychologist researchers including Sarah J. Harsky, Eileen L. Zurbriggen and Jennifer J. Freyd. In attempts at deflecting from their own role and responsibility in the acts on January 6th, 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,” 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. 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 Trump supporters, Proud Boys were there to protect the good guys, the “Patriots” protecting people and businesses against the violence and vandalism of Antifa and Black Lives Matter, whom they identified 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. 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).

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. 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”. This narrative of antifascists being the aggressors has no basis in reality, as there were no antifascists in the arrest records. Regardless, these narratives were widely shared on Telegram among the extreme right-wing eco-system of conspiracy theorists, right-wing media outlets, and various Proud Boys chapters.

Prior to the event, they distributed handheld radio equipment among teams. 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 100 p.m., members of the Proud Boys 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. Proud Boys [along with others] were able to temporarily disrupt Congress’s certification of the 2020 electoral results. operation.” 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.”

During ethnographic research, some members claimed that the Proud Boys came to hear Trump speak. Indictment filings against Tarrio and co-conspirators conflict with this statement. According to many, the group was not only “missed Trump’s speech at the ellipse,” but instead gathered at the Washington Monument as planned in their Telegram chats. According to the indictment, the following message was posted in both the “New MOSD Members” group34 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 patriots!” 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 [Joe] Biggs did not intend to lead the group back to President Trump’s speech.”

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 “trustworthy” 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 communications. The “MOSD Prospect Group” was created to recruit potential “rally boys” and to engage and encourage legal or unlawful conduct to achieve an objective. Later, the “MOSD Members group” was created for accepted recruits who were deemed loyal; this group contained at least 65 members. The “Boots on the Ground” group was intended for any Proud Boys members attending the January 6th protest in person. All members understood that they were “to follow the commands of leadership” and if they did not, they would be removed.

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 andoust President Donald Trump, all aided and abetted by the media and politicians.” 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…” Several posts 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 part of the mob that attacked innocent people to break through according to reports.” Others claimed the involvement of the FBI or FBI “assets.” 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.” This is a broader effort among those in the extreme right to deflect responsibility. This messaging tactic remains prominent in narratives today, and follows a pattern of “false flag” theatre to be epicenters of culture wars and human rights violations against Black Lives Matter activists. 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.

On January 29th, 2020 Tarrio gave the order on Parler for Proud Boys to show up with their colors and alluded to the possibility of members dressing in all black, like their Antifascist and Black Lives Matter counterparts. Blending in with the crowd is an insurgent tactic. In entertaining the possibility of Proud Boys dressing as antifascists, Tarrio 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!”

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” blocked on the Telegram group for the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol via a top down, centralized command structure.

The tactics 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. 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”.
FBI Agents Instigated the Attack on the Capitol

Revolvernews 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. Revolvernews is run by Darren Beattie, Trump’s former speechwriter who left his position after his ties to white nationalists were discovered.

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...”

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. In 2020, “Stop the Steal” events orchestrated by Alex Jones of Infowars and other 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, a 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

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. 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.

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 adherents 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 groups 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. 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 DC do not trust Enrique Tarrio after discovering he acted as a federal informant in 2012. 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 Schulz on the Waroom Podcast to outline his precinct strategy. The goal of the precinct strategy is to return to hand counting at polling locations, mobilize “MAGA Firsters” to run for Precinct committeemen, and “taking over” the Republican Party. On February 27, 2022, President Trump also championed the Precinct Strategy, as “a great way to re-store 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.”

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,” then you have to have shock troops prepared to take it over immediately.” - Bannon to NBC News, October 2nd, 2021
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 Mzezi, a legal expert on QAnon, has stated, “Sovereign Citizen is absolutely a mobilization tactic.”296 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/distabilization 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”.297

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 re-instatement 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.298

On May 19th, David Riddle, 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.”299 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.300

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.301 Sean Feucht, a Christian Nationalist who had Proud Boys provide security at his 2021 “Let Us Worship,”302 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.303 Including one Proud Boy nicknamed Oreo Express.304, 305

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.306

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.307

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 Tarrio, 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, was among the “hand selected members” who were initially added to the “MOSD Leaders Group” in the encrypted messaging app;308 was designated a regional leader,309 was visited by Pezzola in December to be presented with a “decorative shield”,310 added members and posted important messages to all the groups involved in the January 6th attack on the Capitol,311 and was identified in both the indictment312 and in Donohoe’s statement of offense as a “regional leader of MOSD.”313 Bertino has been identified as PERSON-1 due to the information regarding his stabbing during the December 12 altercation.314, 315

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 highlight 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 opted causes shared by the QAnon conspiracy movement: Mask mandates in schools make children easier prey for sex traffickers,315 and
that school board policies—especially those supporting LGBTQ+ youth—are geared toward “grooming” children.\(^{294,295,296,297,298,299,300,301}\)

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.\(^{302}\) 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 investigation\(^{297}\) 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 his 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 midterm elections. In Nevada, fraudulent election claims are already morphed into justifications for interfering with elected officials, including threats against Governor Sisolak.\(^{304,305}\)

According to an IREHR\(^{306}\) 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 page\(^{310}\) 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.

**Georgia**

The Georgia Chapter of the Proud Boys has endorsed Kandiss Taylor, a QAnon Candidate for Congress.\(^{312}\) Other Georgia Congresswomen espousing QAnon narratives are circulating Taylor’s Proud Boys endorsement.\(^{310}\) Taylor has used the QAnon invective of accusing Joe Biden of being a pedophile and repeats false claims that Donald Trump won.\(^{311}\) On Twitter, Taylor identified herself as a “Proud Boys Girl”.\(^{314}\)

In addition to support from Proud Boys, Taylor 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. Floridians 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 Conservatives 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.\(^{325}\)

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 terrorist.\(^{320}\) 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 dissuade the Buffalo Shooter attack and launder the reputation of their group.

**New York**

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**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**

**Suspect in racist shooting in Buffalo was detained for mental health check last year.**

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1. **Reuters @Reuters - 5h**
2. **Suspect in racist shooting in Buffalo was detained for mental health check last year. reut.rs/3FLKetM**

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

**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 the continuous 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” 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 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 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 Mancuso 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.”343 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.”345 Political campaigns, whether won or lost, can “normalize extreme ideas and serve to mobilize potentially violent communities.”346 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 group’s support, giving it an indirect political victory.”347

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.

In Michigan, individuals are encouraging others to become precinct committeeemen. Their calls to action are laden with misinformation and QAnon linked narratives and information about the film 2000 Mules, which peddles fraudulent election claims about ballot stuff ing.346

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 Reik347

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.

Smith (2009) explained that Citizens’ Councils, also known as “White Citizens’ Councils” and “the hoodless Klan”,348 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.349

Halbertam (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 constitutional legitimacy, while the Klan harkens back to the period of American democracy to achieve an undemocratic result.”350

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.

“Respectable Means for Unrespectable Ends”

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

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. According to Smith, the circulation of the paper was up to 40,000 nationwide by 1956.351 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.”352 When television became more widely available, they used that, too, to spread their message.353

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.262 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.”263 In May 1957, 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.264

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.”265 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.266

Protestors 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.265

Lewis (2004) examined the movement in North Carolina where opponents of desegregation claimed that “school desegregation would lead inexorably to inter racial breeding and the destruction of the ‘purity’ of the white race,” an outcome that must be avoided at all costs.266 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.”267 He quoted Dr. Martin Luther King 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.”268

Scapegoats

According to Cope, the Capital Citizens’ Council claimed that “outside agitators” were to blame for desegregation. So, too, was the community: the NAACP, communists, and atheists.269 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.”270 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.”271 Brückman (2015) 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 rabblerousers.”272 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.”273 Likewise, McMillen (1957) 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,”274 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.275 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 and a black United Methodist church, and later destroyed another BLM banner owned by the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church (both are historic Black churches).276 Joe Biggs claimed on Parler that they were “taking a stand against evil.”277 Enrique Tarrio later pled guilty to “destruction of property” for destroying the sign.278

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 similar 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 operated on a national level within 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 militias. 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.”279 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.280 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.281

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 fellow patriots. #ResistTyranny.”282

Violence

Cobb stated that although council members wore suits instead of hoods and “torsore violence of any sort, their dire prophesies of ‘mon- gerization’ and warnings that ‘desegregating the schools will lead to rape’ clearly inflamed white racial passions.”283 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 recounts events at one rally 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 identified, having left fingerprints and a tape of the trial in November, testimony revealed that the dynamitations 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 newspaper, 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.284

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.”285 Cobb described several in-
stences 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 QAnon-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 Boys392 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 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.

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

In 2022 it is politically advantageous for Republicans to amplify Russian Disinformation. Proud Boys are a part of this amplification network.402

Suggestions and Policy Solutions

Although there have been many arguments for criminalizing domestic terrorism, efforts have met with resistance.403 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.404 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.405 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 ripe 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,418 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.419 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.408

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 challenge the rising hate and extremist violence.”420 This requires that education beginning at an early age to help children recognize misinformation and disinformation as well as “extremist narratives and recruitment tactics” as well as a focus on “empathy, cross-cultural openness, understanding, and a sense of human connection with peers and others.”421

Foundational to this approach, however, is to ensure that youth have “a basic understanding of the national histories around racism and white supremacy.”422 It is not a coincidence that extremist groups like the Proud Boys,423 the Three Percenters,424 and adherents to the QAnon conspiracy theory425 have all been organizing to stop schools from teaching “Cirical 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 a jokey irony—is that when you try to take it seriously, you sound like an idiot.”426 Between their efforts to “troll the media,”427 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 political 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.428

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 unchanged, 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/


5. Quoted from Enrique Tarrio’s Parler account, December 29, 2020.

6. Ibid.


13. Proud Boys NJ Coalition @NPBCoalition, "$900,000 video of a little black girl beat by a woman this lady's Island Middle School in Beaufort, South Carolina.", Telegram, February 14, 2022. https://t.me/NPBCoalition/1486


15. Proud Boys: Long Island @proudboysLI, "A shocking story of racism and hate out of an elementary school using a stroller being knocked to the ground by a black man in an unprovoked attack...", Telegram, June 16, 2020. https://t.me/proudboysLI/241

16. The Ohio Proud Boys @OhioProudBoys, "NY Post: Black male sucker-punches White male leading race right before crossing the finish line at Florida High School," Telegram, March 31, 2022. https://t.me/OhioProudBoys/242

17. Proud Boys WA @pbeebaw: "There are too many black boys coming to Ireland and I have seen an increase of black women in my neighbourhood as child minders and home help for old people. Do not leave your kids alone with blacks. The combination of a low IQ, short temper and laziness is a dangerous mix...", Telegram, June 16, 2020. https://t.me/proudboys WA/214

18. Proud Boys NJ Coalition @NPBCoalition, "Michelob det banged a black dude and will soon be a single mom", Telegram, February 16, 2022. https://t.me/NPBCoalition/1516

19. The Ohio Proud Boys @OhioProudBoys, "Don’t be fooled: the Mississippi River Valley and South has the highest concentrations of blacks in America and (now in 2022) is a not-so-subtle illegitimate invasion of our neighborhood as child minders and home help for old people. Do not leave your kids alone with blacks. The combination of a low IQ, short temper and laziness is a dangerous mix...", Telegram, March 27, 2017. https://t.me/OhioProudBoys/7129.

20. Official AZ Proud Boys Channel @OfficialAZProudBoys, "[Image] Blacks in South Africa are allowed to openly wage open warfare against the nmole for two weeks...", Telegram, February 19, 2022. https://t.me/OfficialAZProudBoys/242


22. Official AZ Proud Boys Channel @OfficialAZProudBoys, "[Image] Blacks in South Africa are allowed to openly wage open warfare against the nmole for two weeks...", Telegram, February 19, 2022. https://t.me/OfficialAZProudBoys/242

23. Kutner, personal correspondence.


26. A "cognitive opening" is the first stage in the four-stage model of radicalization described by Wiktorowicz in his landmark study, Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West. According to Wiktorowicz, people “...rarely awake to social cues, do not experience a sudden taste for radicalism”--first, they must be willing to listen to the views of radicals. This occurs through a “cognitive opening in which they become more receptive to the possibility of new ideas and worldviews.” (Wiktorowicz, 2001, p. 85).

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. 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.

February 13th
2012
Roger Stone changes his party affiliation from the Republican to the Libertarian Party.

2015
The Trump campaign hires Roger Stone as an informal advisor.

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.

January 2011
Charles Koch hosts a secret fundraising seminar where politicians can mingle with wealthy donors. 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.

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.

Early September
2012
Foster Friess Donates $100,000 to Charlie Kirk.
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.”

Guccifer takes responsibility for the DNC email leaks.

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.”

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

Roger Stone Tweets, “Four more dead bodies in the Clinton’s wake. Coincidence? I think not. @ClintonsWar”

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

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 Yiannopoulos) 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”.

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

Proud Boys intimidate and provoke democrats in the crowd during their speech.

Andrew Gillum loses a close election to Ron DeSantis for Governor.
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.”

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.”

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.

Rudy Giuliani begins a pressure campaign to try to force Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky 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.

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.”

Proud Boy Jacob Engels engages in further acts of political sabotage, sharing compromising photos of Andrew Gillum with the help of Enrique Tarrio in his Central Florida Post blog.

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.

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, 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.”

Enrique Tarrio writes in Parler, “Standing by sir.” 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.”

President Trump tweeted his administration will designate “antifa,” a “terrorist organization.”

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.

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

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 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”.

November 12th 2020
Tarrio posted a message on Parler that read, “Fuck Unity. No quarter. Raise the black flag.”

November 25th 2020
Donald Trump announces his pardon of former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn.

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.

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.

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 30th 2020
Tarrio receives a nine-page document titled “1776 Returns,” by an “individual known to the grand jury.”

Late December 2020
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.\(^4\)

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.\(^5\)

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.\(^6\)

June 16th
2021

Steve Bannon telegraphs the post-June 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.\(^7\)

April 25th
2022

Roger Stone becomes the Senior strategic advisor for the Ontario party in Canada.\(^8\)

- 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.\(^9\)

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.”\(^10\)

May 4th
2022


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.”\(^11\)

- 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.

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 institution.\(^12\)
- 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.\(^13\)

May 2nd
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.”\(^14\)

February 24th
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.\(^9\)

May 4th
2022

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.