



JANUARY 2022

“This is the Aftermath”

Assessing Domestic Violent Extremism
One Year After the Capitol Siege

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The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the George Washington University. The details contained in the court documents are allegations. Defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On January 6, 2021, a mob composed of activists, unaffiliated sympathizers, and hardened extremists violently entered the United States Capitol, destroying property, assaulting law enforcement, and attempting to disrupt the American electoral process. During the siege, as it has come to be known, several thousand people are believed to have unlawfully breached the Capitol. The violence that day left five dead and more than a hundred injured.¹

The Capitol Siege was a watershed moment for domestic violent extremism in the United States. In its immediate aftermath, the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation launched a nationwide investigation into the alleged perpetrators of the violence. It quickly became the largest investigation of its type in the Bureau's history, heralding investigations in nearly all 50 states and 704 criminal charges to date (as of January 1, 2022).² The breadth of the federal investigation has resulted in an unprecedented pace of prosecutorial activity, with nearly two criminal charges released per day on average during the first three months after the Capitol Siege. Today, a year after January 6, 2021, new charges are still being released every week, and the operational tempo for the DOJ and FBI has not significantly slowed.

The events of that day also led the U.S. government to redesign its approach to counterterrorism, largely reorienting its focus from international to domestic extremism. At the same time, January 6, 2021, was not only a turning point for counterterrorism authorities, but has numerous ramifications for various American domestic violent extremist groups and their efforts to recruit and plan activities while avoiding law enforcement scrutiny.

On the one-year anniversary of January 6, 2021, this report takes stock of the Capitol Siege's impacts on domestic violent extremism in America, and the U.S. federal government's efforts to respond to the threat over the past year. This research is based on the Program on Extremism's Capitol Siege Database, a collection of over 20,000 pages of court documents from cases of individuals who have been federally charged for their participation in the Capitol Siege, as well as

¹ *The New York Times*. 2021. "Inside the Capitol Riot: An Exclusive Video Investigation," June 30, 2021, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/30/us/jan-6-capitol-attack-takeaways.html>.

² All data on arrests and prosecutions in this report is accurate as of January 1, 2022. "Ten Months Since the Jan. 6 Attack on the Capitol." 2021. Department of Justice Press Release. November 9, 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/ten-months-jan-6-attack-capitol>.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, interviews with U.S. government officials and defense attorneys, media reports, and other open-source information.³

The report's main findings are as follows:

- In the year since the Capitol Siege, federal authorities have arrested 704 people for their alleged roles in breaching the Capitol. The backgrounds and motivations of individuals in this cohort remain demographically, geographically, and ideologically diverse.
- Existing evidence shows limited correlation between an individual's planning and coordination with domestic violent extremist groups prior to January 6th and their alleged participation in violent activities on January 6th. Examining the "spontaneous clusters"—individual siege participants who coordinated with others during the breach of the Capitol and jointly conducted violence—is vitally important to understand the nature of the violence at the Capitol and the potential for similar events in the future.
- Federal prosecutors allege that two domestic violent extremist networks were most responsible for mobilizing their followers to the Capitol on January 6th: the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys. These groups have faced the bulk of the federal law enforcement pressure in the year following the Siege.
- The difference between the Oath Keepers' and Proud Boys' success in adapting to increased pressure and continuing their activities during the past year may be tied to the degree of decentralization in their leadership. The autonomy of local and regional Proud Boys chapters from their national leadership allowed them greater freedom to plan violent activities throughout 2021, even when major figures connected to the group were subject to significant federal investigations.
- Since January 2021, the U.S. government has made massive changes to its domestic counterterrorism architecture at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. In 2021, each major agency tasked with counterterrorism has adopted new policies and guidelines to address domestic violent extremism, in response to a first-of-its-kind push from the White House to develop a national strategy to counter domestic terrorism.

³ All court records cited in this report are available at "Capitol Siege Database." 2022. Program on Extremism at George Washington University. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/Capitol-Hill-Cases>.

- Countering domestic violent extremist groups after the Capitol Siege will require continued innovations in categorizing and analyzing groups and actors, as well as coordinating information sharing between federal, state, local, and non-governmental authorities.

INTRODUCTION

One year ago, on January 6, 2021, a collection of individuals with allegiances to a wide variety of political causes, extremist groups, actors, and ideologies formed a mob and stormed the U.S. Capitol.⁴ The Capitol Siege was a dramatic manifestation of the broadening power, capacity, and recruiting strength of domestic extremists in the U.S. However, the violence and destruction committed by the mob on that day were far from the first examples of the threat posed by domestic terrorism to the United States, and they are unlikely to be the last. The January 6th Capitol Siege was in many ways the apex of the American domestic violent extremism threat that has metastasized over the past decade. And, moreover, according to Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) assessments, the events of that day will continue to serve as a lodestar for domestic extremism long into the future, as “these actors have been emboldened in the aftermath of the breach of the U.S. Capitol.”⁵

January 6, 2021 represented a crossroads for the nature of the threat from domestic violent extremists (DVEs) in the U.S., as well as for the U.S.’ domestic counterterrorism approach. In the wake of the Capitol Siege, American extremists and their adversaries in U.S. government agencies tasked with counterterrorism were both forced to reckon with the breach of the Capitol and its implications for recruitment, radicalization, and mobilization. During the past year, this dynamic led to strategic changes from each side. On the governmental side, this included an overhaul of the U.S.’ counterterrorism architecture and the largest federal domestic terrorism investigation in the FBI’s history. For extremists, January 6th changed how DVE groups avoid federal scrutiny, gain momentum for radicalization and recruitment, and calibrate their ideological alliances and messages.⁶

Drawing on court documents from the 704 individuals thus far charged with participating in the Capitol Siege, as well as from governmental reports, interviews,

⁴ “‘This Is Our House!’ A Preliminary Assessment of the Capitol Hill Siege Participants.” 2021. Washington: Program on Extremism at George Washington University. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/This-Is-Our-House.pdf>.

⁵ Wray, Christopher. 2021. “Examining the January 6 Attack on the U.S. Capitol.” Statement by Director Christopher Wray before the House Oversight and Reform Committee. Federal Bureau of Investigation. June 15, 2021. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/examining-the-january-6-attack-on-the-us-capitol-wray-061521>.

⁶ Wray, Christopher. 2021. “Threats to the Homeland: Evaluating the Landscape 20 Years After 9/11.” Statement by Director Christopher Wray before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. Federal Bureau of Investigation. September 21, 2021. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/threats-to-the-homeland-evaluating-the-landscape-20-years-after-911-wray-092121>.

and open-source accounts, this report is designed to address the major changes in the American DVE and counter-DVE landscape that have taken place over the past year. Furthermore, it provides an update to the data in two previous reports, “This is Our House: A Preliminary Assessment of the Capitol Hill Siege Participants” and “This is War: Examining Military Experience Among the Capitol Hill Siege Participants,” released by the Program on Extremism in March and April 2021, respectively.⁷ Like its predecessors, this report and its assessments are also preliminary, as the federal investigations, policy reorientations, and shifts in the American DVE landscape continue. Nevertheless, the year since January 6th, 2021 was an understandably eventful one for this field of research, and therefore requires some accounting.

To take stock of trends in DVE since the Capitol Siege, this report attempts to answer three main questions:

- **In the past year, what have we learned about the backgrounds and categorization of the 704 people arrested and charged federally for their participation in the Capitol Siege?**
- **In the past year, how have domestic violent extremist groups responded to the Capitol Siege and ensuing developments?**
- **In the past year, how has the United States federal government responded to the Capitol Siege through the enactment of policy? Which areas of policy response to domestic violent extremism still require improvements?**

⁷ Program on Extremism, “This is Our House!”; Milton, Daniel, and Andrew Mines. 2021. “‘This Is War!’ Examining Military Experience Among the Capitol Hill Siege Participants.” Washington: Program on Extremism at George Washington University. https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/This_is_War.pdf.

THE CAPITOL SIEGE PARTICIPANTS

Since January 6, 2021, U.S. federal law enforcement authorities claim to have arrested and charged over 725 people for their involvement in the Capitol Siege.⁸ From that number, this report evaluates the 704 federal cases where charges are publicly available as of January 1, 2022. The number of cases included in this report and corresponding data about each case are still incomplete, as new charges are constantly released and the prosecutorial process is ongoing in most cases. However, updated information on the defendants that came to light during the year after January 6, 2021 can help paint a more complete picture of their backgrounds, actions, and motivations.

Findings

Our preliminary report on this dataset, published in March 2021, examined the initial 257 defendants, and found that “the alleged perpetrators are by no means a homogenous group.”⁹ Several months later, in light of additional information on those cases and more than 447 new charges, this finding still stands (**See figures 1-4**). The oldest defendant, **Gary Wickersham**, was 80 years old when he was charged for his alleged participation in the Capitol Siege; the youngest, **Kayli Munn** and **Bruno Cua**, were both 18.¹⁰ The average age of the indicted siege participants is 39. While the majority (87%) of defendants charged to date were men, the sample includes 91 women (13% of the total). The heterogeneity of Capitol Siege suspects is not only demographic, but also geographic. Individuals from 45 states and the District of Columbia, and over 350 counties nationwide, have thus far been charged.

In the initial months after the Capitol Siege, media reporting and analysis often intensely focused on particular backgrounds of origin and affiliations of the

⁸ Department of Justice, “Ten Months Since the Jan. 6 Attack on the Capitol.”

⁹ Program on Extremism, “This is Our House!”

¹⁰ “Statement of Facts.” 2021. United States of America v. Gary Wickersham. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, May 7, 2021. Case 1:21-mj-00418-GMH. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Gary%20Wickersham%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>; “Statement of Facts.” 2021. United States of America v. Bruno Cua. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. January 29, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00187-ZMF. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Bruno%20Cua%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>; “Statement of Facts.” 2021. United States of America v. Kristi Munn et al. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. July 12, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00521-ZMF. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Kristi%20Munn%20et%20al%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>.

FIGURE 1 | Age at Time of Arrest

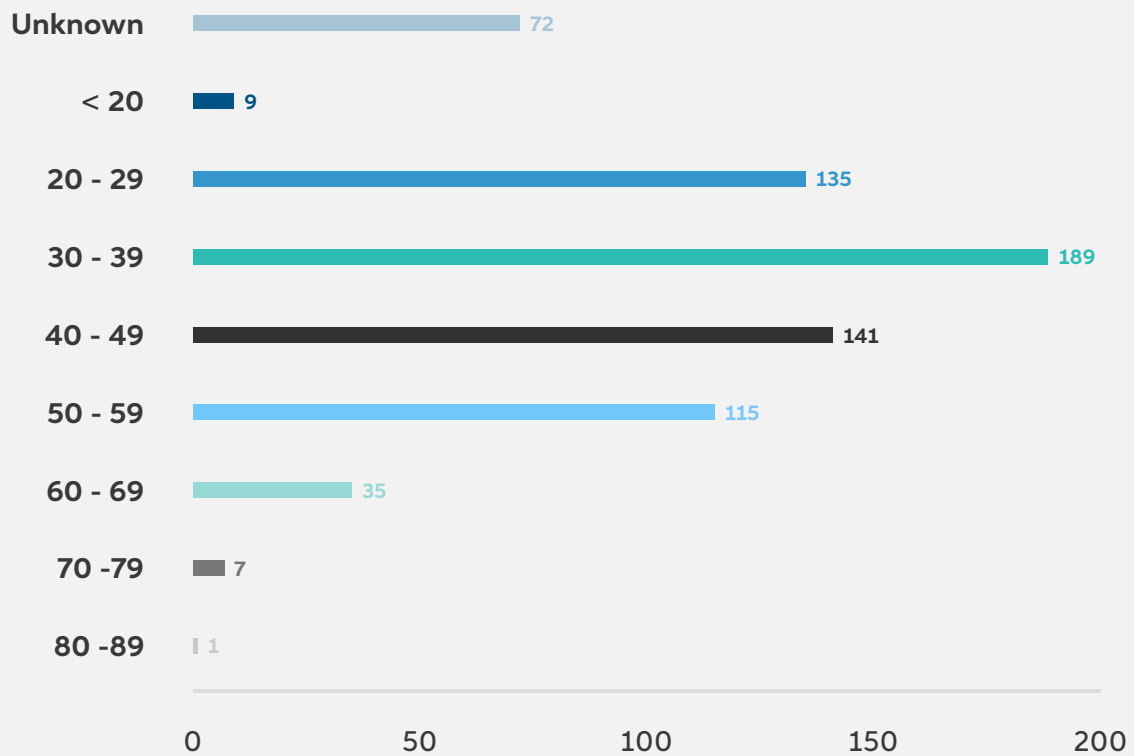


FIGURE 2 | Gender Breakdown of Alleged Perpetrators

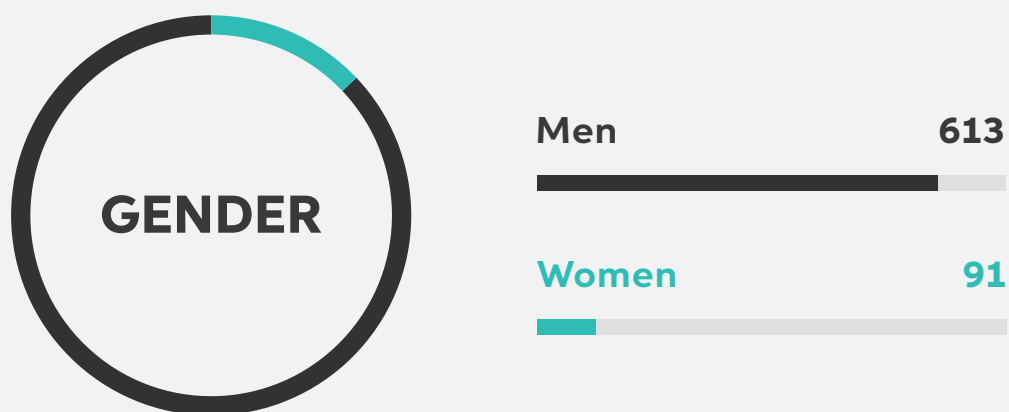


FIGURE 3 | Alleged Perpetrators' States of Residence

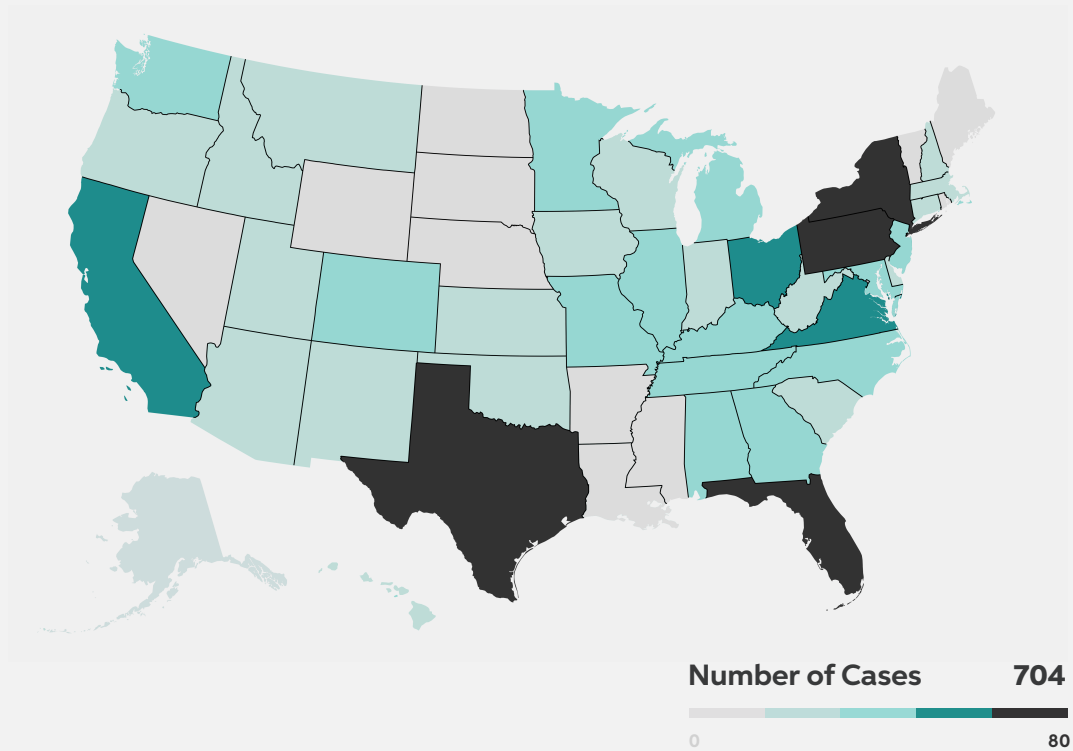
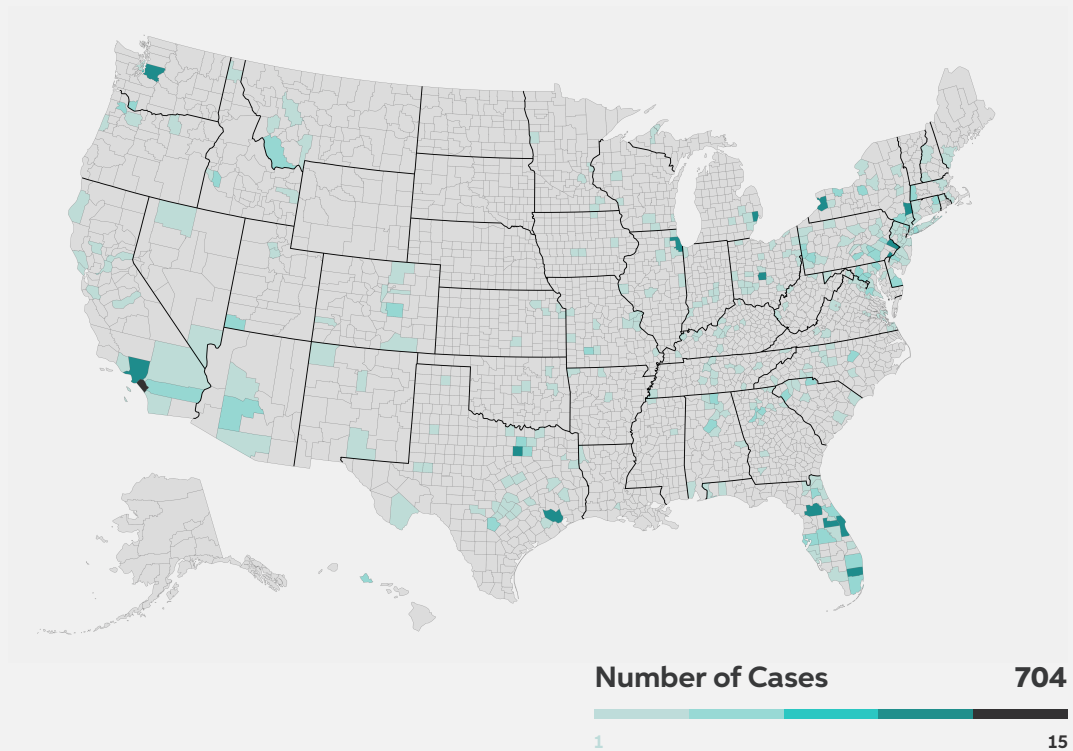


FIGURE 4 | Alleged Perpetrators' Counties of Residence



defendants.¹¹ The two categories of understandable interest that arguably generated the most public scrutiny are alleged siege participants with military and law enforcement backgrounds and those with previous membership or affiliations with known DVE groups.¹²

A year after January 6th, evidence from the cases to date show that neither of these affiliations characterize a large proportion of the defendants (**See figures 5-6**). 82 (11%) of the defendants had some confirmed form of prior U.S. military service; the vast majority of this category is former military as opposed to active-duty servicemembers.¹³ A further 24 had experience in law enforcement. A handful of defendants, including U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration probationary employee **Mark Sami Ibrahim** and State Department special assistant **Federico Klein**, had previously worked for federal government agencies.¹⁴

11% of the defendants are alleged to have been affiliates of known DVE groups prior to January 6th, the majority of whom belonged to one of three groups: the Oath Keepers (24), the Proud Boys (48), or the Three Percenters (14). As detailed later in this section, the preponderance of members of these specific groups is largely a response to the organizations' prior planning for the Capitol Siege, including top-down directives from group leaders for participation by their members.¹⁵ More interestingly, a greater percentage of the individual participants in the sample with military experience also had membership in a DVE organization (26%) than those without military service.

In addition to the various demographic and geographic backgrounds of the alleged perpetrators of the January 6th Capitol Siege, in the past year, the Department of

¹¹ Program on Extremism, "This is War!"

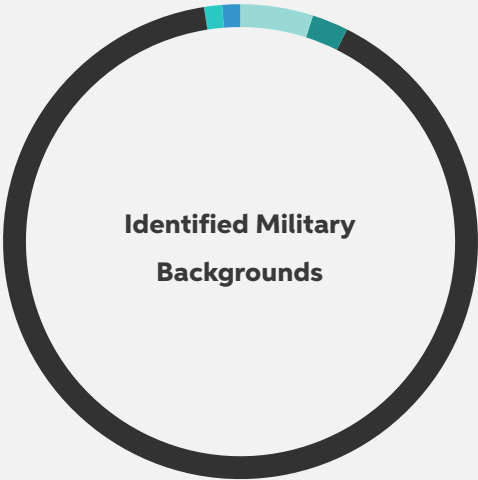
¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ "Statement of Facts." 2021. United States of America v. Mark Sami Ibrahim. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. July 6, 2021. Case 1:21-mj-00516-ZMF. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Mark%20Sami%20Ibrahim%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>; "Statement of Facts." 2021. United States of America v. Federico Klein. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. March 2, 2021. https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Federico%20Klein%20Statement%20of%20Facts_Redacted.pdf.

¹⁵ Woodruff Swan, Betsey, Kyle Cheney, and Nicholas Wu. 2021. "Jan. 6 Investigators Subpoena Proud Boys, Oath Keepers as Probe Turns to Domestic Extremism." POLITICO. November 23, 2021. <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/11/23/january-6-subpoena-proud-boys-oath-keepers-523255>; see also Weiner, Rachel, Spencer S. Hsu, and Tom Jackman. 2021. "Prosecutors Allege 'Alliance' between Proud Boys and Oath Keepers on Jan. 6." *Washington Post*, March 24, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/oathkeepers-proudboys-alliance-capitol-riot/2021/03/24/81e93b48-8cb0-11eb-9423-04079921c915_story.html.

FIGURE 5



Veteran	73
National Guard	2
Reserves	4
Active Duty	1
Basic Training	1

FIGURE 6



Proud Boys	48
Three Percenters	14
Oath Keepers	24

Justice has used a variety of investigative and prosecutorial methods to bring those involved to justice. In the days, weeks, and months after January 6th, FBI field offices across the country led a massive investigative effort to bring perpetrators to account; the ensuing hunt has thus far represented the largest joint investigation in the FBI's 113-year history.¹⁶ Evidence used in the investigations has taken a variety of forms. A substantial number of criminal complaints against the alleged perpetrators includes evidence from social media, with 77% of cases including some information obtained online. The FBI has also heavily relied on tips and information from the public, soliciting assistance from the public to identify alleged perpetrators through a designated January 6th tipline.¹⁷ Tips from the public—usually from the friends, families, and coworkers of defendants—as well as open-source information collected by members of the public are included in the evidence used to charge a significant proportion of defendants with Capitol Siege-related offenses.¹⁸

The Department of Justice has engaged in an equally wide-sweeping prosecutorial process by indicting and prosecuting alleged Capitol Siege participants, using a wide array of criminal charges. Much of this diversity in prosecutorial methods is due to the spectrum of unlawful activities allegedly conducted by the defendants, from federal misdemeanor offenses like trespassing to assaulting federal law enforcement officers and conspiracy charges.¹⁹ In total, federal prosecutors have thus far used 33 different statutes to charge January 6th defendants, with each defendant facing a total of 5 charges on average. The Department of Justice has reserved its most serious charge—18 U.S.C. § 1512(c)(2)—for more than 275 individuals accused of corruptly obstructing, influencing, or impeding the Congressional proceeding, or attempting to do so.²⁰ The Department of Justice has

¹⁶ Department of Justice, "Ten Months Since the Jan. 6 Attack on the Capitol."

¹⁷ "Capitol Violence." n.d. Page. Federal Bureau of Investigation. Accessed December 2, 2021. <https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/capitol-violence>.

¹⁸ See, for instance: "Statement of Facts." 2021. United States of America v. Jeremy Baouche. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. November 2, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Jeremy%20Baouche%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>; "Criminal Complaint." 2021. United States of America v. Caleb Jones. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. March 29, 2021. https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Caleb%20Jones%20Statement%20of%20Facts_Redacted.pdf; Reilly, Ryan. 2021. "'Sedition Hunters': Meet The Online Sleuths Aiding The FBI's Capitol Manhunt." Huffpost. June 30, 2021. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/sedition-hunters-fbi-capitol-attack-manhunt-online-sleuths_n_60479dd7c5b653040034f749.

¹⁹ Department of Justice, "Ten Months Since the Jan. 6 Attack on the Capitol."

²⁰ Department of Justice, "Ten Months Since the Jan. 6 Attack on the Capitol."; Pagliery, Jose. 2021. "The Obscure Charge Jan. 6 Investigators Are Looking at for Trump." Daily Beast. December 23, 2021. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-obscure-charge-jan-6-investigators-are-looking-at-for-donald-trump>.

similarly used 18 U.S.C. § 111(a)(1) against the 155 individuals who are alleged to have assaulted law enforcement or media during the commission of the siege.²¹

Since the Capitol Siege, the Department of Justice has secured convictions in 170 cases, all through guilty pleas. The first Capitol Siege-related conviction came 100 days after the riot, when Oath Keeper **Jon Schaffer** pleaded guilty to obstructing an official proceeding and entering a restricted building with a deadly weapon on April 16, 2021.²² While Schaffer and 21 others pleaded guilty to federal felonies, an additional 148 guilty pleas came in misdemeanor cases. While the vast majority of the January 6th cases are still pending, federal courts have handed down sentences in 71 cases. Of the 31 who were sentenced to a period of incarceration, convicted participants in the Capitol Siege have received sentences of 283 days. However, when factoring in the 40 defendants who were sentenced to home detention or probation, the average sentence length is 121 days. Concurrently, the DOJ has dismissed 3 indictments against January 6th defendants, 2 of which occurred because the defendant in question died.²³

Categorizing the Capitol Siege Participants

The initial narrative about violence at the Capitol and violent extremism that emanated after the first cases of January 6th defendants divided the cases into two groups. The first group consisted of a small, coordinated number of hardened violent extremists with concrete and organized plans to storm the Capitol and conduct violence on January 6th.²⁴ The second group was larger, comprising the opportunistic individuals with various ideological leanings who took advantage of

²¹ Department of Justice, “Ten Months Since the Jan. 6 Attack on the Capitol.”; “Capitol Siege Database.” 2022. Program on Extremism at George Washington University. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/Capitol-Hill-Cases>.

²² “Lifetime Founding Member of the Oath Keepers Pleads Guilty to Breaching Capitol on Jan. 6 to Obstruct Congressional Proceeding.” 2021. Department of Justice Press Release, April 16, 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/lifetime-founding-member-oath-keepers-pleads-guilty-breaching-capitol-jan-6-obstruct>.

²³ The third individual, Christopher Kelly, had charges against him dropped due to a lack of evidence that he entered the Capitol. See: Williams, Pete, Daniel Barnes, and Jonathan Dienst. 2021. “Feds Seek to Drop US Capitol Riot Case Against NY Man Due to Lack of Evidence.” NBC 4 New York. September 1, 2021. <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/feds-seek-to-drop-u-s-capitol-riot-case-against-ny-man-due-to-lack-of-evidence/3084584/>.

²⁴ Rosenblatt, Nate, and Jason Blazakis. 2021. “How New Is the New Extremist Threat? Preliminary Conclusions from the U.S. Capitol Arrests Data.” War on the Rocks. March 16, 2021. <https://warontherocks.com/2021/03/how-new-is-the-new-extremist-threat-preliminary-conclusions-from-the-u-s-capitol-arrests-data/>; Schweingruber, David. 2021. “The Capitol Breach: Perspective from the Sociology of Collective Action.” *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 14 (2): 110–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2021.1913507>.

the breach and entered the Capitol without conducting violence.²⁵ Implicitly, this narrative views the violence committed at the Capitol as a function of the rioters’ ties to violent extremist organizations and/or the extent of their planning in advance of January 6th.

After more than 704 arrests and a year after the siege, very little of the public record contains evidence to support this narrative, especially the implied connection between planning or organizational ties and violence. **Table 1** details how our preliminary assessment categorized the January 6th defendants and provides updated figures for the numbers of defendants in each category based on the activities alleged in court documents. As of March 2021, only a fraction of the prosecutions (13%) focused on individuals in the militant network category: those with known ties to violent extremist organizations who were responding to their organization’s call for its followers to plan, participate, and conduct violence during the events of January 6th.²⁶ Today, the percentage of cases involving a member of a militant network is even fewer. Instead, the bulk of cases either involve organized clusters—referring to individuals who allegedly planned to participate in the events of January 6th with their friend or family networks—or inspired believers, who seemingly conducted their planning and travel to the Capitol alone.²⁷

Table 1: Original Categorization of Siege Participants

	Militant Networks	Organized Clusters	Inspired Believers
Organization (vertical)	Top-down directives from DVE organization leaders to participate in the siege	Inspired to participate in the siege despite lack of membership in formal DVE group	Inspired to participate in the siege despite lack of membership in formal DVE group
Networks (horizontal)	Networks of several members of DVE organization	Networks of several like-minded believers, especially groups of family/friends	No known network

²⁵ *Ibid* all. The exact nature and intent of evidenced coordination by Oath Keepers and Proud Boys prior to January 6th remains unclear. Claims in criminal complaints against several members of these organizations suggest that these militant networks planned to breach the Capitol and conduct violence, although the evidence to support many of these allegations is not available to the public at present as the cases in question are still in progress.

²⁶ Program on Extremism, “This is Our House!”

²⁷ *Ibid*.

<i>Planning</i>	Planned travel to DC and accommodations in conjunction with other participants; Planned to breach Capitol and conduct violence	Planned travel to DC and logistics with other participants	Planned own travel to DC and logistics
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Since the March 2021 Program on Extremism report, several prominent cases involved a phenomenon that is not well-accounted for in our previous categorization, which assessed the January 6th defendants by their level of organization, their connection to broader networks, and their planning for the Capitol Siege, but not by their alleged activities at the Capitol that day. While we initially predicted that most of the prosecutions related to violence conducted at the Capitol would target members of militant networks, multiple major prosecutions have instead focused on individuals in the other two categories who, despite lacking the prior planning and organization of militant networks, are alleged to have conducted serious acts of violence during the siege.

Accounting for the subcategory of individuals who engaged in organized, collaborative violent acts at the Capitol with others despite a lack of evidence they planned to do so in advance of January 6th requires a category reconfiguration. **Table 2** details our updated categorization of the cases and the number of cases in each new category. Two factors distinguish the new framework from its predecessor. First, the variables used to categorize defendants do not simply concern their activities and affiliations prior to the Capitol Siege, but also address their alleged activities at the Capitol on January 6, 2021. Second, as a result of these new variables, the schematic has a new category of defendants in addition to militant networks, organized cells, and inspired believers, which we term “spontaneous clusters.” These are individuals who traveled either independently or in networks of small, like-minded believers to Washington, DC to participate in the events at the Capitol on January 6, 2021. Unlike their counterparts in the organized clusters and inspired believers groupings, however, members of spontaneous clusters are alleged to have conducted coordinated violent activities with other unaffiliated individuals during the commission of the siege. Thus, 21% of the cases are now classed as spontaneous clusters; in comparison, 36% are now classified as inspired believers, 34% are organized clusters, and 9% are militant networks.

As a result of the new classification system, the category assigned to certain cases has changed. For instance, in March 2021 prosecutors charged **George Tanios** and **Julian Khater** with several counts, including the assault of Capitol Police officers.²⁸ Tanios and Khater, from Morgantown, West Virginia and State College, Pennsylvania respectively, grew up together in New Brunswick, New Jersey and allegedly planned jointly to travel to the Capitol on January 6th.²⁹ As a result, they were initially classified in the database as an organized cluster. As a result of the new classification, however, the pair are a textbook example of a spontaneous cluster, because they reportedly conspired together to assault federal officers during the commission of the siege.³⁰ Federal prosecutors argue that Tanios and Khater were the men responsible for using chemical spray to attack several Capitol Police officers, including Officer Brian Sicknick, who later died on January 7, 2021 after suffering two strokes.³¹

Some individuals who were initially classed as inspired believers also may meet the definition of a spontaneous cluster. A third superseding 12-count indictment released in November 2021 charges Jeffery Sabol, Peter Stager, Michael Lopatic, Jr., Clayton Mullins, Jack Whitton, Logan James Barnhart, Ronald Colton McAbee, Justin Jersey, and Mason Courson as co-defendants in the assault of federal law enforcement officers during the siege.³² Despite no evidence in the public record that shows that these individuals from seven different states knew each other prior to January 6th, 2021, they are alleged to have jointly collaborated in using violent force against police officers at the steps near the West Terrace of the Capitol complex.³³ This report classifies this group as a spontaneous cluster because of their reported spur-of-the-moment collaboration in using violence during the Capitol Siege.

²⁸ "Criminal Complaint and Statement of Facts." 2021. United States of America v. Julian Elie Khater and George Pierre Tanios, United States District Court for the District of Columbia. March 6, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00286. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Julian%20Elie%20Khater%20and%20George%20Pierre%20Tanios%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*; "Medical Examiner Finds USCP Officer Brian Sicknick Died of Natural Causes." 2021. United States Capitol Police, April 19, 2021. <https://www.uscp.gov/media-center/press-releases/medical-examiner-finds-uscp-officer-brian-sicknick-died-natural-causes>

³² "Third Superseding Indictment." 2021. United States of America v. Jeffrey Sabol et al, United States District Court for the District of Columbia. November 17, 2021. Case: 1:21-cr-00035-EGS. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Sabol%20et%20al%20Third%20Superseding%20Indictment.pdf>.

³³ *Ibid.*; Barry, Dan, Alan Feuer, and Matthew Rosenberg, 2021. "90 Seconds of Rage." The New York Times. October 16, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/10/16/us/capitol-riot.html>.

Table 2: Updated Categorization of Siege Participants

	Militant Networks	Spontaneous Clusters	Organized Clusters	Inspired Believers
Organization (vertical)	Top-down directives from DVE organization leaders to participate in the siege	Inspired to participate in the siege despite lack of membership in formal DVE group	Inspired to participate in the siege despite lack of membership in formal DVE group	Inspired to participate in the siege despite lack of membership in formal DVE group
Networks (horizontal)	Networks of several members of DVE organization	Networks of several like-minded believers formed before or during the siege	Networks of several like-minded believers, especially groups of family/friends	No known network
Planning	Planned travel to DC and accommodations in conjunction with other participants; Planned to breach Capitol and conduct violence	Planned travel to DC and logistics individually or with other participants, breached the Capitol in conjunction with other participants	Planned travel to DC and logistics with other participants	Planned own travel to DC and logistics
Violence	Engaged in or conspired with others to conduct violent activities at the Capitol	Engaged in violence or conspired with others to conduct violent activities at the Capitol	Did not engage in or conspire with others to conduct violent activity at the Capitol	Did not engage in or conspired with others to violent activity at the Capitol

The new categorization is significant, as it helps to isolate individuals who were allegedly responsible for seemingly impulsive attacks on law enforcement and media during the Capitol Siege. These individuals in spontaneous clusters are different from those in militant networks, as they had no linkage, affiliation, or pre-January 6th planning activity with formal DVE groups, and they are different from organized clusters and inspired believers, who are not alleged to have engaged in or conspired with others to conduct violent activity at the Capitol. Understanding spontaneous clusters is critically important to analyzing January 6th, as well as detailing the factors that may lead to similar events in the future.³⁴ Nate Rosenblatt and Jason Blazakis write that analytically, “a more successful strategy would be to isolate those planning to use violence from the rest of the people who stormed the U.S. Capitol, treating the former as potentially enduring threats while punishing the

³⁴ Schweingruber, “The Capitol Breach.”

latter according to the laws that they broke.”³⁵ With a year of information from court cases, it is now possible to preliminarily isolate the defendants who are charged with violent activity at the Capitol from their counterparts who did not, while also distinguishing this group from the individuals with ties to organized violent extremist groups who committed violence at the Capitol.

Furthermore, this category of cases has arguably been among the predominant concerns for federal law enforcement in the wake of January 6th.³⁶ The individuals in spontaneous clusters are allegedly responsible for some of the most heinous crimes committed at the Capitol on January 6th, including assaults on law enforcement and the media, destruction of Congressional and police property, and conspiracies.³⁷ The nature of some of the violence committed by spontaneous clusters at the Capitol was seemingly organic, uniting several individuals and groups of individuals with no known previous connections who nonetheless conducted spur-of-the-moment violent acts together.³⁸ As a result, members of spontaneous clusters are among those facing the most severe charges brought by the Department of Justice in its January 6th investigations.³⁹ This emphasis continued into the judicial process, where prosecutors have argued that members of spontaneous clusters—despite lacking ties to organized DVE groups or in some cases, pre-January 6th ties to other Capitol Siege defendants—should face stringent restrictions and/or pre-trial detention.⁴⁰

The spontaneous cluster category may also be a unique harbinger for DVE in the post-Capitol Siege era. In March 2021, the United States Intelligence Community assessed that “lone offenders or small cells of DVEs adhering to a diverse set of violent extremist ideologies are more likely to carry out violent attacks in the Homeland than organizations that allegedly advocate a DVE ideology.”⁴¹ The

³⁵ Rosenblatt and Blazakis, “How New Is the New Extremist Threat?”

³⁶ James, Nathan. 2021. “Law Enforcement’s Response to the January 6th Events at the Capitol.” Congressional Research Service, January 22, 2021. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1147493.pdf>.

³⁷ Author interview with Department of Justice official, December 2021.

³⁸ Schweingruber, “The Capitol Breach.”

³⁹ Author interview with Department of Justice official, December 2021.

⁴⁰ Parloff, Roger. 2021. “What Do—and Will—the Criminal Prosecutions of the Jan. 6 Capitol Rioters Tell Us?” Lawfare. November 4, 2021. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/what-do%E2%80%94and-will%E2%80%94criminal-prosecutions-jan-6-capitol-rioters-tell-us>.

⁴¹ “Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021.” 2021. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, March 1, 2021. https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/21_0301_odni_unclass-summary-of-dve-assessment-17_march-final_508.pdf.

spontaneous clusters were the representatives of this trend at the Capitol on January 6th, made up of groups of either individual extremists or small cells of extremists that, in responding to a hodgepodge of ideological influences, carried out violence. As the next sections detail, a turnkey variable in how DVE networks were able to resist law enforcement pressure and continue propagating violent activity in the year after the Capitol Siege was their ability to spontaneously convene groups of ideologically like-minded but organizationally unconnected individual extremists. Therefore, studying the potential for spontaneous clusters to form at large-scale protests, events, and demonstrations like the events of January 6th can help inform counterterrorism practitioners, policymakers, and researchers alike.

THE DOMESTIC VIOLENT EXTREMIST RESPONSE TO JANUARY 6TH

The events of January 6, 2021 represented an inflection point for far-right domestic violent extremist movements in the United States. The alleged conspiracies by members of the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and Three Percenters shared a common goal: to disrupt the official Congressional proceeding to certify the results of the 2020 General Election. As court documents and federal authorities allege, the conspiracies orchestrated by the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys were deeply hierarchical. Organizationally, the structures of both groups in the lead-up to January 6 revolved around the directives and messaging of their respective leaders, Stewart Rhodes and Enrique Tarrio. While neither have been charged at present, significant federal investigations are ongoing which are seeking to scope the totality of their alleged involvement in the events of January 6, 2021.

While the scope and scale of the participation by members of these movements, as well as the specific overt acts in furtherance of these conspiracies, continue to come to light in legal proceedings, it is crucial to understand these actions as a single data point in the evolution of these hierarchical movements. Further, while investigations into these groups continue, it is important to consider the role of “disorganized militias”—both ad hoc extremist cells and disparate movements like the Three Percenters—who are each alleged to have played a role in the events of the day. Finally, the specter of extremist movements not alleged to have been present in significant numbers at the U.S. Capitol, including accelerationist movements like the Boogaloo, looms large in the DVE landscape today. An understanding of complexities of these movements and their adherents is crucial to the development of a comprehensive picture of how January 6 served to influence the trajectories of these domestic violent extremist movements in 2021 and beyond.

Hierarchical DVE Groups at the Capitol Siege: Oath Keepers and Proud Boys

The U.S. government alleges that the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys are the two most hierarchical DVE organizations which participated in the events of January 6. The charging documents against members of both groups claim that there were significant, top-down directives from Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes and Proud Boys chairman Enrique Tarrio, sequestered and encrypted leadership chats

used to organize and mobilize followers, and clear conspiracies by members of DVE groups throughout the Fall of 2020 up through the assault on the U.S. Capitol.

At the time of publication, 48 individuals charged federally in relation to their alleged criminal actions on January 6th have been identified as having a nexus to the Proud Boys, 17 of which are charged across five indictments with conspiring to disrupt the official Congressional proceeding.⁴² The Oath Keepers conspiracy consists of 21 individuals presently charged as co-defendants, with a further 3 Oath Keepers members charged individually for their alleged conduct on the day of the Siege.⁴³

As a result of the central role alleged to have been played by the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers organization on January 6, these groups and their leaders have experienced the most significant overt federal pressure in the aftermath of the Capitol Siege. Two factors are worth consideration in the assessment of these respective groups' mobilization building up to January 6: the organizational structure of each group and its hierarchy, and the offline tempo each of these groups exhibited over their evolution during the previous four years.

The Oath Keepers organization operates largely as a hierarchical entity, with a national leadership council, state and county chapters, and local branches that are all responsive to commands from Rhodes. While some local mobilization can be undertaken with a semblance of autonomy, many of the significant instances of Oath Keepers' organizational mobilization involve Rhodes.⁴⁴ Further, the evolution of the Oath Keepers as an organization has been characterized by intermittent and often isolated offline activities focused on specific flashpoints. As such, while the group has largely been absent from many events in 2021 that would typically witness an Oath Keepers presence, it is important not to over-interpret a drop-off in their post-January 6 activity as a sign of imminent organizational collapse, or over extrapolate the potential relationship the ongoing federal investigation into Rhodes and the Oath Keepers on this absence.⁴⁵

⁴² "Capitol Hill Siege." 2021. Program on Extremism at George Washington University, accessed January 1, 2022.

⁴³ "Capitol Hill Siege." 2021. Program on Extremism at George Washington University, accessed January 1, 2022.

⁴⁴ Jackson, Sam. *Oath Keepers: Patriotism and the Edge of Violence in a Right-Wing Antigovernment Group*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

⁴⁵ Author interview with Sam Jackson, November 2021.

Sam Jackson argues that in a movement often characterized by breathless paranoia and intemperate rhetoric, Rhodes has long stood out for his relatively measured public persona. Having often walked along the edge of violence, Rhodes has frequently deployed rhetoric and ideas that make violence more likely without directly calling for or engaging in violence himself. In years past, he has deployed a degree of ambiguity in his rhetoric about political violence, arguing that some circumstances require violence on the part of so-called patriots without clearly stating whether those circumstances have been met. In part, Jackson suggests, this could relate to his legal training and his tendency to be risk-averse: his actions and rhetoric—particularly from 2009 through 2016—suggest that he has deliberately tried to avoid legal risk for himself and his organization. It can be argued his rhetoric sets the stage for others to decide for themselves to engage in violent or criminal behavior, however, Rhodes himself has largely avoided directly calling for or participating in that behavior.⁴⁶

Yet, evidence suggests that the federal pressure being exerted on the national leadership of the Oath Keepers organization—and Rhodes personally—is significant. Rhodes admitted to being questioned by the FBI in relation to his role in the Oath Keepers conspiracy on January 6 following their seizure of his cell phone in May 2021.⁴⁷ While the full transcript of the interview has not been made public, government disclosures in the ongoing federal conspiracy case against the Oath Keepers members suggest ongoing efforts by Rhodes to distance himself from the criminal conduct by his subordinates and dues-paying members of his organization. In his May 2021 FBI interview, the government asserts that Rhodes “asserted that he...[was] ‘cut out’ of planning between individuals like Kelly Meggs and his coconspirators.”⁴⁸ However, the involvement of Person One in the Oath Keepers conspiracy, identified in public reporting as Stewart Rhodes,⁴⁹ is evident across the entire timeline of the alleged conspiracy—from planning calls in the immediate aftermath of Trump’s election loss in November 2020 through near-constant phone

⁴⁶ Author interview with Sam Jackson, December 2021

⁴⁷ Feuer, Alan. 2021. “Oath Keepers Leader Sits for F.B.I. Questioning Against Legal Advice.” *The New York Times*. July 9, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/09/us/politics/stewart-rhodes-oath-keepers-fbi.html>.

⁴⁸ *USA v. Kenneth Harrelson*, “Government’s Surreply to Defendant’s Reply in Support of Third Motion for Release,” District of Columbia, 2021. Case: 1:21-cr-00028.

⁴⁹ Spencer S. Hsu, 2021. “Oath Keepers founder, associates exchanged 19 calls from start of Jan. 6 riot through breach, prosecutors allege,” *The Washington Post*, April 1, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/oath-keepers-calls-capitol-riot/2021/04/01/1b48aad4-9338-11eb-a74e-1f4cf89fd948_story.html.

calls between Rhodes, his “operations leader” Person Ten,⁵⁰ and numerous Oath Keepers defendants on January 6, 2021.⁵¹

In September 2021, the FBI seized the phone of Kellye SoRelle, the Oath Keepers’ general counsel, reportedly in relation to suspected violations of federal criminal statutes connected to January 6, including 18 U.S.C § 2384 (seditious conspiracy).⁵² Further, Rhodes, along with Proud Boys chairman Enrique Tarrio, Roger Stone, and Alex Jones, were recently subpoenaed by the House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol. In the committee’s subpoena, they note that “in written and spoken remarks delivered prior to January 6, 2021, you repeatedly suggested that the Oath Keepers should, or were prepared to, engage in violence to ensure their preferred election outcome.”⁵³

As these investigations move forward, cracks have seemingly begun to emerge in the foundation of the relationship between Rhodes and the organization that he founded in 2009 and which has been shaped into an extension of his own anti-government ideology. Reporting from BuzzFeed News quotes indicted Oath Keeper Jessica Watkins’ boyfriend as claiming that Stewart Rhodes “is more concerned with his own image than what happens to anyone who is part of the organizations he runs.”⁵⁴ A cursory examination of Rhodes’ previous attendance at prominent flashpoints like the Bundy Ranch Standoff shows a similar trail of disgruntled adherents. Joseph Rice, a former head of a Southern Oregon Oath Keeper chapter who left the group several years ago, described Rhodes as someone who, “flies in,

⁵⁰ Friedman, Dan. 2021. “We’ve Unmasked the Oath Keepers’ January 6 ‘Operations Leader,’” Mother Jones, July 26, 2021.

⁵¹ USA v. Kenneth Harrelson, “Government’s Surreply to Defendant’s Reply in Support of Third Motion for Release,” District of Columbia, 2021; Dan Friedman, “We’ve Unmasked the Oath Keepers’ January 6 ‘Operations Leader,’” Mother Jones, July 26, 2021. Case: 1:21-cr-00028.

⁵² To date, none of the 704 defendants charged federally in relation to their alleged criminal conduct on January 6 have been charged with seditious conspiracy. See: Dan Friedman, 2021. “FBI Seizes Oath Keeper Lawyer’s Phone in “Seditious Conspiracy” Investigation,” Mother Jones, September 9, 2021. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2021/09/fbi-oath-keepers-lawyer-phone-seditious-conspiracy-january-6/>.

⁵³ “Subpoena of Mr. Elmer Stewart Rhodes,” House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, November 23, 2021. <https://january6th.house.gov/sites/democrats.january6th.house.gov/files/20211123%20Rhodes%20Letter.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Garrison, Jessica, Ken Bensinger, Salvador Hernandez. 2021. “Some Oath Keepers Say Its Founder Has Betrayed The Group’s Mission — And Them.” March 4, 2021. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/jessicagarrison/stewart-rhodes-oath-keepers-early-history-conflicts>.

throws up a PayPal, and then disappears...He stirs up a hornet's nest, and then he leaves. And the groups in that community have to deal with the fallout.”⁵⁵

For the Proud Boys, the permissiveness from federal, state, and local law enforcement that often accompanied their activities during the previous four years led to a spike in offline activities, especially in specific local flashpoints. Some chapters and members, particularly on the West Coast, have been heavily involved with traveling to engage in street brawls or staging armed political protests.⁵⁶ The Proud Boys leadership operates a far more autonomous structure, with local chapters being afforded significant latitude in their activities. Involvement from national leadership into local chapters' jurisdictions has often been dependent on geographic location, as well as the specifics of the given activity by Proud Boys chapters. This autonomy has led to a wide variance in both frequency and type of offline mobilization by individual Proud Boys chapters, both prior to and after January 6.

This relative autonomy is also evident in the government's allegations of the composition and responsiveness of Proud Boys leadership in the days leading up to January 6. Henry “Enrique” Tarrio, the leader of the Proud Boys, was arrested in Washington, D.C. on January 4, 2021, and charged with one misdemeanor count of destruction of property, stemming from Tarrio's theft and destruction of a ‘Black Lives Matter’ banner from Asbury United Methodist Church in December 2020.⁵⁷ Tarrio was also charged with two felony counts of possession of high-capacity ammunition feeding devices, which were in his possession at the time of his arrest. Tarrio was ultimately sentenced to 155 days in prison in August 2021 for these charges, and remains incarcerated⁵⁸ Following Tarrio's arrest, four Proud Boys leaders (Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, Zachary Rehl, and Charles Donohoe)

⁵⁵ Garrison, Jessica, Ken Bensinger, Salvador Hernandez. 2021. “Some Oath Keepers Say Its Founder Has Betrayed The Group's Mission — And Them.” March 4, 2021. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/jessicagarrison/stewart-rhodes-oath-keepers-early-history-conflicts>.

⁵⁶ Kriner, Matt, and Jon Lewis. 2021. “The Violent Evolution of the Proud Boys.” Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel. July/August 2021. <https://ctc.usma.edu/pride-prejudice-the-violent-evolution-of-the-proud-boys/>.

⁵⁷ Hermann, Peter, and Martin Weil. 2021. “Proud Boys leader arrested in the burning of church's Black Lives Matter banner, D.C. police say.” The Washington Post. January 4, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/proud-boys-enrique-tarrio-arrest/2021/01/04/8642a76a-4edf-11eb-b96e-0e54447b23a1_story.html.

⁵⁸ “Florida Man Sentenced to 155 Days in Jail On Destruction of Property, Firearms Charges.” 2021. Department of Justice Press Release. August 23, 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/pr/florida-man-sentenced-155-days-jail-destruction-property-firearms-charges>.

allegedly took steps to destroy the contents of their encrypted messaging channel known as the “Ministry of Self Defense (MOSD)” and created a new encrypted channel which did not include Tarrio.⁵⁹

Despite the increased scrutiny from law enforcement and individual chapters shuttering after January 6, Proud Boys leadership has shown no intent to curb the activities of its rank and file. Instead, the group has continued to mobilize, sometimes armed and violently, in response to the continued disinformation narratives related to the “Stop the Steal” movement, COVID-19 vaccine and mask mandates, and more. Data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) has identified 145 protests and demonstrations attended by Proud Boys members since January 6, 2021.⁶⁰ This data, which does not include school board or local health board meetings, highlights a continued focus by Proud Boys on state and local level mobilization.⁶¹ As Cassie Miller of the Southern Poverty Law Center noted in recent analysis of the group, “They’re simply switching up their organizational style...Now they are organizing more at a local level, they’re hosting local rallies, or they’re joining into other rallies around political flashpoints like critical race theory or anti-masking.”⁶² While the local focus of the Proud Boys is not necessarily new when comparing 2021 events against previous years of ACLED data on the group, this refocusing on decentralized local flashpoints is an important indicator of Proud Boys efforts to regroup and reorient their efforts on building a local base in the wake of January 6.⁶³

The legal repercussions for individual members allegedly present at the U.S. Capitol have similarly not deterred local branches from continued violent confrontations. A “White Lives Matter” demonstration in Huntington Beach, California attended by

⁵⁹ Kriner, Matt, and Jon Lewis. 2021. “The Violent Evolution of the Proud Boys.” Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel. July/August 2021. <https://ctc.usma.edu/pride-prejudice-the-violent-evolution-of-the-proud-boys/>.

⁶⁰ Frenkel, Sheera. 2021. “Proud Boys Regroup, Focusing on School Boards and Town Councils.” The New York Times. December 14, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/14/us/proud-boys-local-issues.html>.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* Owen, Tess. 2021. “All the Terrible Things Proud Boys Have Done Since Storming the Capitol.” Vice News. June 23, 2021. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/pkb377/all-the-terrible-things-proud-boys-have-done-since-storming-the-capitol>.

⁶² Yousef, Odette. 2021. “After Arrests And Setbacks, Far-Right Proud Boys Press New Ambition.” NPR. September 29, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/09/29/1041121327/despite-arrests-and-setbacks-far-right-proud-boys-press-new-ambitions>.

⁶³ Frenkel, Sheera. 2021. “Proud Boys Regroup, Focusing on School Boards and Town Councils.” The New York Times. December 14, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/14/us/proud-boys-local-issues.html>.

Proud Boys on April 11, 2021 quickly turned violent.⁶⁴ On June 18, 2021, clashes between Proud Boys and antifascist counter-protesters in Oregon City, Oregon, descended into a riot.⁶⁵ Similarly, Portland, Oregon, a longstanding flashpoint between the far-right and local antifascist counter-protestors, witnessed a resurgence of street violence involving Proud Boys in August of 2021.⁶⁶

Importantly, the group has continued to attempt to insert itself into the mainstream political atmosphere, often latching onto popular disinformation narratives within the far-right to do so. On May 1, 2021, members of the Proud Boys acted as security for a Second Amendment rally in Salem, Oregon during which a speaker referred to the coronavirus vaccines as a “bioweapon” and accused state officials of “going after your children.”⁶⁷ Over the past 12 months, numerous identified Proud Boys members have sought positions on local school boards and submitted candidacy for local election official positions and elected office.⁶⁸ In November 2021, members of the group’s northern Illinois chapter appeared at a local high school board meeting in suburban Chicago regarding the potential removal of a sexually-explicit book from school libraries.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Smith, Hayley, Ruben Vives, Priscella Vega, Hannah Fry, and Matt Szabo. 2021. “White Lives Matter rally ends with large counterprotest, 12 arrests in Huntington Beach.” *Los Angeles Times*. April 11, 2021. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-04-11/huntington-beach-rallies-wlm-blm>.

⁶⁵ Dowling, Jennifer. 2021. “Proud Boys, antifa in ‘medieval clashes’ in Oregon City riot.” *KOIN*. June 18, 2021. <https://www.koin.com/news/protests/oregon-city-protests-declared-riot-06182021/>.

⁶⁶ Wilson, Jason. 2021. “Hundreds clash in Portland as Proud Boys rally descends into violence.” *The Guardian*. August 23, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/aug/23/portland-oregon-clashes-protests-proud-boys-antifascist>.

⁶⁷ Owen, Tess. 2021. “All the Terrible Things Proud Boys Have Done Since Storming the Capitol.” *Vice News*. June 23, 2021. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/pkb377/all-the-terrible-things-proud-boys-have-done-since-storming-the-capitol>; Radnovich, Connor. 2021. “Far-right groups rally in Salem in support of 2nd Amendment, against pandemic restrictions.” *Statesman Journal*. May 1, 2021. <https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2021/05/01/far-right-groups-rally-salem-support-2nd-amendment-against-pandemic-restrictions/7402799002/>.

⁶⁸ See, for example: Mak, Tim. 2021. “Some Proud Boys Are Moving To Local Politics As Scrutiny Of Far-Right Group Ramps Up.” *NPR*. June 28, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/28/1010328631/some-proud-boys-are-moving-to-local-politics-as-scrutiny-of-far-right-group-ramp>; Smith, Sherman. 2021. “Haven school board candidate lured into sharing racist ideology with teenage anti-fascists.” *Kansas Reflector*. July 20, 2021. <https://kansasreflector.com/2021/07/20/haven-school-board-candidate-lured-into-sharing-racist-ideology-with-teenage-anti-fascists/>; *Las Vegas Sun*. 2021. “Republican Party’s civil war in Nevada: Moderates vs. violent extremists,” June 30, 2021, sec. Editorial. <https://lasvegassun.com/news/2021/aug/02/in-the-republican-partys-civil-war-its-moderates-v/>.

⁶⁹ Schuba, Tom, and Nader Issa. 2021. “Proud Boys join effort to ban ‘Gender Queer’ book from school library — rattling students in suburban Chicago.” *Chicago Sun Times*. November 21, 2021. <https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2021/11/21/22789363/gender-queer-proud-boys-downers-grove-north-south-culture-wars-school-board-illinois>.

As the one-year anniversary of January 6th approaches, the group continues to display resilience in the face of continued law enforcement pressure. In New York, Proud Boys members marched through Rockville Centre on Long Island, reportedly “storming into stores and disrupting shoppers.”⁷⁰ On December 4, 2021, members of the Proud Boys reportedly held a “Kyle Rittenhouse appreciation rally” in Salt Lake City, Utah.⁷¹ Even as Enrique Tarrio remains incarcerated in Washington, D.C., and members of the Proud Boys continue to be arrested in connection to their alleged criminal conduct on January 6, the group has not withered or moderated. Instead, its members appear emboldened, seeking to carve out a position not only as a vanguard for the far right, but embracing more extreme ideologies as it does so.

The autonomy afforded to individual chapters has also led to virulent antisemitic, neo-fascist, and similar sentiments by prominent members of the Proud Boys. In a Telegram post on December 2, 2021, St. Louis Proud Boys President Mike Lasater commented, “Our time is not up; it is the jewish hegemony whose days our [sic] numbered. This is a Christian nation; jews may be citizens of this country, but they are guests of our nation, and they should remember that.”⁷² In the wake of President Trump’s 2020 General Election loss, former Proud Boys member Kyle Chapman posted what appeared to be a challenge to Tarrio on Telegram, stating “We will no longer cuck to the left by appointing token negroes as our leaders. We will no longer allow homosexuals or other ‘undesirables’ into our ranks. We will confront the Zionist criminals who wish to destroy our civilization. We recognize that the West was built by the White Race alone and we owe nothing to any other race.”⁷³ With Tarrio’s position within the Proud Boys seemingly uncertain following his incarceration and the revelation that Tarrio was a longtime federal informant, the future trajectory of the group remains in flux. However, it is evident that the events of January 6th served to embolden the more extreme elements of the group which continue to engage in offline activity that seemingly walks the line between street violence and domestic violent extremism.

⁷⁰ Raskin, Sam. 2021. “Far-right Proud Boys march through Long Island streets, alarming local pols.” New York Post. November 28, 2021. <https://nypost.com/2021/11/28/proud-boys-march-through-long-island-streets-report/>.

⁷¹ Schott, Bryan. 2021. “Proud Boys to hold ‘Kyle Rittenhouse appreciation rally’ in SLC on Saturday.” The Salt Lake Tribune. December 3, 2021. <https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2021/12/03/proud-boys-hold-kyle/>.

⁷² Telegram post reviewed by the authors.

⁷³ Weill, Kelly. 2020. “The Post-Election Proud Boys Meltdown Is Here, and It’s Ugly.” Daily Beast. November 11, 2020. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-post-election-proud-boys-meltdown-is-here-and-its-ugly>; Dickson, E.J. 2021. “The Rise and Fall of the Proud Boys.” June 15, 2021. <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/proud-boys-far-right-group-1183966/>.

DVE in 2021 and Beyond: Three Percenter, Disorganized Militias, and Accelerationists

While the organized, hierarchical DVE groups have, understandably, received the lion's share of both public and U.S. government scrutiny in the year since the Capitol Siege, broader trends in the DVE landscape both before and after January 6 underscore a growing current of more amorphous, disorganized, and potentially far more dangerous DVE movements in the United States. An analysis of such movements—both those alleged to have been present at the Capitol Siege and those who have merely drawn inspiration from its aftermath—shows the continued threat posed by a wide range of lone actors and small cells inspired by a range of white supremacist, anti-government, and accelerationist ideologies in the United States which continue to operate with relative impunity in both online and offline spaces.

The Oath Keepers and Proud Boys represent two of the more significant DVE movements alleged to have conspired to disrupt the certification of the 2020 general election on January 6, 2021. Yet a constellation of smaller conspiracies and violent mobilization within the tranche of Capitol Siege cases highlight the increasing prevalence of these amorphous, disorganized violent extremist movements like the Three Percenters and newly charged 'Patriot Boys.'⁷⁴

Indeed, a significant proportion of extremist mobilization in 2020 and 2021 can be largely attributed to a post-organizational milieu inhabited by coalitions tied together not by an inherent ideological purity, but diverse strands interconnected by narratives often driven by disinformation and conspiracy theories. Many of the most violent manifestations of extremism in the United States at present are encouraged by what Cynthia Miller-Idriss and Brian Hughes refer to as “mobilizing concepts.”⁷⁵ These concepts, or ideographs, are perfectly exemplified in a big tent, amorphous movement like the accelerationist Boogaloo, which emerged offline in force in 2020.

The Boogaloo movement coalesced around specific event-driven mobilizing concepts related to perceived government abuse and overreach in the early months

⁷⁴ “Criminal Complaint.” 2021. United States of America v. Donald Hazard and Lucas Denney, United States District Court for the District of Columbia. December 7, 2021. Case: 1:21-mj-00686. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Donald%20Hazard%20and%20Lucas%20Denney%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>.

⁷⁵ Miller-Idriss, Cynthia, and Brian Hughes. 2021. “Blurry Ideologies and Strange Coalitions: The Evolving Landscape of Domestic Extremism.” Lawfare. December 19, 2021. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/blurry-ideologies-and-strange-coalitions-evolving-landscape-domestic-extremism>.

of 2020, from police brutality to no-knock raids to mask mandates stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. While Boogaloo members have been nearly entirely absent from the current group of arrestees, several figures within the movement have claimed to have attended, potentially as an effort to retain relevance and continue to appeal to their core audiences.⁷⁶ While some of these specific flashpoints in 2020 may have receded from the public consciousness, these themes remain deeply ingrained within traditional anti-government spaces, long embodied within groups like the Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, and a collection of local militias and related movements drawn together under the broad umbrella of the Patriot Movement.

These interconnected themes and narratives of a deeply tyrannical federal government built upon existing anti-authority sentiments deeply ingrained in the domestic Patriot Movement, and represent a diffusion of ideographs and aesthetics popularized by early Boogaloo movement adherents. While, for example, the specific flashpoints that mobilized Boogaloo movement adherents as a cohesive and recognizable entity have faded to some degree, the underlying boogaloo narrative has been integrated into the ideological foundations of neo-fascist and Christian Identity spaces.⁷⁷

Crucially, even as specific DVE organizations or groups may fade, the core ideographs which drove the movement's adherents to mobilize to violence remain—and often metastasize. What transpired at the Capitol on January 6th, 2021, and during the aftermath, is a mainstreaming of these diffusive themes in largely online ecosystems which are far more disparate and far less tied to a specific organization or group. This embrace of, or return to, a “post-organizational” threat landscape by domestic violent extremists is one that has implications on U.S. domestic counterterrorism policies post-January 6.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Thompson, A.C., Lila Hassan, and Karim Hajj. 2021. “The Boogaloo Bois Have Guns, Criminal Records and Military Training. Now They Want to Overthrow the Government.” ProPublica. February 1, 2021. <https://www.propublica.org/article/boogaloo-bois-military-training>; Hesson, Ted, Ned Parker, Kristina Cooke, and Julia Harte. 2021. “U.S. Capitol Siege emboldens motley crew of extremists.” Reuters. January 8, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-extremists/u-s-capitol-siege-emboldens-motley-crew-of-extremists-idUSKBN29D2ZY>.

⁷⁷ Kriner, Matthew, Alex Newhouse, and Jon Lewis. 2021. “Understanding Accelerationist Narratives: The Boogaloo.” Global Network on Extremism & Technology. November 18, 2021. <https://gnet-research.org/2021/11/18/understanding-accelerationist-narratives-the-boogaloo/>.

⁷⁸ Comerford, Milo. 2020. “Confronting the Challenge of ‘Post-Organisational’ Extremism.” Observer Research Foundation. August 19, 2020. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/confronting-the-challenge-of-post-organisational-extremism/>.

U.S. DOMESTIC COUNTER-EXTREMISM AFTER JANUARY 6TH

The Capitol Siege was a reckoning for the U.S. government in terms of its domestic counterterrorism strategy and policy. Calls for the federal government to reevaluate its approach towards DVE groups had been steadily growing over the past half-decade, in response to DVE-related terrorist attacks in Charlottesville, Pittsburgh, El Paso, and elsewhere.⁷⁹ Prior to January 6th, revamping U.S. domestic counterterrorism was already considered to be a priority for the then-incoming Biden Administration.⁸⁰ However, the Capitol Siege crystallized the nature of the threat for many policymakers, generating a massive, year-long flurry of new strategies and policies that in conjunction amount to a “sea change” in U.S. domestic counter-extremism.⁸¹

The Sea Change in Domestic Counter-Extremism

In the year since January 6, 2021, the U.S. government has enacted changes in its counter-DVE architecture that have affected nearly every level of decision-making, from broad, strategic-level shifts to changes on the ground that affect front-line counterterrorism practitioners. New policies have been implemented across the national security bureaucracy, focusing on improving intelligence collection and analysis, investigations and prosecutions, Congressional oversight, countering violent extremism, and countering insider threats. In total, the combined effect of this policy push in the months after January 6th leads to the conclusion that the U.S.

⁷⁹ Byman, Daniel L. 2017. “Should We Treat Domestic Terrorists the Way We Treat ISIS?: What Works—and What Doesn’t.” *Brookings* (blog). October 3, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/should-we-treat-domestic-terrorists-the-way-we-treat-isis-what-works-and-what-doesnt/>; Hoffman, Bruce, and Jacob Ware. 2020. “The Terrorist Threat from the Fractured Far Right.” *Lawfare*. November 1, 2020. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/terrorist-threat-fractured-far-right>; Jones, Seth, Catrina Doxsee, Grace Hwang, James Suber, and Nicholas Harrington. 2020. “The War Comes Home: The Evolution of Domestic Terrorism in the United States.” Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/war-comes-home-evolution-domestic-terrorism-united-states>; Laguardia, Francesca. 2019. “Considering a Domestic Terrorism Statute and Its Alternatives.” *Northwestern University Law Review* 114 (4): 1061–1100.

⁸⁰ “2020 Democratic Party Platform.” July 2020. <https://democrats.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-Democratic-Party-Platform.pdf>.

⁸¹ Gordenstein, Carly, and Seamus Hughes. 2021. “A Sea Change in Counterterrorism.” *Lawfare*. June 13, 2021. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/sea-change-counterterrorism>.

government now views domestic terrorism as the preeminent terrorism threat facing the U.S., rather than international terrorism.⁸²

Chief among the whole-of-government changes was the first-of-its-kind National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism, released by the White House National Security Council in June 2021.⁸³ The National Strategy calls for improvements in four areas: information and intelligence-sharing on domestic terrorism inside and outside the federal government, preventing DVE recruitment, improving the domestic terrorism investigation and prosecution process, and addressing the root causes of DVE in the U.S.⁸⁴ This document was produced by the Biden Administration after a 140-day, government-wide review of domestic terrorism policy in the U.S. was initiated by President Biden immediately after taking office.⁸⁵

The national strategy was paired with other strategic changes in the U.S. government's domestic counterterrorism approach. It is partially based on an unclassified assessment by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, released in March 2021, which "assesses that domestic violent extremists (DVEs) who are motivated by a range of ideologies and galvanized by recent political and societal events in the United States pose an elevated threat to the Homeland."⁸⁶ Following this assessment, the FBI and DHS released a joint report to Congress, highlighting significant domestic terrorism incidents and their assessment of the DVE threat between 2015 and 2019.⁸⁷ Finally, in a commitment to countering extremist recruitment and radicalization online, the U.S. government became party to the Christchurch Call to Action to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online in May 2021.⁸⁸

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ "National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism." 2021. White House National Security Council, June 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/National-Strategy-for-Countering-Domestic-Terrorism.pdf>.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ "FACT SHEET: National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism." 2021. The White House. June 15, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/15/fact-sheet-national-strategy-for-countering-domestic-terrorism/>.

⁸⁶ ODNI, "Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021."

⁸⁷ "Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism." 2021. Federal Bureau of Investigation/Department of Homeland Security Joint Report. May 2021. <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/fbi-dhs-domestic-terrorism-strategic-report.pdf/view>.

⁸⁸ "United States Joins Christchurch Call to Action to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online." 2021. United States Department of State. May 7, 2021. <https://www.state.gov/united-states-joins-christchurch-call-to-action-to-eliminate-terrorist-and-violent-extremist-content-online/>.

In addition to these whole-of-government strategic changes, individual agencies and parts of the government have adjusted their own policies to counter domestic terrorism. With regard to January 6th, the most-heralded new effort has been the establishment of the U.S. House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, established through a resolution passed in late June 2021.⁸⁹ The Select Committee includes Members of Congress from both major parties and has the important power to subpoena documents and testimonies in their investigation of the lead-up and response to the Capitol Siege.⁹⁰ However, its short existence has been marred by political controversy, disputes over subpoenas, lawsuits, and challenges to its investigative authorities.⁹¹ Whether the eventual findings of the Select Committee will have an effect on U.S. domestic counterterrorism remains to be seen.

As Congress investigates, executive agencies have taken matters into their own hands. In March 2021, the Attorney General streamlined the DOJ's process for investigating and prosecuting DVE-related cases by issuing new guidance, requiring all federal prosecutors trying cases related to DVEs to notify the DOJ's National Security Division.⁹² The purpose of this requirement is to nationally consolidate data on DOJ's domestic terrorism caseload, so that more standardized information on the numbers and type of DVE cases can be submitted to other federal agencies and Congress.⁹³ This change in reporting requirements was coupled with a major funding request by the Attorney General for an additional \$85 million from Congress, to assist the DOJ and FBI in counter-DVE efforts.⁹⁴

Major agency-level changes also took place within the Department of Defense. Shortly after the Capitol Siege, with initial reports centering on the participation of current or former military servicemembers in the events of January 6th, Secretary of

⁸⁹ "About." 2021. Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol. 2021. <https://january6th.house.gov/about>.

⁹⁰ Jurecic, Quinta. 2021. "The Jan. 6 Select Committee Isn't Just a Formality." Lawfare. July 19, 2021. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/jan-6-select-committee-isnt-just-formality>.

⁹¹ Jurecic, Quinta, and Molly Reynolds. 2021. "The Jan. 6 Investigation Is Ramping Up. Will It Matter?" Lawfare. October 8, 2021. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/jan-6-investigation-ramping-will-it-matter>.

⁹² Winter, Jana. 2021. "Exclusive: Attorney General to Detail New Guidelines for Domestic Terrorism Investigations and Cases." Yahoo News. May 11, 2021. <https://news.yahoo.com/exclusive-attorney-general-to-detail-new-guidelines-for-domestic-terrorism-investigations-and-cases-200923496.html>.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Knutson, Jacob. 2021. "Garland Asks Congress for \$85 Million in Additional DOJ Funding to Fight Domestic Terrorism." Axios. May 4, 2021. <https://www.axios.com/merrick-garland-doj-domestic-terrorism-02aa5942-dd07-40ab-825f-659b59782772.html>.

Defense Austin announced an all-DOD “stand-down,” in which all commanding officers and supervising personnel would carry out a one-day discussion on extremism with their personnel.⁹⁵ It also commissioned two review entities, one internal and one external, with carrying out reviews of the DOD’s counter-extremism policies.⁹⁶ The DOD’s internal Countering Extremist Activities Working Group (CEAWG) is currently tasked with creating a definition of “extremism” for use in DOD assessments and studying the prevalence of extremist ideologies within the DOD’s workforce.⁹⁷ At the DOD’s behest, the RAND Corporation has also issued several reports on problems and recommendations for extremism within the ranks.⁹⁸ Finally, to address the issue of former military servicemembers joining extremist groups, the CEAWG was tasked with creating guidance for those transitioning away from active-duty military service to avoid recruitment from DVE groups.⁹⁹ These efforts have been coupled with House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee hearings, reviews, and investigations into how Congress can help support the Department of Veterans Affairs and Veterans Service Organizations into preventing violent extremism among transitioning or former military personnel.¹⁰⁰

After the announcement of these initiatives, in recent months various components of the DOD have unrolled the first elements of their new anti-extremism policies. A December 2021 DOD Inspector General report claims military made progress in improving and standardizing the DOD’s data collection process and reporting on the numbers of identified extremists in the ranks.¹⁰¹ Later that month, the Pentagon released a report from the CEAWG that highlighted their efforts to improve their

⁹⁵ “Stand-Down to Address Extremism in the Ranks.” 2021. Secretary of Defense. February 5, 2021. <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Feb/05/2002577485/-1/-1/0/STAND-DOWN-TO-ADDRESS-EXTREMISM-IN-THE-RANKS.PDF>.

⁹⁶ “Immediate Actions to Counter Extremism in the Department and Establishment of the Counter Extremism Working Group.” 2021. Secretary of Defense. April 9, 2021. <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Apr/09/2002617921/-1/-1/1/MEMORANDUM-IMMEDIATE-ACTIONS-TO-COUNTER-EXTREMISM-IN-THE-DEPARTMENT-AND-THE-ESTABLISHMENT-OF-THE-COUNTERING-EXTREMISM-WORKING-GROUP.PDF>.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Posard, Marek N., Leslie Adrienne Payne, and Laura L. Miller. 2021. “Reducing the Risk of Extremist Activity in the U.S. Military.” RAND Corporation. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1447-1.html>.

⁹⁹ Secretary of Defense, “Immediate Actions to Counter Extremism in the Department.”

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ “Department of Defense Progress on Implementing Fiscal Year 2021 NDAA Section 554 Requirements Involving Prohibited Activities of Covered Armed Forces.” 2021. Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense. December 1, 2021. Report No. DODIG-2022-042. <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Dec/02/2002902153/-1/-1/1/DODIG-2022-042.PDF>.

counter-extremism strategy and implemented new updates to existing policies. Most notably, the new guidelines clarified the definitions of “extremist activities” and “active participation [in extremist groups]”; this in effect creates a broader swathe of prohibited activities for military personnel, including certain online behaviors.¹⁰² In addition, new policies also cover services for transitioning military personnel and enhanced screening measures, to prevent individuals with previous extremist ties from joining the military.¹⁰³ The CEAWG also commissioned a report from the Institute of Defense Analyses which will estimate the frequency of extremist activities throughout the U.S. military.¹⁰⁴

The Department of Homeland Security also made significant structural changes to the agency to improve its portion of the domestic counterterrorism mission. Secretary of Homeland Security Mayorkas designated DVE as a National Priority Area in February 2021, which requires recipients of particular DHS grants to spend at least 7.5% of the grant funds on countering DVE.¹⁰⁵ In conjunction, DHS reformed its primary arm for public-private counter-extremism partnerships, shuttering the Office for Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (OTVTP) and replacing it with the Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3).¹⁰⁶ CP3 continued DHS’ Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP) grant program, selecting over 35 local partners across the country to “enhance capabilities to prevent targeted violence and terrorism”; the FY2021 awardees focus more heavily on preventing DVE.¹⁰⁷ In addition to changes to DHS’ preventative architecture, the agency’s Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I+A) created a branch that specifically works on domestic terrorism, with a focus on gathering intelligence from social media.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² “Report on Countering Extremist Activity Within the Department of Defense.” 2021. Department of Defense, December 2021. <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Dec/20/2002912573/-1/-1/0/REPORT-ON-COUNTERING-EXTREMIST-ACTIVITY-WITHIN-THE-DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE.PDF>.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ “Secretary Mayorkas Announces Domestic Violent Extremism Review at DHS.” 2021. Department of Homeland Security. April 26, 2021. <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2021/04/26/secretary-mayorkas-announces-domestic-violent-extremism-review-dhs>.

¹⁰⁶ “DHS Creates New Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships and Additional Efforts to Comprehensively Combat Domestic Violent Extremism.” 2021. Department of Homeland Security. May 11, 2021. <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2021/05/11/dhs-creates-new-center-prevention-programs-and-partnerships-and-additional-efforts>.

¹⁰⁷ “Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program.” 2020. Department of Homeland Security. February 14, 2020. <https://www.dhs.gov/tvtpgrants>.

¹⁰⁸ DHS, “DHS Creates New Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships.”

Finally, like the DOD, in the wake of January 6th DHS started its own taskforce to examine the prevalence of extremist ideologies within the agency's workforce.¹⁰⁹

The combination of strategic and operational changes to American domestic counterterrorism has also been joined to significant tactical shifts, which are reflected in data on frontline counterterrorism practitioners working domestic terrorism cases daily. FBI Director Wray testified in September 2021 that the number of federal investigations related to domestic terrorism had ballooned to around 2,700 at any given time, requiring the Bureau to "surge personnel to match more than doubling the number of people working that threat from a year before."¹¹⁰ Similar expansion to the number of investigations and personnel also occurred within DHS, where a significant number of analysts were shifted to the counter-DVE mission area, and in U.S. Attorneys offices across the country, where the influx of DVE prosecutions related and unrelated to January 6th have increased the caseload for prosecutors.¹¹¹

Improving Domestic Counter-Extremism

The strategic re-posturing of U.S. domestic counterterrorism towards DVE groups is ongoing, with the federal government and contingent authorities each frequently adopting new measures at a rapid pace. To date, most new policies have focused improving on two pillars of the Biden Administration's domestic counterterrorism strategy: improving the domestic terrorism investigation and prosecution process and to a lesser extent, preventing DVE recruitment (particularly within the federal and military workforces). Without a doubt, further improvements are forthcoming. However, after the first six months of the new American strategy towards countering domestic violent extremism, there are several areas on which policymakers from the federal counterterrorism agencies may consider increasing their focus.

First, the processes of sharing information between federal agencies on domestic terrorism and creating two-way dissemination of pertinent information between state, local, tribal and territorial authorities and their federal counterparts require

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Wray, "Threats to the Homeland."

¹¹¹ "Attorney General Merrick B. Garland Remarks: Domestic Terrorism Policy Address." 2021. Department of Justice Press Release. June 15, 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-merrick-b-garland-remarks-domestic-terrorism-policy-address>; DHS, "DHS Creates New Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships."

streamlining. In the year after January 6, 2021, one of the long-standing issues in this field was remedied when the FBI and DHS provided a publicly-available version of their Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism report to Congress, giving the legislature and the public a window into the scope of the DVE threat by category.¹¹² Yet additional concerns remain regarding intra-agency collaboration; the lack of coordination between disparate entities (including the FBI, DHS, U.S. Capitol Police, the DOD and others) is cited in media reports, independent analyses and testimonies as one of the main factors guiding intelligence and policy failures prior to January 6th.¹¹³ This is particularly true regarding intelligence-sharing with the Capitol Police, whose intelligence analysis mission was subject to a massive stress test prior to January 6th and continues to receive a steady stream of actionable threats against lawmakers and government targets.¹¹⁴

In addition to ongoing concerns about horizontal collaboration between federal agencies, there is additional work to be done in improving two-way vertical collaboration between federal, state, and local law enforcement. In this arena, there are two bottlenecks of information that impede effective response to the domestic terrorism threat. First, in many DVE-related investigations, pertinent information about individuals or groups under investigation is more likely to be found at the local level.¹¹⁵ However, by the time the information is disseminated upward to the federal government through forums like DHS Fusion Centers or FBI Joint Terrorism Taskforces (JTTF), signals can become lost in the noise or are not distributed to relevant agencies.¹¹⁶ On January 6, 2021, this reportedly occurred when a memo

¹¹² FBI/DHS, “Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism.”

¹¹³ See for instance: Wittes, Benjamin, and Rohini Kurup. 2021. “Was Jan. 6 an Intelligence Failure, a Police Failure or Both?” Lawfare. March 1, 2021. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/was-jan-6-intelligence-failure-police-failure-or-both>; Connelly, Phoebe, Natalia Jiménez-Stuard, Tyler Rimmel, and Madison Walls. 2021. “Warnings of Jan. 6 Violence Preceded the Capitol Riot.” Washington Post. October 31, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/interactive/2021/warnings-jan-6-insurrection/>; Burke, Frances, and Richard Shultz. 2021. “The Department of Homeland Security’s Epic ‘Intelligence Enterprise’ Failure.” The National Interest. The Center for the National Interest. January 24, 2021. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/departement-homeland-security%E2%80%99s-epic-%E2%80%98intelligence-enterprise%E2%80%99-failure-176946>; Dilanian, Ken. 2021. “Two Decades after 9/11, FBI Accused of Intelligence Failure before Capitol Riot.” NBC News. February 23, 2021. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/you-can-t-just-push-send-20-years-after-9-n1258637>.

¹¹⁴ “Review of the Events Surrounding the January 6, 2021, Takeover of the U.S. Capitol.” 2021. United States Police Office of the Inspector General. April, 2021. <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/HA/HA00/20210510/112587/HHRG-117-HA00-20210510-SD002.pdf>

¹¹⁵ Bjelopera, Jerome. 2017. “Domestic Terrorism: An Overview.” Congressional Research Service. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/R44921.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ Connelly et. al., “Warnings of Jan. 6 Violence Preceded the Capitol Riot.”

from the FBI JTTF in Norfolk, VA assessing the likelihood of violence at the Capitol was not distributed to several federal agencies, including Capitol Police.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, there is also a bottleneck of wherewithal and knowledge on countering domestic terrorism, where the resources and expertise that are available to federal law enforcement, intelligence, and homeland security agencies are not shared with state, local, tribal and territorial partners.¹¹⁸ Complicating these bottlenecks, law enforcement agencies throughout the 50 states vary in their institutional mandates, resources, authorities, and political will to combat domestic terrorism.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, efficiency in information sharing between levels of government is of the utmost importance with regard to preventing another Capitol Siege; the events of January 6, 2021 at the U.S. Capitol were coupled with similar riots at state capitols across the country, and many assessments find that the most likely site for a recurrence of a capitol siege is at state capitols rather than in Washington, DC.¹²⁰

The more pressing concerns for the implementation of the Biden Administration's domestic counterterrorism strategy are found in its pillars to prevent DVE recruitment and addressing the root causes thereof. With regard to these policies, there is an incongruity between the strategy's efforts to define, categorize and assess the threat from different DVE trends and its method of response.¹²¹ With the Capitol Siege mobilization as a prominent example, today's DVE phenomena in the U.S. are characterized by amorphous, overlapping, and intersecting movements that promulgate an array of grievances and narratives to mobilize their followers to violence, online and offline.¹²² The categorization scheme used in the National

¹¹⁷ Barrett, Devlin, and Matt Zapotosky. 2021. "FBI Report Warned of 'War' at Capitol, Contradicting Claims There Was No Indication of Looming Violence." *Washington Post*, January 12, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/capitol-riot-fbi-intelligence/2021/01/12/30d12748-546b-11eb-a817-e5e7f8a406d6_story.html.

¹¹⁸ Hughes, Seamus, and Rohini Kurup. 2021. "An Assessment of the U.S. Government's Domestic Terrorism Assessment." *Lawfare*. May 24, 2021. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/assessment-us-governments-domestic-terrorism-assessment>.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Baker, Mike, Sean Keenan, Kathleen Gray, and Shawn Hubler. 2021. "Trump Supporters Also Mobilized at State Capitols." *The New York Times*, January 6, 2021, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/06/us/politics/trump-supporters-also-mobilized-at-state-capitols.html>.

¹²¹ Hughes, Seamus, and Devorah Margolin. 2019. "The Fractured Terrorism Threat to America." *Lawfare*. November 10, 2019. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/fractured-terrorism-threat-america>; Hoffman, Bruce, and Jacob Ware. 2020. "The Terrorist Threat from the Fractured Far Right." *Lawfare*. November 1, 2020. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/terrorist-threat-fractured-far-right>; Newhouse, Alex. 2021. "The Threat Is the Network: The Multi-Node Structure of Neo-Fascist Accelerationism." *CTC Sentinel* 14 (5). <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-threat-is-the-network-the-multi-node-structure-of-neo-fascist-accelerationism/>

¹²² *Ibid.* all.

Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism and related Intelligence Community assessments to classify DVE groups and actors is effective in establishing stable categories for data on the fractured DVE threat. However, using these categories as a basis for policy to counter the threat oversimplifies the nature of DVE movements, which often do not fit neatly within one category, lack formalized hierarchies and structures, or otherwise are difficult to classify.¹²³

In public remarks in December 2021, DHS Acting Undersecretary for Intelligence and Analysis John Cohen reviewed the U.S. government's enactment of the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism and pointed to these difficulties in categorization as a prime impediment on law enforcement and U.S. intelligence community efforts to thwart domestic terrorist attacks.¹²⁴ Cohen argued that the contemporary domestic terrorism threat:

“doesn't fit into those neat definitional categories that those of us in law enforcement or in the intelligence world depend on...in order to define a threat and a course of action associated with the threat. That is a real challenge, because it impacts the ability of federal task forces, law enforcement in general, and even intelligence analysts to categorize the type of threat-related activity that may be observed in a community somewhere in the country. That has actually resulted in circumstances where individuals have come to the attention of law enforcement... or local officials, and because of the difficulty in categorizing whether this was a personal grievance-motivated attack or threat or an ideologically-motivated threat, it resulted in inaction. And we've actually seen lethal attacks from individuals who have come to the attention of law enforcement previously but have not reached the threshold of a counterterrorism investigation.”¹²⁵

Because of the differences in categorizing threat actors, if the Biden Administration's policies in the coming years are intended to repurpose traditional counterterrorism tools—such as the processes for terrorism prosecutions, designations, and statutes in existence—on current DVE actors and movements, they are unlikely to achieve the objectives set by the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism.¹²⁶ These tactics presume that their adversaries are formalized, terrorist organizations

¹²³ Interview with U.S. government official, December 2021

¹²⁴ Cohen, John. 2021. “Six Months After the Countering Domestic Terrorism Strategy: A Conversation with John Cohen.” National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center (NCITE) and Program on Extremism at George Washington University event. December 15, 2021.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Interview with U.S. government official, December 2021

with distinct hierarchies, leaders, and substructures. According to the ODNI's assessment, the actors at the apex of the DVE threat to the U.S. lack these characteristics.¹²⁷ The Capitol Siege, which drew together an amalgam of committed violent extremists from various movements and groups, individual, unaffiliated extremists, and others with personalized motivations and grievances, is an example of the impact of amorphous movements on the domestic terrorism landscape, and other DVE actors, from white supremacists to militias and anarchists, also lack formalized organizational structures.¹²⁸ Countering these groups will require creativity and innovation in how the federal government conducts intelligence analysis on the DVE movements in question, and that policymakers have the means to distinguish the important but transitory groups and actors from the broader networks and movements that they represent.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, Hoffman and Ware, "The Terrorist Threat from the Fractured Far Right."

¹²⁸ *Ibid* all.

CONCLUSION

The events and aftermath of January 6, 2021 will more than likely continue to have a resounding impact on the landscape and characteristics of domestic violent extremism in the United States for years to come. Shocks to the system from the Capitol Siege reverberated throughout the U.S. government, which embarked on a massive effort to interdict the perpetrators and announced sweeping changes to the domestic counterterrorism architecture just days after January 6. Simultaneously, the shocks also manifested throughout America's fractured domestic extremist movements. After only one year since the Capitol Siege, there have been several early signs of the potential long-term impacts of January 6th, which are documented throughout this report.

First, by engaging in the largest domestic terrorism investigation in its history, the DOJ and FBI have identified and charged several hundred people throughout the country who are alleged to have breached the Capitol on January 6th. As each new case is added to the ledger, the ability for researchers and analysts to reach a single conclusion about the backgrounds of the defendants becomes more and more difficult. The common thread uniting each defendant is that they viewed the results of the 2020 Presidential election as illegitimate, but this is where the similarities end. The 704 cases represent almost as many unique ideological, demographic, and geographic profiles. To date, more common threads between the defendants may be uncovered through investigations into broader networks and milieus, but even in the event that this information comes to public light, it is still unlikely that it will lead to sweeping conclusions about the motivations of the mob at the Capitol Siege.

For this reason, identifying the subset of Capitol Siege defendants who engaged in coordinated violent activity at the Capitol on January 6th is of the utmost importance. With the information that has come to light since the early months of investigations, it is possible to highlight the roles of two groups within this subset, whose presence in the mob was both necessary to the escalation of violence on January 6th and informative for future efforts to prevent Capitol Siege-like events in the future. The first group are militant networks, the individuals in organized DVE groups who responded to calls from their leadership to participate in the siege and conduct violence in furtherance of disrupting the electoral process. Certainly, a great deal of analysis and reporting has covered this group. But less focused on were those in spontaneous clusters, groups of like-minded individuals who organically

joined together and conducted some of the worst instances of assaults and property damage during the siege. Understanding how previously unaffiliated extremists band together during an event and perpetrate violence together will be critical to preventing similar events in the future.

The degree to which DVE groups take note of this trend could be impactful for the future of domestic terrorism threats in the U.S. January 6th disproved the notions that the most effective DVE groups are the most hierarchical and organized ones, as well as the notion that extremists of multiple differing ideological persuasions (such as racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists and anti-government/anti-authority violent extremists) could never effectively cooperate with one another during a single event. These realities are evident in how the two groups that mobilized in the largest numbers for January 6th— the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys—have fared in the aftermath of the Capitol Siege. The Oath Keepers have been racked by legal pressure targeting the senior echelons of their leadership, as well as law enforcement scrutiny and public pressure on many of their rank-and-file members. Despite their outsized role in the Capitol Siege, their activities have plummeted since. Meanwhile, Proud Boys chapters across the country, who maintained a largely decentralized network of chapters throughout the country before, during, and after January 6th, have managed to survive federal pressure and continue planning violence during protests in many states.

The continued decentralization and fracturing of DVE groups in the U.S. after January 6th may explain the endurance of domestic terrorism threats, despite the barrage of new domestic counterterrorism policies issued by the U.S. government in the wake of the siege. In 2021, the U.S. government coupled its new National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism with new policies aimed at DVE groups at virtually every level and agency of the federal government with counterterrorism authorities. The effects of this course correction remain to be seen, but will likely rely on their ability to innovate domestic counterterrorism from a solely group-targeted approach to one that more holistically addresses movements and ideologies. This is due to the fact that today's predominant domestic terrorism threats to the U.S. are characterized by amorphous networks that constantly reshuffle the names and makeups of groups, are organized less through tight physical hierarchies and more through mutual participation in virtual forums, and are more willing to form coalitions and strategic alliances with other extremists.

Regardless of what domestic terrorism looks like in the years after January 6, 2021, the events of the Capitol Siege are likely to loom large in the minds of domestic extremists and those tasked with countering them. For the former, it was a testament to the power, strength, and capabilities of the movements that they represent, especially as a demonstration of their ability to stir up public support for their violent causes and garner sympathy with a wider swath of the population. For the latter, it was a catastrophic failure that was predicated by decades of federal government inaction to meaningfully address the rising tide of domestic terrorism. Both domestic terrorists and counter-terrorists are therefore likely to continue citing the Capitol Siege as a rallying cry. In the years to come, continued efforts by researchers to uncover new information about these aspects of the events of January 6, 2021 are therefore critical to charting the course of the domestic violent extremism landscape in the United States.

Program on Extremism

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