

# “Toppling Tyranny: Understanding the Militia Movement’s Role in the January 6<sup>th</sup> Insurrection and Beyond”

Statement by

Dr. Amy Cooter

Advisor

Accelerationism Research Consortium

And

Matthew Kriner

Senior Research Scholar

Center on Terrorism, Extremism and Counterterrorism

&

Managing Director

Accelerationism Research Consortium

to the

United States House of Representatives

Select Committee to Investigate the January 6<sup>th</sup> Attack on the United States Capitol

## Executive Summary

The American democratic system has been touted as an exemplar for the peaceful transition of power across political parties since the US Constitution went into effect 233 years ago. Yet in January 2021, an insurgency that sought to reject the official election results and disrupt the confirmation procedures for incoming President, Joe Biden, almost dealt a crippling blow to the foundation of our democracy as we know it. Many of these actors had participated in what we now know to be detailed paramilitary preparations with the clear intention to disrupt lawful democratic processes and negate the will of voters. Most participants were part of the nostalgic group spectrum—people who look to an idealized version of the nation’s past as a model of society that should once more be attained, a vision that tends to prioritize the perspective of white men.<sup>1</sup> These groups can range from violent and overt neo-Nazis to performative organizations that reenact historical battles. Domestic militia groups are firmly on this spectrum, and they and their sympathizers played a large role in the Capitol incursion.

Stewart Rhodes and his militia group called Oath Keepers took a particularly visible role on January 6<sup>th</sup> with numerous members willing to violently interfere with the election certification. This group, which “paradoxically portrays itself as ‘guardians of the republic,’” calmly moved through the riotous mob that surged across the steps of the US Capitol towards the inner sanctum of American democracy.<sup>2</sup> Some Oath Keepers stockpiled weapons and ammunition, some carried zip ties that could be used as handcuffs, and Rhodes himself indicated that he was prepared for an ongoing conflict rising to the level of civil war.

Social changes in the last few years facilitated the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection by deeply enervating existing elements of the militia movement, attracting new sympathizers and adherents, and inspiring entirely new innovations on what it means to be a militia. The first period of notable change began in 2016 with the arrival of the MAGA movement and its open embrace of nativist, conspiratorial views on leftist politics and the government as a deep state entity. These themes resonated deeply with the militia movement and the so-called Patriot community which had long held conspiratorial views that blended easily with President Donald Trump’s firebrand rhetoric. Groups such as the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters suddenly found an institutional figurehead that promised to use the governmental system to advocate for their interests, reducing their usual hostility and skepticism toward the federal government. Spoken from behind the Presidential seal and with the stamp of approval from a mainstream political party, these messages softened longstanding anti-government narratives within nostalgic groups and offered radicals and violent extremists greater legitimacy to act upon their violent ideations. Militia actors began to see themselves less as uniformly working against an oppressive government, and more as being part of the system and influencing it from the inside. The MAGA movement also presented a radical shift in an understanding of patriotism more broadly, warping pride in the nation into an identity aimed at restructuring the state.

The second period of substantial change started after February 2018’s Parkland school shooting. Numerous states introduced and implemented so-called “red flag laws” following this event, while, according to the New York Times,<sup>3</sup> only 5 states previously had such laws. These laws allow courts

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/citizen-militias-in-the-u-s-are-moving-toward-more-violent-extremism/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-oath-keepers-and-their-role-in-the-january-6-insurrection/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/06/us/red-flag-laws.html>

to order the removal of firearms from individuals believed to be a threat to themselves or others. Among many gun rights advocates, and many militia members, “red flag” carries a dual connotation, one that illustrates the imminent manifestation of federal government plans to abolish Second Amendment rights. For these individuals, the introduction of such laws serves as a call to action to fight this and any other firearms legislation. Advocates believe the government cannot be trusted to accurately assess individuals who may be threatening, that such laws can be weaponized against law abiding citizens, and that such laws pave the way for even more aggressive or mass confiscation of firearms. Uproar about these laws, alongside perceptions of an increased need for self-defense from migrant communities<sup>4</sup> and other “outsiders” contributed to the emergence of militant accelerationism as a social force within the militia and Patriot movements.

The third major period of influence on the militia movement came with the sweeping social changes of 2020. George Floyd’s murder and the subsequent social justice protests once more heightened perceptions of threat in militia communities. Members who believed Floyd’s death was an act of police brutality nonetheless also believed that their property and well-being could be harmed by riots, supposedly spearheaded by antifa. Perceptions that an “anarchist” group was coopting racial justice protests for unspecified but nefarious ends led many militia members to support police and legal measures that limited protestors’ rights. This was true even while many of the same people were conducting their own, sometimes more individualized protests against COVID-19 public health measures. Various anti-government factions viewed efforts to control the virus outbreak as tyrannical overreach by both federal and state governments. Lawful mask mandates and conspiracy theories around vaccine rollouts triggered considerable anxiety and fear within militia communities. Some militias had been priming their audiences for decades for such a response through other conspiracies about public health measures being used as covert vessels to establish martial law or slowly eradicate Constitutional rights. With the acute onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, these latent fears easily translated into a visceral, and at times violent, response to the government’s attempts at managing the global pandemic.

A notable shift in some militia activity that coincided with this third time period was the emergence of the Boogaloo movement and an incorporation of accelerationist tactics and narratives within the broader militia and Patriot movements in America. Narratives from accelerationist and Boogaloo influences surged throughout these movements and was particularly strong in the Three Percent movement. Fixated on the supposed imminent collapse of society and/or on the onset of a civil war, these narratives helped some groups justify plots to harm police officers,<sup>5</sup> escalate violence during racial justice protests,<sup>6</sup> and may have served as partial motivation to invade the Capitol building and obstruct the transfer of power<sup>7</sup>. Militias and similar groups have always had a reflexive stance towards government tyranny where they have argued that under the right conditions, they would be prepared for an armed uprising to defend their understanding of American culture and values. However, 2020 brought a significant shift in both rhetoric and outlook that was informed by the broader MAGA movement and the embrace of the militant

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/05/16/trump-immigrants-animals-mexico-democrats-sanctuary-cities/617252002/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/texas-man-linked-boogaloo-movement-gets-50-years-trying-kill-cops-1630428>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/texas-man-boogaloo-movement-pleads-guilty-firing-police-station-floyd-rna2499>; <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/11/1080311940/alleged-boogaloo-member-pleads-guilty-to-killing-federal-guard-during-2020-prote>

<sup>7</sup> <https://abcnews.go.com/US/fbi-arrests-boogaloo-bois-militia-members-incited-riot/story?id=75845610>

accelerationist narratives and tactics within some militia factions. This pushed these factions into a stance of proactive hostility towards the government, rather than a defensive posturing.

At the core of the militia and Patriot movements' adoption of these social changes is the deep critique of the current political system: the belief that the system is irreparably broken and that the American way of life, including individual rights and freedoms, are under extreme threat from internal actors. Each of these factors also contributed to the militia movement's embrace of the Stop the Steal campaign and the central role some militia actors played in the January 6<sup>th</sup> Insurrection.

## Historical Context

The modern militia movement in the United States arises from a long history of far-right political groups that have attempted to hold on to a certain nostalgic vision of the past. Economic, political, and social changes can be jarring for anyone, but particularly for people who root themselves in an increasingly distant version of history. Rapid change on any or all of these dimensions, especially alongside general feelings of uncertainty or of danger, can lead to backlash. Many scholars believe that the key, overarching driver of nostalgia groups' shift towards political extremity and anti-authority, anti-government violence is backlash to racial and other progressive changes in recent years. Many groups were inflamed, for example, by the mere presence of a Black man in the White House during President Obama's administration. Others, less influenced by racism, were similarly incensed by health care policies from that administration that seemed to push the values of the country away from individual hard work and determination and into "socialism," or by policies that relaxed barriers for Dreamers and other migrants, whom some believe receive unfair and unearned advantages. These feelings of angst and unfairness only grew under President Trump who legitimized these feelings and who also promised a pathway to reviving a 'lost' America.

The immediate causes of the modern militia movement are well known but deserve a brief review to contextualize the social changes that fed into the militia movement and nostalgia groups' role in the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection. In the 1990s, federal law enforcement raids on compounds at Ruby Ridge, Idaho and in Waco, Texas resulted in the deaths of federal agents and civilians in what many Americans came to see as acts of unnecessary government aggression. Some Americans were so concerned by the actions of the federal agencies that they felt a personal responsibility to try to stop further such actions, leading to the formation of militias, first, in Montana and Michigan, then quickly all across the country.

What is less well-understood is the ideological and cultural backdrop that led to the militia's formation. Militias, like other nostalgic groups, believe that an ideal America has come and gone, and that they are duty-bound to return the country to that earlier model. Some are willing to use violence to accomplish this return. Each of the components below represent salient social changes that directly affected the mobilization of nostalgic groups towards anti-government activism and extremist violence. Many of these groups and movements served as direct predecessors to what we understand to be the representations of the militia and Patriot movements today.

Many scholars trace the origins of nostalgic groups in the US to the second wave of the Ku Klux Klan. Rising to prominence as both a political and terrorist organization in the 1920s, Klan members believed both Black people and Catholic migrants to be antithetical to their vision of a white, Protestant America. The Klan's rhetoric about white people missing out on economic opportunities due to these ethnic and religious groups' growing presence and power sounds eerily similar to concerns emanating from many of today's nostalgic organizations. These same themes can be found in the repeated "America First" platform of President Trump's two campaigns, which directly echoes the anthem of Nazi sympathizers during World War II as well as the 20s Klan rhetoric. Fears of losing out to purportedly lesser-qualified or lesser-deserving groups has been an effective clarion call for numerous American politicians at every level of government who have used such rhetoric to motivate White people into political, and sometimes violent, actions in an effort to maintain the status quo.

In the 1950s, anti-Communism took center stage as a dominant ideological strain of nostalgic groups with the rise of McCarthyism. The John Birch Society, for example, was founded in the latter part of the decade and presented itself as an anti-Communist organization that quickly spawned national chapters. It opposed the Civil Rights Movement, ostensibly on the basis that too many of its leaders were embedded in Communist ideology, and played a large role in the origin of the "New World Order" conspiracy theory that continues through present day political activism and militia organizing. This conspiracy fantasy alleges nefarious connections between global elites (especially wealthy Jewish people) who work to undermine "average" citizens in often vague but supposedly impactful ways.

Continuing social change (namely the Civil Rights Movement, the second wave of Feminism, and the expansion of immigration from non-European countries) ensured a regressive aspiration from white people who felt the 1960s brought too much change too quickly. Most of this change disrupted the long-standing status quo where white men held nearly exclusive political and economic power. Changes to this dynamic felt like a loss or even an active threat from the groups who were slowly striving for greater equality. Appeals to these same fears were rife in Trump's rhetoric from 2016 and onwards and were strong motivators to action for some segments of the MAGA movement.

One movement that emerged in response to these fears of losing out from social changes in the late 1960s and early 1970s was the Posse Comitatus. Members of this group were disdainful of a federal government they believed to be acting against their best interests and argued that local sheriffs were the highest form of legal authority. This belief that sheriffs are the supreme authority in the land was rooted in a very selective reading of the US Constitution that, eventually, bled into the Sovereign Citizen movement whose members allege that they are not required to pay taxes or have driver's licenses and other forms of "illegitimate" government oversight. This movement was, especially in the early days, deeply embedded in New World Order conspiracies and other overtly anti-Semitic worldviews. A contemporary iteration of this movement, the Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association (CSPOA) mirrors much of the Oath Keepers' mission statement. Although members claim to support all citizens by insisting that local sheriffs can protect citizens from tyrannical actions of the federal government, what this means in practice is that some Sheriffs may see themselves as the sole arbiters of a law that is then both inequitably applied and weaponized against those with whom they disagree.

The 1980s witnessed a return to notable violence perpetrated by overtly racist groups. This decade also marked the emergence of the Christian Right, which capitalized on the uncertainty of the previous decade to attempt a “return to traditional values” (and traditional gender roles) in its fight against abortion rights and women’s increasing presence in the workplace.<sup>8</sup> This movement has increasing successes through present day and openly advocates for more theocratic policies in government and schools.

By the time the government raids in Idaho and Texas occurred in the early ‘90s, many Americans, if not already openly aligned, were predisposed based on the activities of previous nostalgic groups to see the government as an active enemy. As such, the militia movement emerged as a form of convergence from roughly 50 years of nativist and conspiratorial outlooks about the federal government, drawing most directly from the legacy of the Posse Comitatus and Sovereign Citizen efforts. These early militia groups did not typically center race or racism in their group ideology but instead advocated for a smaller federal government, lower taxes, and less regulation. They saw themselves as ready to defend against a perceived growing aggression from the government, but some groups indicated a willingness to take more proactive violence, however, rather than a purely defensive stance. Some of these more aggressively positioned entities, such as the Order and The Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord, would go on to experience a revival within neofascist accelerationism communities in the 2010s.

The expanding national militia movement garnered much public attention in the aftermath of 1995’s Oklahoma City bombing, perpetrated by a man, Timothy McVeigh, who was not a militia member but who nonetheless shared many of their ideological principles. Congressional hearings into possible threats posed by militias led to much ridicule as notable militia leaders insisted that Japan, rather than a disaffected Army veteran, had been responsible for the carnage.<sup>9</sup> The movement, as well as some lingering and separate threads of the Sovereign Citizen movement, continued to be active in smaller (and less visible) numbers before once again receiving public attention during Trump’s administration.

Starting in the early 2000s and extending through present day, we have seen outgrowths and evolutions of the original militia movement – groups that share some of its ideological stances but that do not center around gathering in person to practice and maintain firearms skills or preparing for a war with the US federal government. Groups like the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters started more as online-only discussion groups that later became active militia organizations that regularly attend protests while armed, thus shaping the political discourse through intimidation and the potential for political violence. Some groups, like the Proud Boys, are less affiliated with the classical notion of militias and instead more closely resemble violent and overtly white supremacist organizations.<sup>10</sup> Each of these iterations on the original militia movement have proven to be threats to the American government in their own capacity. For example, even prior to their involvement in the January 6<sup>th</sup> Insurrection, the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters were frequent

---

<sup>8</sup> See Diamond 1995, Hardisty 2000, Himmelstein 1992.

<sup>9</sup> See Churchill 2009, Cooter 2013.

<sup>10</sup> <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/pride-prejudice-the-violent-evolution-of-the-proud-boys/>

co-travelers at political events with white nationalists that sought to overthrow the American government.<sup>11</sup>

## Elaboration on Three Percenters

The Three Percenter movement<sup>12</sup> is a largely decentralized militia movement that emerged in the resurgence of the American militia movement around the 2008 presidential election – a time when active militias increased from a few dozen to hundreds and began to take on evolving characteristics distinct from past militia entities described above. Founded by Mike Vanderboegh in 2008, the Three Percent movement acts as a loosely defined brand that seeks to evoke general sentiments of rejecting tyranny across a wide swath of Americans. As a decentralized anti-government brand under which individuals and networks have mobilized, there are numerous expressions of affinity towards the movement’s core ideological views that run the gamut from displaying aesthetics (e.g., wearing Three Percent branded morale patches or clothes) and amplifying Three Percenter narratives, to Three Percent cell-based militant activities that have included terrorist plots. Additionally, it is common to see Three Percent iconography alongside other symbols of militia affiliation as well as symbols of anti-government or white supremacist views. Broadly speaking, Three Percenter activism and violence is varied and can range from seeking representation in mainstream political parties (e.g., the Republican and Libertarian parties) to political violence and terrorism.

Much like the Boogaloo, barriers to entry for involvement with the Three Percent movement are low and membership predominantly emerges from self-declaration rather than a vetting process. By design, the Three Percent movement contains a unique blend of conditions and features present within the contemporary American anti-government, anti-authority landscape that have allowed its themes and aesthetics to inspire and appeal to numerous iterations of the nostalgic group landscape. In part this is due to the group’s reliance on a mythos distilled from the American revolutionary spirit. It also derives from the conspiracy theory from which Vanderboegh fashioned their name - the belief that it only took three percent of the population to rebel and foment the American Revolution. As with most ideographic evolutions of the militia movement, the Three Percent movement has both outlived and outgrown its original conception, as well as outlived its founder, who died in 2016. Vanderboegh, however, seemed to be aware of this evolution:

“The Three Percent idea, the movement, the ideal, was designed to be a simple, powerful concept that could not be infiltrated or subjected to agents provocateurs like many organizations that I observed in the constitutional militia movement of the 90s. In this I was both correct and dead wrong, as I have been battling folks almost since the beginning who have misunderstood, deliberately or not, what the Three Percent was in history, what it is today and what its aims are for the future.”

While new entities have and continue to coalesce around the Three Percent concept, established groups also adopted its motifs, aesthetics, and insurrectionary outlook. One such established entity, the Oath Keepers is deeply intertwined with the more violent Three Percenter movement. For

---

<sup>11</sup> <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/pride-prejudice-the-violent-evolution-of-the-proud-boys/>; <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-oath-keepers-and-their-role-in-the-january-6-insurrection/>

<sup>12</sup> The Three Percenter movement and its adherents are also referenced to as Threepers, 3%, or iii%.

example, in 2015, after four U.S. Marines were murdered at two military installations in Chattanooga, Tennessee, armed Oath Keepers and Three Percenters mobilized jointly to serve as vigilante guards at military recruitment centers because active duty members were prohibited from carrying firearms.<sup>13</sup> While vigilante guard duty isn't a direct threat to America's democratic institutions, members of the Three Percenter movement have been linked to multiple attempted acts of terrorist violence against minorities and engaged in the January 6 insurrection.

In the wake of the January 6<sup>th</sup> Insurrection, the Canadian government designated the Three Percent movement a terrorist entity.<sup>14</sup> For experts, the move was unsurprising and long overdue. Since its conception, the Three Percent movement has been associated with numerous incidents of violence and multiple terrorist plots. In 2016, three men associated with an offshoot of the Kansas III% Security Force known as The Crusaders were charged with "conspiring to detonate a bomb at an apartment complex in Garden City where Muslim immigrants from Somalia live and worship."<sup>15</sup> In 2017, an individual that professed ideological sympathy with the Three Percent movement was arrested and charged for a plot to detonate a 1,000 lb. explosive in Oklahoma City in an effort to recreate Timothy McVeigh's deadly bombing in 1995 that killed 168 Americans.<sup>16</sup> And in 2018, four men associated with the "White Rabbit Three Percent Illinois Patriot Freedom Fighters Militia" were charged for a spree of criminal activity that included illegal firearms possessions, robberies, attempted sabotage of a railway, an attempted pipe bombing of an abortion clinic,<sup>17</sup> as well as a bombing of a Minnesota mosque in 2017.<sup>18</sup>

In response to social changes in America, some adherents of the Three Percent movement have sought to make a home within the mainstream of reactionary conservatism of the Republican or Libertarian parties. Some prominent Three Percent figures, such as former Washington State Representative Matt Shea, have simultaneously held political office while actively seeking to undermine American democracy. Shea, a close associate of Three Percent founder Mike Vanderboegh and other regional Three Percent leaders, was found by an independent investigation to be actively organizing armed insurrection against the US federal government.<sup>19</sup> Participation in and material support for events that led to Shea's expulsion from the Washington State Legislature, such as the armed standoff against US Federal law enforcement in Bunkerville, Nevada in 2016 and the armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon in 2016, were also attended by Stewart Rhodes and the Oath Keepers.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-oath-keepers-and-their-role-in-the-january-6-insurrection/>; [https://lancasteronline.com/news/local/on-guard-armed-civilians-take-up-posts-outside-local-recruiting-office/article\\_fbdfa7c4-3163-11e5-9c7a-bf6392b51db8.html](https://lancasteronline.com/news/local/on-guard-armed-civilians-take-up-posts-outside-local-recruiting-office/article_fbdfa7c4-3163-11e5-9c7a-bf6392b51db8.html); Jackson 2020; "Protect the Protectors-Update," Oath Keepers website, July 22, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/canada-puts-us-right-wing-three-percenters-militia-group-terror-list-2021-06-25/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ks/pr/three-southwest-kansas-men-charged-plotting-bomb-somali-immigrants>

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/oklahoma-man-charged-in-anti-government-bomb-plot/2017/08/14/97816686-80f9-11e7-ab27-1a21a8e006ab\\_story.html?tid=ss\\_tw&utm\\_term=.1b2f368879bd](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/oklahoma-man-charged-in-anti-government-bomb-plot/2017/08/14/97816686-80f9-11e7-ab27-1a21a8e006ab_story.html?tid=ss_tw&utm_term=.1b2f368879bd)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/usao-cdil/pr/former-ford-county-resident-pleads-guilty-charges-related-domestic-terrorism>

<sup>18</sup> <https://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2018/03/13/u-s-attorney-announces-update-in-mosque-bombing-case/#.WqhLSy6h7PQ.twitter>

<sup>19</sup> <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/6589242/Shea-WA-House-Report.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/6589242/Shea-WA-House-Report.pdf>



In recent years, we have noted a concerning level of militant accelerationism present within the Three Percenter movement that has shifted the movement's stance from anticipating a collapse of society to working towards or inciting its collapse. Individuals in the movement have adopted explicitly accelerationist views, seeking to act on the movement's warped sense of patriotism and revolutionary rhetoric, such as rejecting a perceived tyranny at the federal level. Militant accelerationism indicators in Three Percent members, cells, and networks are frequently associated with neofascist and neo-Nazi ideology.

## Detailed Analysis of the Social Landscape

In 2016, a discernible shift in militia groups' activity and ideological focus occurred that coincided with the nomination and subsequent election of President Donald Trump. Where the federal government was once considered the preeminent tyrannical threat in America, beginning in 2016 the alleged specter of leftist acquiescence to socialist, Marxist ideology became a principal target of existential concern for militia actors. At the same time, preexisting narratives and grievances like excessive taxation, drugs, and perceived criminal threats from migrants were exacerbated by social changes and intentionally stoked by President Trump and the MAGA and alt-right movements. Multiple strains of activity developed in reaction to these cultural and political variables: a reinvigoration of nostalgic groups who may have otherwise continued a decline, the development of new groups, and a rise in accelerationism.

During Trump's presidency, nostalgic groups that had traditionally declined in size and activity under Republican administrations instead responded to a leader telling them that all their fears were legitimate and required urgent addressing. Even some militia members who disliked Trump or his policies found his "Make America Great Again" message appealing, as his disdain for immigrants resonated strongly with their fears of a changing cultural landscape. Facebook pages and other social media sites that these groups used consistently shared news coverage of Trump's news conferences, memes ridiculing his detractors, and commentary about how some members did not like Trump's "methods" but agreed with his focus on nativism. Such groups across the nostalgic spectrum grew in size and visibility, especially during the later stages of Trump's presidency. Trump's nativist populism invigorated people who had previously been members of such groups but had been inactive as well as new (and often younger) adherents who were seeking out such organizations for the first time. The growth included groups organized around overt racism who seized the opportunity to showcase their hate in public spaces that had seemed to become more tolerant of such vitriol under the Trump administration.

The MAGA movement and the radical conservatism it embraced, tapped into primordial American fears over socialism and Marxism. As detailed above, the militia movement and Patriot groups are deeply familiar with these themes. What Matthew Kriner and Jon Lewis wrote on the Oath Keepers is also relevant to the broader contemporary militia movement, "Since 2016, the rise of movements like Black Lives Matter and anti-fascist organizing have assumed a prominent role in the pantheon of Oath Keepers' perceived threats, largely stemming from the organization's long embrace of conspiracy theories that fixate on global institutions supposedly forcing Marxism or Socialism onto American citizens via the United Nations."<sup>21</sup> Today, particularly in the MAGA movement

---

<sup>21</sup> <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-oath-keepers-and-their-role-in-the-january-6-insurrection/>

and the Q Anon movement, these conspiracy theories are harnessed, weaponized, and funneled through nativist framings that portray Democrats as agents acting on behalf of a shadowy cabal set on eroding the “true” American way of life. A visible and vocal leader—like a President—who regularly emphasizes these forces as real and dangerous becomes a nearly irresistible beacon for actors in the nostalgic group spectrum, as well as militant accelerationists, who are eager to find some enemy on whom to project their fears and to incite to violence.

New groups and movements also emerged in response to this morass. The most notable, perhaps, was the Boogaloo movement, which has significantly degraded since its rapid growth online and offline in 2020. The Boogaloo, which overlapped significantly with existing and emerging militia groups, was largely accelerationist at its core but captured a significantly broader audience as it resonated well beyond the boundaries of organized militia groups, appealing to extreme libertarians, unaffiliated supporters of the Second Amendment, and certain segments of the MAGA movement. Though it never reached a size greater than the militia movement of the 90s. As Kriner and Lewis say, “Identification with the Boogaloo movement and aesthetic is both a pathway into and an evolution away from traditional anti-government mobilization.”<sup>22</sup> Yet one feature that distinguished the Boogaloo from its predecessors was its regular and insistent desires to proactively target and seek the dissolution of the government and its representatives. Despite the jovial aesthetic of Hawaiian shirts and meme-based references to luaus (an internal code for “roasting pigs,” meaning targeting police), the Boogaloo movement presented a salient merging of militant accelerationism and militia anti-government views. Some members believed they should publicize and protest police after instances of brutality while others believed they should actively harm officers with violent actions, including murder. One Boogaloo individual from Texas, Aaron Swenson, for example live streamed a “hunt” for law enforcement that closely mimicked the tactical approach of militant accelerationist attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand, Halle, Germany, and now Buffalo, New York.

For decades, as detailed above, beliefs that external forces such as the UN or Communists would invade or forcibly subjugate Americans, stripping them of their natural rights, dominated the militia landscape.<sup>23</sup> Inheriting this narrative legacy, the Boogaloo movement used an ambiguous, broad framing of American revolutionary ideals to cloak an inherent message of necessary violence against the U.S. government.<sup>24</sup> The Boogaloo derives from the “shit hits the fan” and “the happening” concepts which have dominated prepper and survivalist circles for many decades. Both frameworks assume that some cataclysmic event will eventually happen, and individuals should take responsibility for broad disaster preparedness in anticipation. For Boogaloo adherents, this preparation began to include thinking about law enforcement officers and the current US political system as potential threats, with some followers willing to take an offensive approach to the perceived problem.

The Boogaloo movement accelerationist rhetoric, and its revolutionary aesthetics, have dovetailed well with pre-existing militia groups like the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters.<sup>25</sup> This can be found in the mutual claims of upholding the Constitution and insurrectionist platitudes such as

---

<sup>22</sup> <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-evolution-of-the-boogaloo-movement/>

<sup>23</sup> Cooter 2013; Jackson 2020

<sup>24</sup> <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-evolution-of-the-boogaloo-movement/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.accresearch.org/shortanalysis/understanding-accelerationist-narratives-the-boogaloo>

Thomas Jefferson’s now infamous quote, “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.” One of the purported leaders of the Boogaloo-aligned militia cell that plotted to kidnap Michigan’s Governor Whitmer was described as a national leader of the Three Percenters.<sup>26</sup> A key driving narrative in that plot was the alleged tyranny of Governor Whitmer for enacting COVID-19 public health mandates.

Another touch point between the accelerationist Boogaloo movement and the pre-existing militia movement, is their shared interest in protecting Second Amendment rights through armed offline activism. So-called “red flag laws” have served as a lightning rod for gun enthusiasts and activists of all stripes, even non-extremists. However, Virginia’s Lobby Day is a long-running annual gun rights rally that, in 2020, became the site of first significant offline mobilization of Boogaloo. Neo-Nazis and militias from several states came in support, and attendees included Mike Dunn, a former notable leader in the Boogaloo and Virginia militia movements, and accelerationists like Patrik Mathews of the Base who intended to violently exploit the event to kick off a social collapse scenario.<sup>27</sup> Boogaloo continued to increase its offline mobilization, including acts of violence, in response to a series of culturally divisive topics—gun control laws, social justice protests over law enforcement use of force, coronavirus public health lockdowns, and the upcoming 2020 Presidential election.<sup>28</sup> Members also responded to notable police shootings. They pointed to the shooting deaths of Duncan Lemp and Breonna Taylor, both in March 2020, as examples of how police have too much power and not enough oversight.

Lemp’s death in 2020 was a particularly salient motivating force for Boogaloo adherents as the legal pretext for the raid that led to his death utilized a “red flag law.” As such, Lemp became an almost instant martyr to the nascent Boogaloo movement. Notably, law enforcement alleged that Lemp was an “active member of the Three Percenters” and an online profile for Lemp stated, “Hello all! My name is Duncan Lemp, I am an active 3%er and looking for local members and recruits.”<sup>29</sup>

The murder of George Floyd in May of 2020 similarly garnered Boogaloo attention but quickly led to a split that resulted in the decline of the Boogaloo ideology within the nostalgic group world. Dr. Amy Cooter was monitoring various Boogaloo groups on Facebook at the time of Floyd’s murder and surveyed self-described Boogaloo members about their views on protest.<sup>30</sup> Most members espoused strong anti-police perspectives, and some groups even claimed to be planning to travel to Minneapolis to attend anti-police protests alongside Black Lives Matter (BLM). One survey respondent noted in support of these efforts that “the [Minneapolis] protests are extremely valid. Nothing represents state violence more than a cop kneeling on someone’s throat. I hope they create positive policy changes.”

---

<sup>26</sup> <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-conspiracy-to-kidnap-governor-gretchen-whitmer/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-evolution-of-the-boogaloo-movement/>; <https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/pr/three-alleged-members-violent-extremist-group-base-facing-federal-firearms-and-alien>

<sup>28</sup> <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-evolution-of-the-boogaloo-movement/>

<sup>29</sup> Based on review of My Militia by the authors and public reporting, see: <https://apnews.com/article/media-maryland-us-news-police-shootings-1182a35615898c1ed8d5ebdbfc6ad962>

<sup>30</sup> Facebook deplatformed militia world groups and individuals bringing a premature halt to data collection, but the few responses nonetheless represent the broader trends present on social media platforms at that time.

This was not a uniform or consistent view within the movement, however. Some adherents *targeted* BLM events and social justice protests with intent to harm them. Others who mobilized alongside the social justice protestors did so in an attempt to co-opt their campaign and shift the focus from racial justice to other issues. And Boogaloo adherents weren't the only actors motivated to take action in the wake of Floyd's death and corresponding surges in anti-police brutality protests. Three Percenter factions, particularly the Georgia Three Percent Security Force led by Chris Hill, adopted a hyper-militant and antagonistic view of BLM protests, but fell short of proactive violence. Instead, they appeared as armed counter-protestors justifying their militant stance under an anti-Communist framework, once more conflating Communism with racial justice in an echo of the far-right John Birch Society's intervention with the Civil Rights Movement.

As news coverage of these protests shifted to focusing on riots, some of which were instigated by white supremacists attempting to defame BLM,<sup>31</sup> Boogaloo responses evolved as well. Some Boogaloo adherents who had previously suggested supporting BLM were instead persuaded by these subversive efforts and rapidly shifted to a stance that cast aspersions on BLM. These individuals engaged in impressive mental gymnastics, asserting that they still supported BLM and police reform, but saying they believed BLM had been coopted by antifa, whom they perceived to be a group of white actors (possibly with ties to Russia) who had interest only in anarchy and not in racial justice. This rationalization was used to justify supporting police whom they now claimed were necessary to prevent the spread of anarchy across the nation. A similar rationalization about antifa has been promoted by some defendants of the January 6<sup>th</sup> Capitol incursion who insist they were not aggressors, but rather were armed and defensively prepared for violence from antifa, whom they accuse of having instigated the attack on the Capitol.

But armed protests at social justice demonstrations is not new, as we witnessed armed groups engaged in protest activities as early as 2015 when Stewart Rhodes and other Oath Keepers attended protests in Ferguson, Missouri, after Michael Brown was shot by police. The militia group was there, they said, to help maintain law and order and help protect against possible riot damage by being "protectors of the peace." The largely white, male group claimed to not be opposed to BLM protestors or their goals, but at the very least visually and symbolically replicated the disproportionate power structures the mostly Black protestors were trying to challenge. In addition, the Oath Keepers physical posturing indicated an intimidating "overwatch" position via armed rooftop surveillance and patrols that acted more as a private policing initiative than a community protection force.<sup>32</sup>

As another of Cooter's Boogaloo survey respondents noted, "Government overreach is worth protesting I did it and protesting police brutality dates way back so basically nothing new. Riots on the other hand should end quickly with overwhelming force." This sentiment exemplifies the paradoxical views on law enforcement and state power in the modern militia and Boogaloo spaces. When it is aimed at restraining the extrajudicial or supremacist intentions of white men it is an existential threat demanding an immediate and violent response; however, when social instability or unrest occurs, especially when perceived to be rooted in Marxism, socialism or anti-fascist mobilization, the state and its power become a tool of convenience, a necessary evil for addressing

---

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/07/29/umbrella-man-white-supremacist-minneapolis/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-oath-keepers-and-their-role-in-the-january-6-insurrection/>

the existential but largely symbolic threat.<sup>33</sup> Speakers at Boogaloo and similar gatherings frequently speak about existential threats to their view of what constitutes the true American lifestyle and freedoms. They often paint themselves as being under direct attack by supposedly radical leftists and deep state cabals who want to destroy their way of life. Our research has shown that these narratives and actors are deeply associated with militant accelerationism,<sup>34</sup> in particular the neofascist strain popularized by Atomwaffen Division and the Base. Additionally, there is growing evidence that the Boogaloo's origins and early proponents are rooted in neofascist, militant accelerationism, suggesting that its rapid popularization and mobilization to violence was intentionally instigated by a small network of individuals that aimed to exploit the burgeoning movement for collapsing society.

The nation witnessed the first major event organized by militant accelerationists, and a clear resurgence in Nazism and other extreme right-wing activity, in Charlottesville, Virginia's "Unite the Right" rally in late 2017. Notably, local militia actors served as private security for the event, knowing full well that the organizers were overt neo-Nazis. Central to their justification for the protection of the accelerationists and neo-Nazis organizing the event was the alleged threat of violence from anti-fascists who intended to counter-protest the event. Militia members often express an unequivocal support for freedom of speech, and some argued that, as deplorable as neo-Nazis are, they should be allowed to express their opinion without the threat of violence. However, this generosity does not typically extend to people espousing Communist or Marxist views, and nostalgic groups framed antifa—not Nazis—as the likely source of violence at such protests. Thus, at Unite the Right and other events where militias acted as co-travel to neofascists and neo-Nazis militia actors were visibly and symbolically supporting Nazism, not freedom of expression.

Unite the Right garnered considerable public concern not only because of the images of racists with tiki torches or even of the senseless murder of counter-protestor Heather Heyer, but also because of President Trump's now infamous response insisting that "good people" were among the racist organizers and demonstrators. Many overt neo-Nazis and accelerationists saw this as an endorsement of white supremacy, saying things on message boards like, "I wish he would have been even more direct, but we know that's the closest he can do [to support our message.]"

Trump would continue to galvanize a variety of nostalgic groups through the remainder of his Presidency, with his appeals becoming even more clear as his second election approached. In early 2020, the United States was grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic and in the absence of national leadership to mitigate the disease's spread, state governors were left to try their own strategies. Protestors in at least 30 states opposed lockdown measures, and Democratic governors who enacted comparatively restrictive policies on crowds, masking, and business operations drew the most ire. Images of angry protesters—some of them armed—yelling past police inside Michigan's capitol building seemed to serve as a clarion call for others across the nation, a call amplified by Trump's encouragement to "liberate" that state and others from their governor's mandates. Many

---

<sup>33</sup> Antifascist mobilizing, socialism, and Marxist or Communist ideology are far from a visceral physical threat to the American public. However, historical influences of the John Birch Society, New World Order conspiracy theories, and other anti-communist movements (particularly in the militia movement) have allowed the specter of those perceived threats to hold equal or greater purchase in the minds of Americans that hold far-right ideological views.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.accresearch.org/shortanalysis/an-introduction-to-militant-accelerationism>

believe Trump's tweeted instructions played a role in a militia's alleged plot to kidnap Michigan's Governor Gretchen Whitmer and put her on a sham trial for tyranny.

Trump continued to instigate divisiveness through the summer months, encouraging his crowds to transfer his "lock her up chant" originally used against Hilary Clinton to Governor Whitmer and others described as infringing on individual liberties. Trump also seemed to tacitly endorse accelerationist groups like the Proud Boys to continue their violent social destabilization. During a September debate in advance of the Presidential election, he instructed the Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by," adding that "somebody's got to do something about antifa and the left because this is not a right-wing problem." The Proud Boys have always openly embraced violence and had a closer relationship with overt racism than most contemporary nostalgic groups. In the context of their history and presence alongside overt neo-Nazis at 2020 racial justice protests,<sup>35</sup> it was easy to interpret Trump's message as a call for violence against anyone perceived to be aligned with antifa, thus making racial justice protestors likely targets of future nostalgic group violence.

In 2020, we also saw a continuation of Boogaloo adherents' attempts to justify an armed presence at various confrontations. The most notable incident was in Kenosha, Wisconsin, where racial justice protests following a police shooting of Jacob Blake had reached significant volume and unrest. Boogaloo and other militia members attended claiming to be keeping the peace and preventing riots from spreading to other areas, but some attended in anticipation of a civil war starting out of the unrest. In this tense environment, teenager Kyle Rittenhouse who had crossed state lines to help militia factions on the ground ultimately shot three men, two fatally. Rittenhouse, who was ultimately acquitted of murder and other charges for the shootings, garnered hero status in some militia communities due to his use of force against the protesters and having allegedly weathered the state's crackdown on his Second Amendment rights. His actions and his journey through the criminal justice system strengthen the perceived legitimacy of armed, extrajudicial forces who claim to be acting to discourage riots and otherwise defend personal property.

The backlash of 2020 was heavily influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to control its spread. The pandemic simultaneously hit on several core fears shared across the nostalgic spectrum: an unknown physical threat that no firearm could defend against, economic uncertainty, nativist narratives that the virus had outside and possibly nefarious origins in China (which was amplified by President Trump), and—most importantly—the threat of government tyranny. Perceptions of tyranny grew when state governors (and sometimes city mayors) took initiative to enact mask or social distance requirements, temporary business closures, and other measures intended to stop the spread and mutation of the virus. Many people perceived such rules to be a soft version of martial law intended to ease a passive public into increasingly harsh governmental infringement on individual liberties and free economic exercise. Most insisted they could see a straight line between a populous "blindly" following such restrictions and the relatively rapid curtailment of individual gun rights; some went even farther, comparing the mask requirements to head coverings women wear in some religious faiths, arguing these requirements were intended to make people complacent to a version of Sharia law. Perceptions that state and local governments were tyrannically exceeding their authority were amplified when President Trump tweeted that some states' policies were "too tough," and that people should act to "liberate" their states.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> <https://ctc.usma.edu/pride-prejudice-the-violent-evolution-of-the-proud-boys/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52330531>

States with Democratic governors drew the most ire, with Michigan's Governor Gretchen Whitmer becoming the target for an alleged plot to kidnap and try her for her tyranny. The men who were charged belonged to a group called the Wolverine Watchmen, which likely started in 2020 as an offshoot of the larger and more public Michigan Liberty Militia.<sup>37</sup> The alleged plot was elaborate and entailed surveillance efforts and discussions of an explosive device. Media reports of the case described an alleged plan for a citizen's arrest and legal proceedings that harkened a Sovereign Citizen framework, where some people consider themselves not only above certain aspects of the law but also as the true arbiters of it. "Jurors" in a self-produced Sovereign Citizen trial for tyranny would have already known their desired guilty verdict before accosting the defendant. Reporting from NBC News indicated that several members of the Watchmen were also likely influenced by the Boogaloo movement.<sup>38</sup>

Two of those federally charged for their role in this alleged plot were acquitted in April 2022, while another two received a mistrial. Defense attorneys' arguments that much of the alleged plot was driven by confidential informants rather than the defendants may have been persuasive—an argument that easily resonates with militia communities and others whose distrust in the government was both longstanding and heightened by COVID lockdown measures. Most militia groups nonetheless had a relatively tepid response to the verdicts, in part because, by the time of the trial's resolution, much of the militia world's attention had already moved on to the events of January 6<sup>th</sup> and the legal cases surrounding it. Whether and how the two Wolverine Watchmen defendants who received mistrial verdicts are re-tried may nonetheless serve as a future flashpoint to the movement.

The Stop the Steal narrative, which rested on the false claim of the Presidential election having been "stolen" by mass fraudulent voting, soon dominated militia consciousness, washing out focus on the Whitmer plot. As President Trump's appeals for support against the false conspiracy came to a head, people from all over the country heeded his call to march on the U.S. Capitol building on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Most who came (as far as we currently know) were unaffiliated with any group but known militia and white supremacist actors were in the ranks of those that stormed the Capitol in an effort to prevent Joe Biden from taking office. The nation watched as insurrectionists violently breached the Capitol, damaging public property, injuring Capitol police, and narrowly missing confronting politicians including Vice President Mike Pence. Despite the numerous incidents of nostalgic group involvement with political and social issues in preceding years, this was the first time that many truly understood the need to study and understand such groups. Disproportionate attention has understandably since focused on the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters due to their heavy involvement in the insurrection. Both these groups had started as online-only organizations, and Trump's influence was one factor pushing them to have an offline presence. One thing both groups have long had in common is their obsession with societal collapse.

---

<sup>37</sup> <https://theconversation.com/lessons-from-embedding-with-the-michigan-militia-5-questions-answered-about-the-group-allegedly-plotting-to-kidnap-a-governor-147876>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/whitmer-conspiracy-allegations-tied-boogaloo-movement-n1242670>

## Societal Collapse & The Influence of Accelerationism

Social collapse narratives are a significant point of overlap between the militia and militant accelerationism milieus. 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.<sup>39</sup>

Oath Keepers, and principally Rhodes, has asserted since approximately 2016 that the political condition in the United States had significantly devolved due to a pernicious growth in Marxist violence and politics from the American political left. Rhodes is particularly obsessed with the notion that America is primed to descend into collapse and/or civil war. Some state-level leadership and individual members of the Oath Keepers, as well as other Patriot-militia movement groups, assert that a civil war has already started and is being waged beyond the view of the public because the mainstream media doesn't cover it.<sup>40</sup> These views are often tied to conspiracy theories that Marxist, Socialist, or Communist agents are secretly infiltrating left-wing social justice groups like Black Lives Matter and antifa to foment unrest and engage in terrorism. Following the August 2020 shooting of a member of the neo-fascist group Patriot Prayer by an anti-fascist activist, Rhodes posted online that, "The first shot has been fired brother. Civil war is here, right now. We'll give Trump one last chance to declare this a Marxist insurrection & suppress it as his duty demands. If he fails to do HIS duty, we will do OURS. 'against all enemies, foreign and domestic' Stewart".<sup>41</sup>

Views of social collapse and civil war are frequently paired with a belief that the actors aware of the dissolution are either uniquely situated to prevent or survive the conflict, or they are vindicated in their longstanding views that they must actively fight against the evil forces precipitating the collapse. As such, militant accelerationism has become a favored tactic within modern militia entities like the Boogaloo and the Three Percenter movement for fighting perceived evils. Individuals who promote accelerationism within contemporary militia spaces utilize pre-existing narrative structures and world views to gain traction in audiences both established within the movement and those that are discovering it for the first time. The influence of accelerationism and its associated narratives within the militia space is bidirectional. Individuals, networks, and organizations have assuredly adopted accelerationist tendencies and views organically. But they have also been introduced to the concept and tactics due to targeted recruitment, radicalization, and infiltration efforts. A casual perusal of hardened accelerationist Telegram spaces will invariably reveal Patriot themed channels, memes, and profiles that intentionally blend the neo-Nazi and neofascist strains of accelerationism with American revolutionary aesthetics.

It is within these shared frames, ideographs, or conspiracy theories that we see convergence of the militia old guard and militant accelerationism. In this context, bad faith actors that adhere to militant accelerationism have found a favorable environment to exercise their violent intentions. After all, as Matt Kriner has written elsewhere: "What better vessel could accelerationists imagine

---

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.accresearch.org/shortanalysis/an-introduction-to-militant-accelerationism>

<sup>40</sup> <https://youtu.be/8Q4x-H5prE8>

<sup>41</sup> Oath Keepers website



than a ready-made revolutionary movement fixated on an ultra-patriotic necessity to overthrow a corrupt government by force?”<sup>42</sup>

To understand how the legacy militia movement is tied to contemporary militia-styled groups that advocate accelerationist narratives and embrace its tactical solutions, we can look to the “there is no political solution” (TINPS) narrative.<sup>43</sup> The narrative is increasingly common across mainstream political discourse, as evidenced by its prominence in the mobilization for the Stop the Steal campaign that culminated in the January 6<sup>th</sup> Insurrection. Favored by hardened accelerationist influencers and accelerationist entities, TINPS has gained a significant foothold in the ranks of those who seek the dissolution of liberal democratic systems of governance. Even among those who favor democracy, the presence of TINPS has noticeably ticked up in reference to the permissiveness and pluralism of liberal democracy. Instead, they champion imposing limitations on who is worthy of democratic representation in America – a theme that has long been present in the nostalgic group spectrum.

But there is a distinct difference between extremist actors that have dedicated themselves to a stance of revolutionary ideation versus those that view themselves, or act in accordance with, accelerationists. The chief difference is the utter abandonment of political solutions emblematic of accelerationism, which views any and all engagement with the political systems of liberalism as entirely futile and antithetical to their desired outcome of a new political system. Others who merely align themselves with the shared, underlying revolutionary ideation may fantasize about a new system to come and may even offer ideological support to those advocating for governmental overthrow yet never intend to initiate revolutionary acts. Accelerationism is not concerned with the coercion or alteration of the current political system towards a radically different world view. Instead, accelerationism is a tactic towards total system dissolution. The eradication of liberalism and democracy for those who are different from accelerationists is a necessary, if not always overtly desired, side effect of their ideal society. The specifics of what institutional form comes next is nonetheless shirked in favor of violently dismantling the current structures, for as long as they stand, there can’t be a “what comes next” to better align with their interests.

## Going forward?

Since 2015, militia groups have increasingly acted in the role of extra-judicial police at events organized by far-right political figures and overt violent extremist groups. These events are often flash points tied to fears over social change such as demographic shifts, immigration policies, gun control, free speech, and other divisive topics. Additionally, it seems certain that groups across the nostalgic spectrum remain primed to act headed into the next Presidential election cycle, but what precisely that action will look like remains a question, even among the groups themselves. Since January 6, 2021, we have already seen a proliferation of interventions with state and local politics, predominantly centering on school boards and state policies surrounding frank, fact-based discussions of race relations in America. What is at stake in these interactions is not merely the presence or absence of particular books or Critical Race Theory in curriculums but the very power to define a kind of cultural morality. Activists who oppose books like *Maus* by Art Spiegelman do not really want to protect children from images of naked cartoon mice but rather aspire for both real and symbolic control of the narratives we tell ourselves (and especially those we tell children)

---

<sup>42</sup> <https://gnet-research.org/2021/11/18/understanding-accelerationist-narratives-the-boogaloo/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://gnet-research.org/2021/09/02/understanding-accelerationist-narratives-there-is-no-political-solution/>

about U.S. history and what it means to be an American. This nostalgic vision of the past rests on the often-mythical laurels of white men whose accomplishments are described as individual acts of rebellion against all odds, acts that established a unique but very tenuous nation. These stories intentionally omit how both genocide of native peoples and slavery were fundamental ingredients in this nation's trajectory, which instead is usually framed, uniformly, as a noble mission of progress.

Many within the nostalgic group spectrum may genuinely want to believe that racism and other social ills are now merely historical artifacts, but others know that suppressing lessons about the Holocaust, the Civil Rights Movement, and ongoing racism and other discrimination make it more difficult for marginalized groups to fight contemporary and future oppression. Alongside enhanced gerrymandering of Black districts<sup>44</sup> and a continued Congressional refusal to reinstate the Voting Rights Act,<sup>45</sup> a lack of foundational, factual information in the populous at large allows enhanced opportunities for white supremacy and the groups that advocate it to flourish.

While many of these concerns may seem to be consigned to the parameters of the culture wars or political mobilization campaigns ahead of the 2022 mid-term elections, they also act as catalysts to action for militias and far-right violence. The surprise leak from the Supreme Court related to repealing *Roe v. Wade* stands as an example of how historic nostalgic group violence can be reignited with contemporary political and social changes. For decades, anti-abortion violence emanated from groups like the Army of God and Christian Identity (a neofascist movement with militia elements that perverted Christian ideals for the purposes of white supremacy ideology). As Democrat-led states seek to institute legal protections for women's reproductive health and access to abortion services, these old embers may once more rekindle into flames of violence once more.

There are growing concerns about what risks of violence nostalgic groups like militias pose, particularly in places where their efforts are stymied by effective opposition. Most analysts believe that another January 6<sup>th</sup> is unlikely, but we may still see comparatively smaller acts of violence and intimidation. State capitol buildings will again be likely targets, as will be facilities connected to local politics. Voting locations will continue to be possible targets of intimidation or outright violence as perceptions of electoral illegitimacy continue, especially in majority-Black communities. In addition to being closer to home, making it easier to travel and successfully participate in such actions, some actors have already had practice engaging in this kind of intimidation with little to no consequences in recent years, thus normalizing it as an acceptable political tactic. Local school boards and abortion clinics will similarly continue to be at the center of cultural debate, with all three types of locations carrying more symbolic meaning than their practical functions alone. Politicians and other public figures who represent or embody leftist ideals will continue to trigger "deep state" fears and could also become potential targets for violent plots. Intimidation and violence will be especially likely should Trump or his ideological successor once more inflame the nativist passions that undergirded his MAGA supporters' fears over social change and falsehoods about stolen elections.

---

<sup>44</sup> For example, see <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2022/jan/25/nashville-tennessee-gerrymandering-congress-republicans>

<sup>45</sup> <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-a-failed-voting-rights-push-is-a-setback-for-democracy-and-democrats/>

As we've illustrated throughout this statement, militias, once a fringe movement, are now solidly entrenched within the mainstream political system and have shown a willingness to use armed intimidation and threat of political violence to impact political outcomes. Contemporary iterations of classic militia and Patriot movement organizing, such as the Boogaloo, show no signs of lessening that fear of applied violence to political grievances. Instead, policy makers and law enforcement would be well advised to anticipate that the narratives and ideographs which inspired the actors described in this statement will continue to resonate within militia spaces and organizations, such as the Three Percenters and Oath Keepers, no matter the outcome of the January 6<sup>th</sup> investigations and court cases. Ideals of egalitarianism will continue to be rejected by those who view gains from minority groups as a threat and who are willing to use violence to maintain the status quo. The long-term effects of this influence will likely be a continued push within nostalgic groups towards a more extreme and hostile stance towards the status quo, and an active effort to undermine liberal democracy.

## References

Churchill, Robert H. 2009. *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant's Face: Libertarian Political Violence and the Origins of the Militia Movement*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Cooter, Amy. 2013. *Americanness, Masculinity, and Whiteness: How Michigan Militia Men Navigate Evolving Social Norms*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Diamond, Sara. 1995. *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Hardisty, Jean. 2000. *Mobilizing Resentment: Conservative Resurgence from the John Birch Society to the Promise Keepers*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Himmelstein, Jerome L. 1992. *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Jackson, Sam. 2020. *Oath Keepers: Patriotism and the Edge of Violence in a Right-Wing Antigovernment Group*. New York: Columbia University Press