



Into the Abyss: QAnon and the Militia Sphere in the 2020 Election

Gia Kokotakis
March 2023



Program on
Extremism

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America.
© 2023 Program on Extremism at George Washington
University 2000 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20006
<https://www.extremism.gwu.edu>

About the Program on Extremism

The Program on Extremism at The George Washington University provides analysis on issues related to violent and nonviolent extremism. The Program spearheads innovative and thoughtful academic inquiry, producing empirical work that strengthens extremism research as a distinct field of study. The Program aims to develop pragmatic policy solutions that resonate with policymakers, civic leaders, and the general public. 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.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to express gratitude to the Georgetown University Kalorama Fellowship for providing the opportunity to pursue this project and, in doing so, begin answering questions that have such strong personal meaning. The author would also like to thank her mentors, Jacob Ware and Ye Bin Won, for being so generous with their time and for providing invaluable feedback and guidance. Finally, the author is grateful for the team at the Program on Extremism for giving her the opportunity to publish her work and for providing feedback and editing throughout the process.

Table of Contents

Introduction5
 Methodology8
Extremist Theme: Government Corruption.....10
Extremist Theme: Apocalypticism17
Extremist Theme: Defense21
Conclusion27

Introduction

“Those who betray or subvert the Constitution are guilty of sedition and/or treason, are domestic enemies and should and will be punished accordingly... I have sworn to uphold and defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic and I will.”¹

– Oklahoma City Bomber, 1995.

On January 6, 2021, an organized group forcibly breached the United States (U.S.) Capitol – a nearly unprecedented event in American history. However, rather than British soldiers in 1814 or Puerto Rican Nationalists in 1954, the individuals who perpetrated the January 6th Capitol attack were Americans driven by conspiracies of fraud in the 2020 election.

The certification of the 2020 election drew a substantial crowd of far-right extremists, with 13% of individuals arrested for crimes committed at the Capitol on January 6th having ties to militia groups.² Even before the 2020 election, a 2019 report highlighted the increasing popularity of QAnon conspiracy theories among militia members, a trend which only grew more prevalent as the COVID-19 pandemic brought together a collection of extremist actors.³ During and following the 2020 election, militia members incorporated QAnon election fraud conspiracies as a central belief, and these conspiracies served as the main mobilizing factor driving militia members to the Capitol on January 6th. This paper will explore why QAnon 2020 election conspiracies appealed so strongly to QAnon-adhering militia members. It will further examine connections between QAnon 2020 election conspiracies and existing ideological foundations within militias, as well as how the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated and cemented these convergences.

QAnon is a spectrum of conspiracies that has been connected to acts of ideologically motivated violent extremism and has permeated a range of far-right extremist groups. QAnon emerged on 4chan in 2017 within a thread written by a user calling themselves “Q.” The name “Q” references the highest security clearance level in the United States Department of Energy, implying that Q is an anonymous, high-ranking official in the Department of Energy leaking top-secret information.⁴

Since its inception, QAnon has become an umbrella over a large web of loosely-interconnected conspiracy theories, focusing mainly on the “central belief that a cabal of powerful elites control the world, using their power to covertly abuse children.”⁵ QAnon supporters urge members of their

¹ Alpher, David. “U.S. Extremists — and Language like Trump’s — Are More Dangerous than Foreign Ones.” *The Washington Post*. June 2, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/02/u-s-extremists-and-language-like-trumps-are-more-dangerous-than-foreign-ones/>.

² Ismail, Aymann. “We Know Exactly Who the Capitol Rioters Were.” *Slate*. January 4, 2022. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2022/01/january-6-capitol-riot-arrests-research-profile.html>.

³ Kelley, Brendan Joel and Hatewatch Staff. “QAnon Conspiracy Increasingly Popular with Antigovernment Extremists.” Southern Poverty Law Center. April 23, 2019. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2019/04/23/qanon-conspiracy-increasingly-popular-antigovernment-extremists>.

⁴ Amarasingam, Amarnath and Marc-André Argentino. “The QAnon Conspiracy Theory: A Security Threat in the Making?” *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel*, 13, no. 7 (July 2020). <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-qanon-conspiracy-theory-a-security-threat-in-the-making/>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

communities to “do their own research,” harboring and spreading severe distrust in mainstream information sources.⁶ The Combating Terrorism Center has published an analysis of several violent incidents connected to QAnon, demonstrating how the conspiracies have played a significant role in the radicalization of some ideologically motivated violent extremists before the 2020 election.⁷

Before, during, and after the 2020 election, online QAnon communities latched onto conspiracies of a “deep state” interfering in the 2020 election to steal Donald Trump’s election win. In this study of QAnon and the militia-sphere, QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies are defined as conspiracies emerging from QAnon communities claiming a group of actors within the government interfered in the election. These conspiracies include the beliefs that “middle-of-the-night dumps of fake mail-in ballots [swung] red states to blue” and “Republican votes had been changed or thrown out thanks to foreign plots, complex CIA vote-harvesting programs, and the machinations of a truly evil election administrator—the voting-machine company Dominion.”⁸ QAnon’s 2020 election fraud conspiracies took root within far-right communities fiercely loyal to Donald Trump, but other underlying factors within QAnon also appealed more broadly to militias.

Militias have been a consistent far-right presence in the United States for decades. The American Militia Movement, also referred to as the “Patriot” movement, can be ideologically traced back to the founding of the John Birch Society in 1958.⁹ The organization was created to oppose communism and its supposed infiltration into the federal government.¹⁰ The Patriot Movement grew in popularity in the 1990s, following the 1992 Ruby Ridge standoff and the 1993 Waco siege, events interpreted by anti-government extremists as evidence of government overreach.¹¹ Following these standoffs, the federal government passed landmark gun control legislation with the Brady Bill in 1993 and the Federal Assault Weapons Ban in 1994 driving more individuals fearing disarmament into militia membership.¹²

In 1995, Timothy McVeigh committed the deadliest act of homegrown terrorism in American history, detonating a bomb at the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City that killed 168 people, 19 of whom were children. Although not a militia member himself, McVeigh cited pro-militia literature and conspiracies as significant sources of inspiration for his attack.¹³ He demonstrated the potential danger posed by militias: individuals with a craving for violence, severe anti-government sentiment, and susceptibility to conspiracy theories who feel increasingly threatened by events they interpret as government overreach.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Rothschild, Mike. *The Storm Is Upon Us: How QAnon Became a Movement, Cult, and Conspiracy Theory of Everything*. London: Monoray, 2021, 151.

⁹ Southern Poverty Law Center. “Antigovernment Movement.” <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/antigovernment>.

¹⁰ Mallon, Thomas. “A View From the Fringe: The John Birch Society and the rise of the radical right.” *The New Yorker*. January 3, 2016. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/01/11/a-view-from-the-fringe>.

¹¹ Doxsee, Catrina. “Examining Extremism: The Militia Movement,” Center for Strategic & International Studies. August 12, 2021. <https://www.csis.org/blogs/examining-extremism/examining-extremism-militia-movemen.t>.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

Modern militias contrast significantly with the groups from which McVeigh drew inspiration in the 1990s, now coalescing into a “militia-sphere” on social media due to shared conspiratorial beliefs. Militias and other far-right extremist groups increasingly mobilized during 2020, first to protest COVID-19 lockdown mandates, and then to act as counter-protesters against Black Lives Matter demonstrations following the murder of George Floyd. A report by Kyler Ong describes how some members of “previously disparate networks of violent far-right extremists,” including those belonging to anti-government groups, “appear to be coalescing over social media into a ‘militia-sphere’, largely around ‘shared attitudes toward [doubting] the legitimacy of the pandemic, lockdown orders and the role of law enforcement and other government officials.’” Messaging within the militia-sphere “latches onto QAnon conspiracy theories” and has “grown increasingly extreme as the COVID-19 pandemic has progressed, to the point of threatening and enacting violent attacks.”¹⁴ These online convergences also translate to offline collaborative action, as demonstrated when militias cooperated with “alt-lite” groups, such as the Proud Boys,¹⁵ in street fights against antifa during Black Lives Matter protests.¹⁶

Increased violent incidents from both militias and QAnon followers align with a trend of rising far-right extremism across the globe. In the U.S., the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) recorded a growth in hate and militia groups from 674 in 2000 to 1,352 in 2011.¹⁷ Terrorist attacks also increased, with the number of attacks rising from five or less per year between 2007 and 2011 to 31 in 2017.¹⁸ Cynthia Miller-Idriss assesses that growing far-right extremism can be explained by “a reactionary backlash to demographic changes and a rising belief in conspiracy theories” accelerated by “the megaphone of social media, as new online channels for amplifying and circulating ideas have significantly broadened the influence of far-right propaganda and disinformation, forged global connections across groups and movements, and created new ways for extremism to seep into the mainstream.”¹⁹ She cites a rise in violent jihadism and America’s “war on terror” as creating “fertile ground for right-wing extremism” by mainstreaming and justifying xenophobic, white supremacist, and Christian nationalist fears “that the far right had been trying to stoke for decades.”²⁰

In addition to rising levels of far-right extremism, specific intersections have been recorded between extremist groups and other conspiratorial communities, with significant overlap occurring between

¹⁴ Ong, Kyler. “Ideological Convergence in the Extreme Right,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 12, no. 5 (2020): 2-3.

¹⁵ Anti-Defamation League. “The Militia Movement (2020).” October 19, 2020. <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/militia-movement-2020>.

¹⁶ Stall, Hampton, Roudabeh Kishi, and Clionadh Raleigh. “Standing By: Right-Wing Militia Groups & the US Election.” *ACLEd*. October 21, 2020. https://acleddata.com/acleddatanew/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ACLEdMilitiaWatch_StandingByMilitiaGroups_2020Web.pdf.

¹⁷ Potok, Mark. “The Year in Hate and Extremism.” Southern Poverty Law Center, *Intelligence Report*, no. 145 (Spring 2012). <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/issues/2012-spring-year-hate-and-extremism-2011>.

¹⁸ Jones, Seth G. “The Rise of Far-Right Extremism in the United States.” Center for Strategic & International Studies. November 7, 2018. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/rise-far-right-extremism-united-states>.

¹⁹ Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. “From 9/11 to 1/6: The War on Terror Supercharged the Far Right,” *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2021). https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-08-24/war-on-terror-911-jan6?check_logged_in=1&utm_medium=promo_email&utm_source=lo_flows&utm_campaign=registered_user_welcome&utm_term=email_1&utm_content=20220812.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

QAnon and militia groups. In 2019, the SPLC released a report detailing how anti-government extremists “are increasingly subscribing to and propagating the QAnon conspiracy theory, which asserts that pro-Trump forces will soon take down the so-called deep state.”²¹ SPLC argues that QAnon conspiracies “have gained traction among gun-rights, militia and anti-government groups, such as the Three Percenters, as well as supporters of sovereign citizenry, over the past year.”²² Weighing the considerable impact of COVID-19 and the 2020 election on far-right communities in the U.S., as well as how QAnon election conspiracies mobilized militia members to commit acts of violence on January 6th, this literature highlights the need for an updated study of the intersection between QAnon and militias.

Methodology

This study approached the research question of why QAnon’s 2020 election fraud conspiracies appealed to militia members such as Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, and Three Percenters. It hypothesized that the underlying view within the QAnon conspiracy of a corrupt federal government, seemingly “proven” by QAnon’s 2020 election fraud conspiracies, resonated with existing militia ideology.

This project analyzed several hundred court documents and news articles discussing 22 January 6th arrestees.²³ According to a network visualization map released by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, the individuals were recorded as having ties to both militia groups and QAnon.²⁴ Upon further investigation, reasonable doubt arose as to the involvement of 4 of the individuals in any militia group, even though they were recorded by START as affiliated with both QAnon and militias. For this reason, their data was excluded when building conclusions, decreasing the sample size to 18 individuals. It is also important to note that the data set excluded sovereign citizens but included Proud Boys. While some individuals tied to QAnon also expressed beliefs associated with sovereign citizenry, sovereign citizens were excluded from the data set to focus on militias more clearly. Proud Boys, sometimes referred to as an “alt-lite” street fighting group, were grouped with more traditional militia groups like the Three Percenters and the Oath Keepers due to their overlapping ideologies and collaboration leading up to and on January 6th. Although the data set was limited to militia members connected to QAnon rather than all arrested militia members, the findings apply more broadly to the militia-sphere because the ideological foundations making QAnon election fraud conspiracies appealing to QAnon-adhering militia members are also present in militias regardless of their overt connection to QAnon.

The study conducted a qualitative analysis rooted in the grounded theory methodology, an inductive research methodology beginning with a collective of qualitative data that the researcher reviews and

²¹ Kelley and Hatewatch Staff, “QAnon Conspiracy.”

²² Ong, “Ideological Convergence in the Extreme Right.”

²³ In this study, the terms “arrestees” and “arrested individuals” refer to the QAnon-adhering militia members included in the data set.

²⁴ Jensen, Michael, Elizabeth Yates, and Sheehan Kane. “Extremist Group/Movement Affiliations of the J6 Capitol Rioters.” National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism.

https://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/publications/local_attachments/Capitol%20networks%2024x18.pdf.

tags with codes. As data continues to be collected and re-reviewed, codes can be grouped into concepts and then categories forming the basis for a new theory.²⁵ Although this paper does not develop a new theoretical framework, its methodology was inspired by grounded theory because of the flexibility granted to the researcher to move between data collection and analysis.

The project used the grounded theory-inspired software, “Delve,” to insert transcripts from official court documents from the Department of Justice, video clips published by news outlets, news articles, publicly available social media posts, and public interviews with QAnon-adhering militia members arrested for crimes on January 6th. These quotes were then coded within the transcripts based on their reflection of militia ideology, QAnon language and conspiracies, the 2020 election, and other ideas more broadly found within the far-right. This paper will explore three prevailing categories within the data: government corruption, apocalypticism, and defense. Analysis of these categories suggests that QAnon appeals to QAnon-adhering militia members because it aligns with existing foundational militia concepts and conspiracies. Additionally, while the pandemic accelerated QAnon’s appeal to militia members, the 2020 election cemented this trend. This paper assesses that, in the future, QAnon’s growing presence within the militia-sphere will increase convergences between militias and other far-right groups, as well as draw individuals from the mainstream into the militia-sphere.

²⁵ Sharif, Mohmad Yazam and Siti Sayamsul Nurin. “Strategic Thinking Research Using Grounded Theory.” 3rd UUM International Qualitative Research Conference (QRC) 2018. July 10-12, 2018. <https://qualitative-research-conference.com/download/proceedings-2018/161.pdf>.

Extremist Theme: Government Corruption

Adherents of both militia ideology and QAnon frequently cite government corruption as a key mobilizing factor. QAnon election fraud conspiracies that claim a cabal of political figures working against Donald Trump stole the 2020 election aligned with a pre-existing ideological foundation in militias that the federal government, particularly members of the Democratic Party, are inherently corrupt and thus appealed strongly to militia members. Several core conspiracies provided “evidence” supporting individuals’ growing fear of government corruption. While many of the conspiracies have played an integral role in militia ideology for decades, recent COVID-19 pandemic conspiracies accelerated these beliefs in government corruption. QAnon-adhering militia members also cited a belief in widespread government corruption as justification for violence against political figures leading up to and on January 6th.

The frequency of both New World Order (NWO) and deep state conspiracy theories in the dialogue of arrested individuals warrants a discussion of their similarities, differences, and impacts on the lens through which militia members view both the federal and state governments. Originating in the 1990s, the NWO conspiracy theory took hold in militia ideology. The conspiracy describes a cabal of global elites who have infiltrated the U.S. government, working to erode American sovereignty and eventually bring all Americans under a global government by the United Nations (UN).²⁶ Some connected conspiracies claim prominent Jewish families, like the Rothschilds and the Rockefellers, also play a role in controlling the federal government to move the U.S. closer to the NWO. QAnon’s “deep state” envisions a cabal consisting of leading Democrat politicians and celebrity figures who secretly plot against Donald Trump, run a child sex-trafficking ring, and practice Satan-worshipping rituals.²⁷ Although their detailed components contrast significantly, militias’ NWO and QAnon’s deep state conspiracies construct similar ideological lenses through which adherents view the federal government as corrupt. QAnon’s interpretation of the 2020 election as “stolen” aligned with this pre-existing narrative of a nefarious cabal controlling the government.

Some arrested individuals viewed the NWO conspiracy’s globalist cabal as the source of federal government corruption. One arrestee claimed “that there are elements within the US government that are compromised by a larger effort to bring the United States into a less-sovereign state and ultimately part of a One World Government, or what you might call the New World Order or the Great Reset.”²⁸ They warned that “bodies of unelected global elites like the World Economic Forum, the World Health Organization, the United Nations, and many others” have infiltrated and compromised the government to perform “a coordinated insurgency against the United States.”²⁹ Other arrested individuals described QAnon’s deep state as the source of federal government corruption, directing accusations at

²⁶ Flores, Myles. “The New World Order: The Historical Origins of a Dangerous Modern Conspiracy Theory.” Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. May 30, 2022. <https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/academics/centers-initiatives/ctec/ctec-publications/new-world-order-historical-origins-dangerous>.

²⁷ Moskalenko, Sophia and Clark McCauley. “QAnon: Radical Opinion versus Radical Action.” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 15, no. 2 (2021): 142. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007300>.

²⁸ Brown, Jeremy. “BREAKING: FBI Attempts To Recruit Former Green Beret to Infiltrate Oath Keepers, Proudboys, PRE 1/6!” *Banned.Video*. March 5, 2021. <https://banthis.tv/watch?id=6042e0452b9ec530ff1459e2>.

²⁹ *Ibid*.

Democratic political figures rather than outside global actors. One claimed Democratic politicians spent four years attempting “a coup to overthrow” Donald Trump using “the media, the deep state, and paid terrorists Antifa/BLM.”³⁰ These individuals’ sentiments reflect long-standing militia fears of nefarious actors controlling the American government in order to wield its power against the public, expressed either through the NWO conspiracy or QAnon’s deep state conspiracy theories. Arrestees thus shared an ideological foundation of government corruption in that they believed an organized cabal of officials actively plots against the public to claim more power in the U.S.

Arrestees also viewed federal agencies as extensions of government corruption. One individual claimed “the FBI did try to kidnap Gretchen Whitmer”³¹ to better frame far-right militias for violence on January 6th. The same individual believed that a government cabal sends “federal agents... to entrap you into some kind of crime so that they can claim you are a ‘domestic terrorist.’”³² Accusations against federal agencies of plots to frame far-right individuals and militias for domestic terrorism crimes implicate those agencies in the supposed corruption of the federal government, casting them as puppets of a government cabal.

Militia members’ fear of federal government overreach through federal agencies constitutes a core pillar of militia ideology, stemming from the incidents that took place in Ruby Ridge, Idaho in 1992 and Waco, Texas in 1993. Far-right interpretations of the events claim the federal government used lethal force to silence dissenting Americans wanting only to protect their freedoms, making martyrs of the Weaver family and Branch Davidians.³³ It is possible that militia members’ belief in federal agencies’ role in violent events leading up to and after the 2020 election—and thus their connection of federal agencies to a government cabal—is the newest version of a long-standing anti-federal government sentiment within militias.

Adherents to both militia ideology and QAnon also viewed the mainstream media as a tool of the government cabal. One arrestee urged their listeners to “look at the controlling of Fox news right now. We are all being told lies. Look at the controlling of NewsMax as controlled opposition... They’re using disinformation... They’re cutting out key information.”³⁴ The individual connected severe distrust in mainstream media sources to “controlling” by the federal government, implying an organized effort from the government to purposely misinform Americans for nefarious purposes.

The militia community’s distrust of mainstream media sources dates back to the movement’s rise in the 1990s, as seen in 1995 when self-proclaimed Militia of Montana leader John Trochmann made an appearance before the Senate, where he claimed the “twisted, slanted, biased media of America” were

³⁰ Rokos, Brian. “Jurupa Valley man accused of participating in riot inside U.S. Capitol.” *The Press-Enterprise*. February 25, 2021. <https://www.pe.com/2021/02/25/jurupa-valley-man-accused-of-participating-in-riot-inside-u-s-capitol/>.

³¹ Brown, “BREAKING: FBI Attempts To Recruit Former Green Beret.”

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Sneath, Wayne Donovan. “The Conspiratorial Ideology of Right-Wing Extremism in the 1990s: A Cultural Analysis of Ruby Ridge, Waco, and Oklahoma City.” Bowling Green State University. 2000. <http://proxygt-law.wrlc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/conspiratorial-ideology-right-wing-extremism/docview/304586779/se-2>.

³⁴ Brown, “BREAKING: FBI Attempts To Recruit Former Green Beret.”

“bent on destroying what is left of the American way.”³⁵ The rhetoric of QAnon-adhering militia members followed this trend, although they associated media bias with corrupt government influence rather than with “special interest groups.”³⁶ Considering the long history of media distrust in militia ideology, QAnon’s accusation of mainstream media sources’ connection to a government cabal’s plot aligned with pre-existing militia ideology.

Arrested individuals cited antisemitic conspiracy theories as evidence of government corruption. Some believed influential Jewish families use their wealth to control the American federal government and international organizations with cooperation from high-ranking Democratic politicians. Although these conspiracies have been tailored to fit the context of the 2020 election, older versions of strong antisemitic and anti-globalist sentiments can be traced back through militia ideology.

When asked what their message was to Congress on January 6th, one arrestee replied, “That they need to get the corrupt politicians out of office. Pelosi, the Clintons... every single one of them, Biden, Kamala... they have completely destroyed our country and sold them to the Rothschilds and Rockefellers.”³⁷ Militia members have long accused Jewish families like the Rothschilds and Rockefellers of taking part in a conspiracy to overtake the U.S. government with some implicating them in the “globalist” or banking cabal leading the rise of the NWO. Kenneth Stern argues that the conspiracy theories constructing the foundational pillars of militia ideology (such as the NWO conspiracy) are “rooted in the infamous antisemitic forgery *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*,” a prominent antisemitic conspiratorial text published in 1903 that describes Jewish plans for global takeover.³⁸ Accusing the Rockefellers and Rothschilds as the deepest cause of government corruption conveys this antisemitic militia history, resting the blame for U.S. government corruption on the shoulders of Jews and the Democrats who “sell out” to them.³⁹

Militia members also adhering to QAnon viewed communist infiltration as the root of government corruption, reflecting militia communities’ long-standing fears of a communist takeover. One individual described Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, and the Democratic Party as “nothing but a bunch of worthless communists whose sole purpose is nothing but to do away with the Constitution and take all of our freedoms away.”⁴⁰ Another alleged that “Marxists” have taken hold of both the Republican Party and Democratic Party and are “killing our country from the inside.”⁴¹ To QAnon-adhering militia members, communist infiltration through politicians and political parties is an attempt to suppress Americans’ freedoms, and thus is evidence that the government is corrupt.

³⁵ Mulloy, D.J. *American Extremism: History Politics, and the Militia Movement*. London: Routledge, 2005, 84.

³⁶ *Ibid*.

³⁷ United States of America v. Robert Gieswein 1:21-cr-00024-EGS Document 11 (D.D.C. 2021), 11.

³⁸ Mulloy, *American Extremism*.

³⁹ It is important to note that while some militia members believe in the idea of UN implication of the NWO or a global bankers’ conspiracy without holding antisemitic sentiments, specific and consistent blame on families like the Rothschilds and Rockefellers as the lead controlling force of government corruption is an undeniable antisemitic belief. *Ibid*, p. 179.

⁴⁰ United States of America v. Donald Hazard, Lucas Denney 1:21-mj-00686-RMM Document 1-1 (D.D.C. 2021), 14.

⁴¹ Dreisback, Tom. “Capitol riot suspects had more ties to Oath Keepers than previously known.” *NPR*. November 10, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/11/10/1054024084/capitol-riot-suspects-had-more-ties-to-oath-keepers-than-previously-known>.

Similar conspiracy theories grew from heavy anti-communist sentiment in America beginning in 1917 and skyrocketing from 1947-1954, a period typically referred to as the “red scare” or the “McCarthy era.”⁴² In the 1950s and 1960s, a cluster of militant groups emerged, motivated “by the conviction that America has long been under attack by a conspiracy, and fear that the conspiracy has been winning.”⁴³ Included in this early history of the Militia Movement, the John Birch Society and the Minutemen were founded to eradicate supposed communist plots and invasions within the U.S. government.⁴⁴ Thus, anti-communism was a founding concept of American militias, and it remains in the rhetoric of militia members today.

Fear of government infiltration by China demonstrates a more recent development in militia anti-communist dialogue. Some arrestees viewed the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as an invading force that has taken hold within the American government, particularly among Democrats. One arrestee believed the “country has been SOLD to CHINA,” since “China gave us a god damn virus, they stole our elections, [and] bought our politicians.”⁴⁵ Another claimed their goal on January 6th was to “speak to the House and Senate about... infiltration by the Chinese Communist Party of our government.”⁴⁶ Although infiltration of the U.S. government by foreign actors seems to echo the NWO conspiracy, the individuals’ statements more strongly reflect a fear of communism directed at China, a recent target of conservative politicians like Donald Trump. China has also been the center of multiple QAnon conspiracy theories, including those accusing the Chinese government of engineering COVID-19 for use as a bioweapon against Americans. Considering the high rate of convergence between militia ideology and QAnon conspiracies, QAnon pandemic conspiracies targeting China likely increased anti-Chinese rhetoric in militia communities leading up to the 2020 election, as they also increased anti-Asian rhetoric across the country.⁴⁷

Anti-communism in America is far from new, founding an integral element of militia ideology that remains today. Specific accusations of CCP infiltration of the U.S. federal government show a modernized interpretation of long-lasting fears of communism. Strong anti-communist dialogue from QAnon-adhering militia members demonstrates a foundational belief in federal government corruption due to communist infiltration through major political figures and parties.

⁴² J. Foster, Stuart J. “Chapter I: The Red Scare: Origins and Impact,” *Counterpoints* 87 (2000): 2-9.

⁴³ Durham, Martin. *White Rage: The Extreme Right and American Politics*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, 115.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁴⁵ United States of America v. Ryan Nichols 1:21-cr-00117-TFH Document 61 (D.D.C. 2021), 4.

⁴⁶ Nashrulla, Tasneem. “The Daughter Of A Trump Rioter Arrested At The Capitol Says She Is ‘Ashamed and Disgusted.’” *Buzzfeed News*. January 7, 2021. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/tasneemnashrulla/trump-rioter-arrested-daughter-ashamed>.

⁴⁷ Anti-Defamation League. “ADL Report: Anti-Asian Hostility Spikes on Twitter After President Trump’s COVID Diagnosis.” October 9, 2020. <https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/adl-report-anti-asian-hostility-spikes-twitter-after-president-trumps-covid>.

Conspiracies about the COVID-19 pandemic align with previous research on conspirators “mixing and matching ideologies to justify and explain the targets of their animus,”⁴⁸ as pandemic conspiracy theories confirmed pre-existing beliefs in government corruption among arrested QAnon-adhering militia members. Violent extremist organizations, like militias, “absorbed some of the COVID-19 conspiracies promoted by QAnon,”⁴⁹ adapting them to complement their existing conspiracy theories of government corruption. Such processes of conspiratorial exchange and adaptation are explained as a “unitary, closed-off worldview in which beliefs come together in a mutually supportive network known as a monological belief system.”⁵⁰ Individuals compile conspiracy theories to act as “evidence” for one another (even when they seem contradictory), as these conspiratorial webs are held together by an overarching belief in deceptive government officials.⁵¹ Similarly, when militias adopted pandemic conspiracies, they did so in a manner that confirmed their pre-existing beliefs in government corruption.

Individuals with pre-existing beliefs in government corruption, whether it be QAnon’s deep state, the NWO’s globalist cabal, a banking cabal related to the NWO, or communist infiltration, interpreted QAnon conspiracies through this existing ideological lens. One individual spoke at length about an antisemitic conspiracy theory that a banking cabal is working in conjunction with a globalist cabal to bring about the rise of the NWO. The individual stated, “An ultimatum was given via the UN Security Council to the WHO [World Health Organization], the Rockefellers, and Rothschilds to stop their depopulation vaccination campaign.”⁵² Another arrestee who previously expressed their belief in QAnon’s deep state claimed Democrats:

“saw that he [Trump] was just so popular and he’s not going to lose... his reelection because the economy’s so strong and the virus... was meant more to kill the economy than to kill people. It was really hurting his reputation, you know, because he has an ego and a big reputation for being a businessman and all that, and then they just want to blame him.”⁵³

Finally, an individual who blamed Chinese communist infiltration supported by Democrats for the root of government corruption in the U.S. said, “Your country has been SOLD to CHINA... China gave us a god damn virus.”⁵⁴ Individuals thus integrated conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 pandemic to build upon pre-existing conspiratorial beliefs.

The pandemic’s presence in all aspects of American life, including its creation of hardships such as job loss, financial struggles, deaths of friends and family members, and social isolation, may have

⁴⁸ Hoffman, Bruce and Jacob Ware, “The Challenges of Effective Counterterrorism Intelligence in the 2020s.” Lawfare. June 21, 2020. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/challenges-effective-counterterrorism-intelligence-2020s>.

⁴⁹ Argentino, Marc-André. “Extremism Unmasked.” Global Network on Extremism & Technology. June 22, 2021. <https://gnet-research.org/2021/06/22/extremism-unmasked-2/>.

⁵⁰ Wood, Michael J., Karen M. Douglas, and Robbie M. Sutton. “Dead and Alive: Beliefs in Contradictory Conspiracy Theories.” *Social Psychological & Personality Science* 3, no. 6 (2012): 767.

⁵¹ Miller, Joanne M. “Do COVID-19 Conspiracy Theory Beliefs Form a Monological Belief System?” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 2 (2020): 320.

⁵² LaMotta, Antonio “An ultimatum was given via the UN Security Council to the WHO, the Rockefellers, and Rothschilds to stop their depopulation vaccination campaign or their headquarters in Geneva would be vaporized in a flash.” Facebook. June 29, 2021.

⁵³ United States of America v. Daniel Rodriguez 1:21-cr-00246-ABJ Document 38-1 (D.D.C. 2021), 28.

⁵⁴ United States of America v. Ryan Nichols.

contributed to the extent of these conspiracy theories' magnification of beliefs in government corruption. Beginning in March of 2020, militia members were highly mobilized due to pandemic conspiracies' support of government corruption conspiracies. In November 2020, interaction with QAnon election conspiracies served as a breaking point for militia members' escalating animosity toward the "corrupt government," resulting in their direct and violent challenge against it. Therefore, pandemic conspiracies may have accelerated militias' declining tolerance for events they viewed as evidence of government corruption, pushing them more quickly to the violence witnessed on January 6th.

QAnon-adhering militia members used their foundational belief in government corruption to justify violence against politicians. Arrested individuals described intentions to commit acts of violence against mostly Democratic politicians on January 6th, justifying their brutality with election fraud and other government corruption conspiracies.

Arrestees viewed politicians as corrupt traitors for refusing to overturn the 2020 election results, thus the individuals felt justified in carrying out acts of violence against these politicians. Some QAnon-adhering militia members called for politicians who upheld the election results to be tried for treason and executed. Individuals made claims that "there must be long prison terms, while execution is the just punishment for the ringleaders of this coup"⁵⁵ and that "some people at the highest levels need to be made an example of with an execution or two or three" because "tyrants and traitors need to be executed as an example."⁵⁶ Other arrestees turned to street violence to enact justice upon "treasonous" politicians, claiming that if Congress did not "fix this mess and keep America, America" by overturning the 2020 election results, patriots would drag them through the streets "and tie [them] to a f****g [redacted] lamp post."⁵⁷ By seeing politicians who upheld the 2020 election as traitors, QAnon-adhering militia members felt justified in committing severe acts of violence against them.

Militia members have been known to justify violence with conspiracy theories. When they perceive an "existential threat from socialists and globalists believed to be associated with the Democratic Party," militias see violence as an acceptable response.⁵⁸ These perceived threats justify "a broadening milieu of conspiracy theories—all reinforced by recent signals from authority figures, whom militias view as legitimizing or directing their cause."⁵⁹ Thus, when QAnon-adhering militia members perceived an existential threat from the corrupt government following the 2020 election, they justified the use of violence against the politicians they saw as responsible or complicit.

Militia members who also adhere to QAnon described a myriad of conspiracy theories to justify beliefs in government corruption, many of which can be traced back decades through militias' ideological histories. The individuals also incorporated COVID-19 conspiracy theories as evidence supporting their

⁵⁵ United States of America v. Alan Hostetter et al. 1:21-cr-00392-RCL Document 1 (D.C.C. 2021), 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 5-6.

⁵⁷ Balko, Radley. "Meet the police chief turned yoga instructor prodding wealthy suburbanites to civil war." *The Washington Post*. January 27, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/01/27/alan-hostetter-capitol-riot-police-chief-yoga-instructor/>.

⁵⁸ Catrina Doxsee, "Examining Extremism."

⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

other conspiratorial beliefs in government corruption. These pandemic conspiracy theories magnified existing beliefs in government corruption in a way that more quickly convinced the individuals that violent action was not only necessary but justified. QAnon's interpretation of the 2020 election as stolen by a group of nefarious actors relies heavily on the existence of widespread corruption within the federal government, thus appealing to a deep ideological framework within militia communities that predates the election. Combined with a heightened state of mobilization and activity due to the pandemic, QAnon's interpretation of the 2020 election was not only extremely logical to QAnon-adhering militia members, but also a trigger to violent action as seen on January 6th.

Extremist Theme: Apocalypticism

QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies acted as the catalyst that launched militia members' apocalyptic predictions. Militia members claim the country is headed towards an unavoidable "future conflict with the federal government."⁶⁰ These violent, apocalyptic themes arise from the belief of an impending second revolutionary war, civil war, or the arrival of QAnon's Storm. Although at first glance these three predicted events seem quite different, they all describe a similar apocalyptic vision.

Within the broader far-right movement, there is a subculture of apocalypticism founded in books such as *The Turner Diaries* (known to have inspired Timothy McVeigh's act of terrorism) and *The Camp of the Saints*.⁶¹ The works tell stories of impending civil wars and race wars, galvanizing predictions of a future confrontation with the federal government within far-right communities. Although conspiracies about how this confrontation will come about differ between far-right extremist groups, they all fear "some kind of diabolical plot by the dark forces to do in the champions of righteousness and freedom."⁶² After the apocalyptic event, militias aim to reconstruct their ideal society in which "the Capital/Industrial system [is] back to what it 'should be'" and restrictions on liberties like gun ownership are lifted.⁶³

The Order, also known as Brüder Schweigen or the Silent Brotherhood, demonstrates this apocalyptic history within far-right extremism. The white supremacist organization was led by Robert Jay Matthews and operated in the early-to-mid 1980s in the Pacific Northwest.⁶⁴ The Order was responsible for the assassination of Jewish radio host Alan Berg and an armored car robbery amounting to \$3.6 million, among other crimes. The organization focused on the survival of the "Aryan" race, with a plan and ideology loosely based on *The Turner Diaries*. The Order held that the country was headed for a race war, during which revolutionaries would destroy "Jews, 'race mixers,' government agents and other enemies," securing a future rebuilt by the "Aryan race."⁶⁵ Similar apocalyptic themes saturate far-right extremist organizations today, with anti-government groups like militias heavily emphasizing the role of the federal government as the enemy within this predicted future conflict.

Arrested QAnon-adhering militia members describe a second revolutionary war or a second civil war triggered by QAnon's 2020 election fraud conspiracies. Although many had believed in the impending war prior to the election, QAnon election fraud conspiracies served as justification for its launch. Arrestees claimed that if Biden assumed the presidency, "We will have to do a bloody, massively bloody revolution against them [the government]. That's what's going to have to happen."⁶⁶ Other individuals

⁶⁰ Mulloy, D.J. "Liberty or Death: Violence and the Rhetoric of Revolution in the American Militia Movement." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 38, no. 1 (2008): 121.

⁶¹ Allen, Ian. "The Far Right's Apocalyptic Literary Canon." *The New Republic*. October 1, 2019. <https://newrepublic.com/article/155217/far-rights-apocalyptic-literary-canon>.

⁶² Green, Gordon Daniel. "Political Violence in the United States: Apocalyptic Typologies of Left and Right Wing Political Groups and Their Violence through the Period 1990-1997." Masters theses, (Western Michigan University, 1999), 48.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 49.

⁶⁴ Anti-Defamation League. "The Order." <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/order.>; Southern Poverty Law Center. "David Lane." <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/david-lane>.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶⁶ United States of America v. Elmer Stewart Rhodes III et al. 1:22-cr-00015-APM Document 1 (D.C.C. 2021), 13.

viewed the impending conflict as a second civil war, with one stating “we’re definitely going to have a civil war it looks like no matter what the decision [the 2020 election’s winner] made.”⁶⁷ Both individuals believed in an inevitable armed conflict against the federal government triggered and justified by QAnon election conspiracies.

Militia members have long expected a second revolutionary war or a second civil war against a tyrannical government. They consistently embrace violent, revolutionary rhetoric (such as believing they have an obligation to “throw off the tyrants”⁶⁸) and believe in a future conflict with the federal government.⁶⁹ Thus, the arrestees’ assertion that a second revolutionary war or a civil war has begun reflects long-standing apocalyptic trends in militia ideology. QAnon election conspiracies served as the catalyst, “which when put into the larger conspiratorial belief system, reinforces this apocalyptic grand conspiracy.”⁷⁰

The Storm, a QAnon conspiracy, predicts mass arrests of public officials after being exposed by Donald Trump for running a child sex trafficking ring. Some arrested QAnon affiliated militia members viewed QAnon 2020 election conspiracies as launching the Storm, and thus election fraud conspiracies set in motion their pre-existing apocalyptic predictions. This Storm would “clear out the elites and restore the rightful leaders,” wiping out the widespread government corruption militia members and QAnon adherents believe to exist.⁷¹

Leading up to, and on January 6th, arrestees stated “The Storm IS UPON US get ready Patriots”⁷², and “the Storm has arrived.”⁷³ One arrestee claimed that on January 6th, they “thought Trump was going to stay President and they were going to find all this crooked stuff,” since “we were put there to go distract and so somebody can go get Pelosi’s laptop and then get all the intel. And then we could just bust everything and find the truth and it’ll be all exposed and we’ll see that she’s corrupt or some kind of evidence.”⁷⁴ Not only did individuals view January 6th as the beginning of the Storm, but they also viewed themselves and other “patriots” as agents actively assisting with the massive exposure of governmental corruption.

Although not a founding concept in militia ideology, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) cited high rates of ideological convergence between QAnon conspiracies and militia members in 2019. Militias view Q as a person with military intelligence who will “enforce the true law of the land to get rid of the

⁶⁷ United States of America v. Donald Hazard and Lucas Denney, 37.

⁶⁸ Mulloy, “Liberty or Death.”

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 122.

⁷⁰ Green, “Political Violence in the United States.”

⁷¹ Frincu, Ioana. “Into the Q Storm: Uncovering the Narrative of Qanon.” University of Twente, 8, http://essay.utwente.nl/86475/1/Frincu_BA_BMS.pdf.

⁷² Omar, Abdel Jibri. “Rasha Abual-Ragheb biography: 13 things about Donald Trump supporter from Fairfield, New Jersey.” *CONAN Daily*. August 23, 2021. <https://conandaily.com/2021/08/23/rasha-abual-ragheb-biography-13-things-about-donald-trump-supporter-from-fairfield-new-jersey/>.

⁷³ Glover, Scott and Rob Juznia. “The Oath Keeper.” *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2021/06/us/capitol-riot-paths-to-insurrection/donovan-crowl.html>.

⁷⁴ United States of America v. Daniel Rodriguez, 114.

deep state,” culminating in the Storm.⁷⁵ Many arrested individuals appear to have believed in the Storm before the 2020 election. Such ideological connections were likely formed because militia members “insist that it is one of their prime tasks to expose the corruption of the Shadow Government,” and so they see themselves as working to “overthrow the corrupt leaders and restore real democracy.”⁷⁶ QAnon’s Storm thus appealed to the duty held by militia members to expose widespread federal government corruption. QAnon’s interpretation of the 2020 election convinced dual QAnon followers and militia members that the Storm had begun, and the individuals saw their opportunity to assist in exposing the government corruption they had long suspected.

QAnon-adhering militia members fear gun confiscation by the federal government because they believe in an inevitable armed conflict against the government. The individuals view gun control as an attempt to disarm the American public and consolidate power, similar to how they interpret the “fraudulent” 2020 election. They felt the need to keep themselves armed to violently defend against the federal government if and when it becomes tyrannical.

QAnon-adhering militia members argued the government was attempting to disarm its citizens, thus making it impossible for Americans to throw off its future tyrannical rule. One individual posted directly before the Capitol attack, “We aren’t going to back down. We aren’t giving up the 2nd amendment.”⁷⁷ Another discussed gun control in an interview following the Capitol attack, saying, “At a time when violent crime and property crime are skyrocketing faster than inflation and gas prices, your government wants you disarmed... They want to take your guns away... When politicians want to take away your guns, that is exactly when you need your guns, and the founding fathers knew and lived through this.”⁷⁸ Arrested individuals consistently spoke against gun control as a way to protect their ability to fight in a future battle against government overreach.

Militia members’ fear of disarmament by the federal government originated in the 1990s following the passage of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act in 1993 and the Federal Assault Weapons Ban in 1994.⁷⁹ The statements made by the arrested individuals above reflect one prong of the gun confiscation conspiracy in which there are “malevolent actors within the government who want to confiscate firearms because they believe that widespread gun ownership prevents them from seizing more power.”⁸⁰ Specifically, many militia members fear the federal government’s attempt to disarm citizens by pushing gun control legislation (almost exclusively proposed and supported by members of the Democratic Party) makes it easier to “steal” liberties and freedoms from Americans.⁸¹ Militia

⁷⁵ Kelley and Hatewatch Staff, “Qanon Conspiracy Increasingly Popular”

⁷⁶ Crothers, Lane. “The Cultural Foundations of the Modern Militia Movement.” *New Political Science* 24, no. 2 (2002): 228.

⁷⁷ United States of America v. Ryan Nichols.

⁷⁸ Brown, “BREAKING: FBI Attempts To Recruit Former Green Beret”

⁷⁹ Jackson, Sam. “Conspiracy Theories in the Patriot/Militia Movement.” The George Washington Program on Extremism. May 2017.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/downloads/Jackson%2C%20Conspiracy%20Theories%20Final.pdf>.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

members' objection to citizen disarmament by the federal government thus reflects an apocalyptic vision of future armed confrontation against a corrupt, tyrannical federal government.

Arrestees believed in inevitable apocalyptic events such as a second revolutionary war, second civil war, or QAnon's Storm. Although militias' predictions of war are justified using American history and inherently more violent than QAnon's Storm, all three events push actors towards the same goal: inspiring a large-scale revolution against the government. In a second revolutionary war, second civil war, and the Storm, patriots' conflict with the government leads to the exposure and possible execution of "treasonous" politicians because of their corruption and involvement in a cabal, communist infiltration, role in engineering COVID-19, or pedophilia. The patriots can then reconstruct society in their preferred manner, beginning with the reinstallation of Donald Trump as president. All three apocalyptic predictions tell the same story which made QAnon's election fraud conspiracies so appealing, as election conspiracies acted as a catalytic event for all three types of long-anticipated apocalyptic conflicts.

In addition to predicting apocalyptic conflicts, some far-right groups, like the Boogaloo Bois, attempt to accelerate their occurrence. The term "boogaloo" refers to a sequel or second installment in a series, and it has been used in the context of "Civil War 2: Electric Boogaloo," demonstrating a prediction of an impending second civil war in the U.S.⁸² Members actively endorse acts of anti-government violence to provoke this civil war.⁸³ Although no members of the Boogaloo movement are included in this data set, it is important to note that the QAnon-adhering militia members in this project predicted a similar apocalyptic event as Boogaloo Bois, and took violent action to bring it to fruition on January 6th. Even though they are not defined as accelerationist groups, militias do have accelerationist tendencies which should be further examined. Thus, QAnon election conspiracies were particularly alluring to QAnon-adhering militia members because they provoked these accelerationist tendencies rooted in apocalypticism.

⁸² Thompson, Jared. "Examining Extremism: The Boogaloo Movement." Center for Strategic & International Studies. June 30, 2021. <https://www.csis.org/blogs/examining-extremism/examining-extremism-boogaloo-movement>.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Extremist Theme: Defense

QAnon-adhering militia members believed they were defenders of the U.S. from malicious groups who aimed to destroy its true values and leader. They saw themselves as protecting their fellow Americans, even when engaging in acts of violence, as they felt all peaceful alternatives had failed. QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies appealed to these individuals' belief in defense, painting a picture of a nefarious group of actors militia members felt responsible to fight against. QAnon-following militia members crafted their authority to defend by redefining patriotism, and they primarily defended the nation against antifa and for Donald Trump.

Although a debate persists on whether to classify the January 6th arrestees as terrorists,⁸⁴ QAnon-adhering militia members in this data set shared a similar altruistic mindset to terrorists as described in *Inside Terrorism* by Bruce Hoffman and *The Strategic Logic of Terrorism* by Martha Crenshaw. Hoffman establishes that terrorists see themselves in an altruistic light. A terrorist believes “he is serving a ‘good’ cause designed to achieve a greater good for a wider constituency—whether real or imagined—that the terrorist and his organization purport to represent.”⁸⁵ The terrorist refuses to accept the label of “terrorist,” instead claiming that “it is society or the government or the socioeconomic ‘system’ and its laws that are the real ‘terrorists,’ and moreover that if it were not for this oppression, he would not have felt the need to defend either himself or the population he claims to represent.”⁸⁶ Crenshaw asserts that terrorists are logical actors who often “claim they had no choice but terrorism, and it is indeed true that terrorism follows the failure of other methods.”⁸⁷ Similarly, militia members aim “to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States” and expose the corrupt government.⁸⁸ They see themselves as saviors fighting against nefarious actors attempting to corrupt American values and democratic systems, essentially “stealing” the country from its citizens. In the case of the 2020 election and January 6th, QAnon-adhering militia members' belief in their responsibility to defend is rooted in altruism.

Militia members claimed the authority to defend by redefining patriotism to better fit their political aims. QAnon-adhering militia members defined patriotism as individuals willing to commit acts of violence inspired by QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies. In doing so, they constructed a historically grounded narrative used to transfer authority from elected officials to militia members, justifying their interference in political processes and acts of violence on January 6th.

⁸⁴ See Hoffman's and Young's argument in favor of classifying January 6th as an act of terrorism: Hoffman, Bruce. “Domestic Terrorism Strikes U.S. Capitol, and Democracy.” Council on Foreign Relations. January 7, 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/domestic-terrorism-strikes-us-capitol-and-democracy>.; Young, Joe. “Capitol Insurrection, Riot, or Domestic Terrorism?” American University School of International Service. January 2022. <https://www.american.edu/sis/big-world/44-capitol-insurrection-riot-or-domestic-terrorism.cfm>.

⁸⁵ Hoffman, Bruce. *Inside Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017, 39.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 23.

⁸⁷ Crenshaw, Martha. “The Strategic Logic of Terrorism,” in Richard K. Betts (ed.) *Conflict After the Cold War: Arguments on the Causes of War and Peace*. Routledge, 2017: 10.

⁸⁸ Crothers, “The Cultural Foundations of the Modern Militia Movement.”

Arrestees called themselves “patriots” to claim the authority necessary to justify their disruption of the political processes on January 6th. Following the failure of alternative legal methods to overturn the results of the 2020 election, such as the 63 lawsuits filed by the Trump campaign to appeal the election results, QAnon-adhering militia members believed they had exhausted all peaceful approaches to saving the country. Having identified the governments’ and courts’ failures to correct what they saw as extraordinary evidence of government corruption, arrestees took America’s political future out of the hands of politicians and placed it into their own. QAnon-adhering militia members expressed disdain for politicians, stating that America “was not founded by politicians” but “by patriots,” and so “the politicians who got us into this mess will not be the ones who get us out of the mess.”⁸⁹ Another declared that “the patriots are giving you [politicians] a chance to do it correctly. If you don’t, we will do it ourselves.”⁹⁰ QAnon-adhering militia members viewed this as triggering their responsibility to defend, relying on an American patriotic identity and historical legacy. In doing so, they redefined patriotism as the willingness to insert oneself into political processes when motivated by militia ideals (such as belief in conspiracy theories of widespread government corruption, including QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies).

QAnon-adhering militia members also defined patriots in increasingly violent terms to claim the authority to use violence on January 6th. One individual said that if Mike Pence or Congress did not overturn the “stolen” election, “the Patriots will fix it ourselves,” and that “when the Patriots move to fix it, we’re bringing the wrath of God, and there’s not a F*****G [redacted] thing you can do to stop it.”⁹¹ Another called a Trump supporter who did not participate in the January 6th attack a “keyboard warrior” while referring to himself as “a trump [sic] supporter” who “stormed our nation’s capital today.”⁹² The individual then wrote, “Wtf have you done lately??? How about you just sit on your couch, shut your mouth and let Patriots like myself handle our country’s business!!!”⁹³ Arrestees thus narrowed the definition of patriots from those who support militia ideals to those willing to act violently upon them in the context of the 2020 election. By redefining patriotism in this manner, patriots—rather than the military or law enforcement—embody the authority to fix the government’s errors through violent means.

Militia members have long claimed to be patriots, seeing themselves as “fighting for the preservation of the United States Constitution” against an attack by “foreign and domestic forces.”⁹⁴ They call upon American revolutionary history to establish their hyper-American individualism, linking “their existence and actions to the definition of what it means to be an American.”⁹⁵ Thus, “to be with the militia is to be an American,” whereas “to be against the militia is not.”⁹⁶ In fact, Norman Olson of the Michigan Militia stated “that there can be no patriotism if the motivation of a patriot is anything other than altruistic

⁸⁹ Brown, “BREAKING: FBI Attempts To Recruit Former Green Beret.”

⁹⁰ United States of America v. Ryan Nichols.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹² United States of America v. Donald Hazard, Lucas Denney, 35.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Larizza, R.J. “Paranoia, Patriotism, and the Citizen Militia Movement: Constitutional Right or Criminal Conduct?” *Mercer Law Review* 47, no. 2 (March 1996): 598.

https://digitalcommons.law.mercer.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1418&context=jour_mlr.

⁹⁵ Crothers, “The Cultural Foundations of the Modern Militia Movement.”

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

ideals.”⁹⁷ Militia members, therefore, have a history of altruistic self-image through claiming revolutionary heritage, specifically in calling themselves patriots. They use this term to juxtapose themselves with the government and the agencies it controls, rooting militia members’ claim to political authority in a historical, altruistic narrative. QAnon-adhering militia members further narrowed this definition of patriotism after encountering QAnon election fraud conspiracy theories to claim the authority to use violence on January 6th. Rather than simply believing militia conspiracies or supporting their cause, individuals were required to commit acts of violence against the government inspired by QAnon election fraud conspiracies to be considered true patriots, and not just “keyboard warriors.” Thus, by further redefining patriotism, QAnon-adhering militia members assumed the authority necessary to justify violence.

QAnon’s 2020 election conspiracies appealed to QAnon-following militia members’ belief in the responsibility to defend. Their redefining of patriotism on an exclusionary basis of militia ideals and violence allowed them to claim the authority to right the wrongs of the corrupt government, even if through violent means, and thus justified their intervention in political processes like the certification of electoral votes on January 6th.

QAnon-adhering militia members believed they held a duty to defend against antifa, a decentralized movement with the purpose of opposing fascism and other right-wing extremist groups.⁹⁸ Antifa has become a key enemy of far-right groups and politicians, and antifa members have engaged in brawls against the Proud Boys and other far-right supporters.⁹⁹ QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies convinced militia members of their need to fight antifa on January 6th to save the country from destruction. In fighting against antifa, QAnon-following militia members also saw themselves as directly battling the corrupt government.

QAnon-adhering militia members cited a responsibility to defend local communities against antifa as a mobilizing factor on January 6th. One individual expressed the fear that if militias were not present at the Capitol on January 6th when the “stolen” election was overturned, “then antifa and BLM will burn down that city and take over all the neighborhoods.”¹⁰⁰ Other arrestees feared that “even if we get the Prez [Trump] for 4 more years,” they will still “have to get violent to stop this, especially the antifa maggots who are sure to come out en masse.”¹⁰¹ QAnon-following militia members felt called to action by the confrontation that would ensue on January 6th, since they viewed themselves as responsible to defend local communities from destruction by nefarious actors like antifa.

Although militias fought in the streets with antifa before the 2020 election, the way in which QAnon election conspiracies deepened their belief in government corruption magnified existing antagonism toward antifa. Specifically, militia members viewed antifa as an extension of the corrupt politicians

⁹⁷ Larizza, “Paranoia, Patriotism, and the Citizen Militia Movement.”

⁹⁸ Anti-Defamation League. “Who are Antifa?” August 30, 2017. <https://www.adl.org/resources/background/who-are-antifa>.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ United States of America v. Donald Hazard, Lucas Denney, 11.

¹⁰¹ United States of America v. Thomas Caldwell et al 1:21-cr-00028-APM Document 210 (D.C.C. 2021), 11.

responsible for “stealing” the 2020 election. Militia members previously described antifa as violent individuals under the control of “socialist conglomerates in America.”¹⁰² Following the 2020 election, militia members viewed antifa as an army commanded by the corrupt government that was attempting to overthrow American democracy. Arrestees referred to antifa as an “army of thugs” led by “crooked politicians” to “back their malevolent cabal ways.”¹⁰³ They believed prominent Democrats like Joe Biden and Kamala Harris were “rolling with black lives matter and antifa thugs.”¹⁰⁴ Antifa thus operated as the “far enemy” of militias, controlled by the “near enemy” of the corrupt government.¹⁰⁵

Militias, the Proud Boys in particular, have a history of engaging in acts of street violence against antifa and other organizations they perceive as “Marxist.” According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), after the 2016 election of Donald Trump, the militia movement’s primary offline activity shifted from opposition to the federal government to “looking for other perceived enemies, such as antifa.”¹⁰⁶ The Proud Boys were founded in 2016 with a visible focus of “engaging in politically motivated street fighting to purportedly defend Western society from forces the group views as degenerate and threatening Western values,” most often targeting antifa.¹⁰⁷ Although most militia groups have violently engaged with antifa and other “Marxist” organizations or counter-protesters since 2017, these violent interactions skyrocketed during the summer of 2020 due to hostile reactions to Black Lives Matter protests after the killing of George Floyd. Militia members attended protests to protect “businesses or monuments or to be available as backup for law enforcement, but primarily coming out to oppose the protesters” they often viewed as “hired domestic terrorists” and members of antifa.¹⁰⁸

QAnon-subscribing militia members believed they held a responsibility to fight groups like antifa. In the context of the 2020 election, QAnon election conspiracies inspired QAnon-believing militia members to mobilize on January 6th partly to defend the country from antifa because they felt a duty to protect local communities from antifa’s potential destruction, or because they viewed antifa as an extension of the corrupt government. In either case, QAnon election conspiracies created a situation that appealed to QAnon-following militia members’ belief in defending the nation.

QAnon-adhering militia members believed they were defenders Donald Trump’s claim to political power. Rather than just supporters of the former president, these individuals viewed themselves as a military force—whether organized or unorganized—at Trump’s disposal. In defending Trump, they saw themselves as upholding their responsibility to defend the nation from government corruption.

¹⁰² Anti-Defamation League., “The Militia Movement (2020).”

¹⁰³ United States of America v. Daniel Joseph “DJ” Rodriguez 2:21-mj-05270-DUTY Document 3-1 (D.C.C. 2021), 7.

¹⁰⁴ United States of America v. Lucas Denney and Daniel Hazard, 14.

¹⁰⁵ Ware, Jacob. “How Far-Right Terrorists Choose Their Enemies.” *Foreign Policy*. February 9, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/09/far-right-terrorism-extremism-target-selection-jihad-enemy/>.

¹⁰⁶ Anti-Defamation League, “The Militia Movement (2020).”

¹⁰⁷ Kriner, Matthew and Jon Lewis, “Pride & Prejudice: The Violent Evolution of the Proud Boys.” *Combating Terrorism Center* 14, no. 6 (July/August 2021). <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/pride-prejudice-the-violent-evolution-of-the-proud-boys/>.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Arrestees defended Trump because they believed he “must be inaugurated on January 20th” to “finish this historic job of cleaning out the corruption in the cesspool known as Washington, D.C.”¹⁰⁹ They saw the former president as the sole solution to militias’ deeply held belief in government corruption. However, when legal avenues failed to secure Trump’s power, QAnon-following militia members felt they had exhausted all peaceful alternatives. One individual claimed they were “calling for violence” because they had been peaceful, and yet their “voice hasn’t been heard,” their “vote doesn’t count,” and “the Courts won’t hear [them].”¹¹⁰ Thus, QAnon-adhering militia members turned to violent solutions. They acted, either in an organized or leaderless manner, as military support answering only to the former president. One individual asserted that some members would “be inside DC” while others waited “on the outside of D.C. armed, prepared to go in, if the president calls us up.”¹¹¹ By acting as a private military for the former president, QAnon-adhering militia members acted upon their responsibility to protect the nation by defending Trump’s claim to power.

Militia members have been fiercely loyal to Donald Trump since his entrance onto the political scene. Following Trump’s campaign announcement in 2015 and his election in 2016, “ACLEAD and MilitiaWatch have identified a major realignment of militia movements in the US from anti-federal government writ large to mostly supporting one candidate, thereby generally positioning the militia movement with a political party.”¹¹² Although militias have traditionally held an anti-government stance, denouncing “major party candidates for president” on the grounds of being “too tied to the establishment or too liberal,”¹¹³ they have incorporated Donald Trump as a central, heroic figure. As a result, internal militia culture has undergone “further entrenchment of a connection between these groups’ identities and politics under the Trump administration.”¹¹⁴ With his promises to “drain the swamp,” Trump presented a solution to the federal government corruption militias had long believed.

Trump’s assistance in crafting and magnifying the narrative of a stolen election played a role in QAnon election fraud conspiracies’ appeal to QAnon-adhering militia members. Trump primed far-right audiences with conspiracies of voting fraud prior to the election, aligning with militia ideology by framing leftist politicians as a danger to democracy. On August 17th, he made the statement at a rally in Wisconsin, “The only way we’re going to lose this election is if the election is rigged,” and on September 13th, Trump claimed, “The Democrats are trying to rig this election because that’s the only way they’re going to win.”¹¹⁵ Following the election, Trump repeatedly tweeted support of the QAnon conspiracy claiming that Dominion Voting Systems switched votes from Trump to Biden.¹¹⁶ He also appealed to

¹⁰⁹ United States of America v. Alan Hostetter.

¹¹⁰ United States of America v. Ryan Nichols, 19.

¹¹¹ Dreisbach, Tom. “Capitol riot suspects had more ties to Oath Keepers than previously known.” *NPR*. November 10, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/11/10/1054024084/capitol-riot-suspects-had-more-ties-to-oath-keepers-than-previously-known>.

¹¹² Stall, Kishi, and Raleigh, “Standing By.”

¹¹³ Anti-Defamation League, “The Militia Movement (2020).”

¹¹⁴ Stall, Kishi, and Raleigh, “Standing By.”

¹¹⁵ Niedzwiadek, Nick. “The 9 most notable comments Trump has made about accepting the election results.” *Politico*. September 24, 2020. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/24/trump-casts-doubt-2020-election-integrity-421280>.

¹¹⁶ Greenspan, Rachel E. “Trump shared a video that featured a former administrator of QAnon’s fringe message board spreading disinformation.” *Insider*. November 19, 2020. <https://www.insider.com/trump-tweets-video-voter-fraud-dominion-former-qanon-message-board-2020-11>.

militia members through his high-stakes, violent rhetoric once all legal avenues had been exhausted. Trump threatened that if “you don’t fight like hell, you’re not going to have a country anymore.”¹¹⁷ The former president, therefore, appealed to militia members’ belief in defense by calling upon them to fight for their country against corrupt Democrats who had stolen the election, citing QAnon election fraud conspiracies to support his claims. He pushed QAnon-adhering militia members to recognize that peaceful alternatives had failed, relying on their acceptance of violence as a justified last resort.

QAnon 2020 election conspiracies appealed to QAnon-adhering militia members’ defense of Donald Trump. Arrestees saw themselves as military forces at the disposal of President Trump, protecting his claim to power to preserve the only person they trusted to wipe out corruption within the federal government. Trump’s bolstering of QAnon election conspiracies, in addition to his violent rhetoric and elevation of stakes, pushed these individuals to accept that peaceful avenues had failed, leading them to justify violence as a logical alternative.

QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies appealed to QAnon-adhering militia members’ belief in their role as defenders of the nation. The conspiracies triggered these individuals’ sense of responsibility to protect the nation, whether because they saw themselves as patriots, lone defenders against antifa, or defenders of Donald Trump’s claim to political power. Thus, when encountering QAnon conspiracies that relied upon their inclination to protect the country against perceived hostiles, QAnon-adhering militia members’ belief in their responsibility to defend served as an effective mobilizing factor.

¹¹⁷ Naylor, Brian. “Read Trump’s Jan. 6 Speech, A Key Part of Impeachment Trial.” *NPR*. February 10, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/02/10/966396848/read-trumps-jan-6-speech-a-key-part-of-impeachment-trial>.

Conclusion

This study asked the question of why QAnon's interpretation of the 2020 election appealed to militia members, specifically Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, and Three Percenters. The data confirmed the hypothesis that QAnon election fraud conspiracies aligned with existing conspiracies of government corruption in militia ideology. In addition to confirming this hypothesis, the study also found that QAnon election fraud conspiracies acted as a catalyst for apocalyptic predictions and a responsibility to defend, both of which are integral pieces of militia ideology. Even though the data set included only arrestees with recorded overlap between QAnon and militias, the underlying factors in QAnon election fraud conspiracies that appealed to QAnon-adhering militia members are core elements of militia ideology could make these findings generalizable to the entire militia-sphere.

Although militia members cite multiple reasons for government corruption, each individual nonetheless perceives the government and its agencies through the same ideological lens. QAnon-adhering militia members believed in government corruption before the 2020 election, and they interpreted the pandemic through this lens. They blamed the group causing the government's corruption (whether it be a globalist cabal trying to establish a One World Government, the deep state working to undermine Donald Trump, or communist infiltrators trying to overtake American democracy) as responsible for engineering and weaponizing COVID-19 against Americans. Militia members interpreted government-mandated lockdowns, mask mandates, and vaccination requirements as evidence of a tyrannical government working to oppress the American people, effectively demonstrating the government's corruption. The government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic thus accelerated militia members' perceived threat from the government, and as a result, lowered their threshold to mobilization.

Following the 2020 election, QAnon conspiracies of election fraud cemented QAnon-following militia members' belief in government corruption. Election fraud conspiracies appealed to the same founding ideas within conspiracy theories held by militia members in which a nefarious group of actors, mainly composed of Democratic politicians, works against the American people from within the U.S. government. QAnon election conspiracies constructed a similar narrative in which the deep state meddled in the voting process (whether through switching votes in Dominion voting systems, giving voters in swing states pens that made ballots unreadable, or the creation of ballots lacking Trump's secret watermark)¹¹⁸ to take control of the government and country. QAnon's 2020 election fraud conspiracies acted as evidence confirming the longer-term beliefs of militia members, cementing their view of the government as corrupt.

Militia members also interpreted QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies as the catalyst for apocalyptic predictions. Militias have historically believed the country is destined for an inevitable conflict against the government, whether it be a second revolutionary war or civil war. For example, Timothy McVeigh

¹¹⁸ Link, Devon. "Fact check: False QAnon-related conspiracy theory claims Arizona ballots are secretly watermarked." *USA Today*. April 28, 2021. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2021/04/28/fact-check-qanon-watermarked-ballot-conspiracy-theory-still-false/7388639002/>; Greenspan, "Trump shared a video."; Nguyen, Tina and Mark Scott. "How 'SharpieGate' went from online chatter to Trumpworld strategy in Arizona." *Politico*. November 5, 2020. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/05/sharpie-ballots-trump-strategy-arizona-434372>.

hoped “his bombing of the Murrah building would be the first shot in a violent, bloody revolution in this country.”¹¹⁹ With the rise of QAnon, some militia members came to see the Storm as an inevitable, apocalyptic event. Apocalyptic beliefs of future conflict against the federal government also partly inspire militia members’ fears of disarmament by the federal government, resulting in their opposition to gun control legislation. QAnon-adhering militia members interpreted QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies as a catalyst for their apocalyptic vision, whether it be a second revolutionary war, second civil war, or the Storm. Many militia members saw January 6th as the official beginning of their predicted apocalyptic event, using its launch to justify acts of violence at the Capitol.

Finally, QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies appealed to QAnon-adhering militia members’ belief in defense. By defending against antifa, militia members saw themselves as both protecting local communities from destruction, and as fighting a military-style group controlled by, or allied with, the corrupt government. Similarly, militia members viewed Donald Trump as the sole political figure capable of wiping out government corruption, and so by defending his claim to political power, militias viewed themselves as protecting the country from being overrun by corruption. Militia members upheld their authority to defend by labeling themselves “patriots,” calling upon a revolutionary heritage to justify their involvement in political processes and violence. By intensifying a narrative in which nefarious actors were taking control of the U.S. government, QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies triggered QAnon-following militias members’ inherent belief in their responsibility as patriots to defend the nation.

Since the elements making QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies appealing to QAnon-adhering militia members were rooted in core militia ideological concepts (government corruption, apocalypticism, and defense) and considering how deeply these election conspiracies have taken root within militias, QAnon will continue to grow in popularity within the militia-sphere. As a result, QAnon’s increased presence among militias will cause accelerated internal and external convergences. The new “fourth wave” of the Militia Movement should therefore be understood in the context of QAnon’s presence in militias, as QAnon has contributed to major shifts within the militia-sphere leading up to and following the 2020 election.

Internally, QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies will continue to unite militant far-right groups. Election conspiracies have pulled organizations like the Proud Boys, who consistently tried to separate themselves from far-right extremist organizations, into collaboration with more traditional-style militias, like the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters. Although these convergences began in the summer of 2020 with militias and the Proud Boys working together as counter protesters during demonstrations following George Floyd’s murder, they accelerated after the 2020 election. Collaboration between militias and other militia-adjacent groups is likely to continue because their heavy emphasis on election fraud conspiracies causes them to collectively view the Biden Administration as both illegitimate and a severe threat to their liberties.¹²⁰ In addition to drawing alt-lite groups further into the Militia Movement,

¹¹⁹ Serrano, Richard A. *One of Ours: Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City Bombing*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998, 277.

¹²⁰ Argentino, Marc-André et al. “Far From Gone: The Evolution of Extremism in the First 100 Days of the Biden Administration.” International Centre for the Study of Radicalization. April 30, 2021. <https://icsr.info/wp->

QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies have increased the influence of more extreme groups, like the Boogaloo Bois, in the militia-sphere. The Boogaloo movement, although disjointed in its support of Donald Trump and less active in the Capitol attack, nonetheless is predicted to “appeal to wider audiences” following the violent precedent set on January 6th. Their noticeably increased influence within the militia-sphere may represent growth within militias of “a faction that is particularly receptive to opportunities to conduct violent actions under the umbrella philosophy of accelerationism.”¹²¹ QAnon’s further growth within the militia-sphere will therefore cause it to expand in numbers and grow more inclined to violent offline action.

Externally, the heightened presence of QAnon within militias due to their incorporation of QAnon 2020 election fraud conspiracies may increase convergences with individuals in the mainstream. Following the seeming disappearance of Q from 8kun (an “anonymous message board known for propelling white-supremacist and extremist content” formerly known as 8chan)¹²² in December of 2020, some QAnon adherents “have looked for a better cause or something more goal-oriented which they can attach their conspiratorial mindset to.”¹²³ Militias’ integration of QAnon conspiracies combined with their organized and violent nature has bred hybrid groups such as “QAnon Proud Boys, QAnon Oath Keepers, QAnon III%,” and others, demonstrating a fusion of each of these movements with QAnon that may prove more appealing to individuals in the political mainstream.¹²⁴ The de-platforming of QAnon from mainstream social media has propelled many adherents to alternative platforms, like Telegram, where individuals may be viewed as a “large pool of new potential recruits” by extremist organizations.¹²⁵ Thus, QAnon’s predicted growth in the militia-sphere not only draws more individuals from mainstream conspiracies into the militia-sphere, but also may expose them to other far-right groups, like white supremacists and neo-Nazis.

Scholars have acknowledged increased hostility from militias as possible evidence of a “fourth wave” within the Militia Movement, marked by “increased fears of citizens’ freedoms diminishing and severe opposition to President Biden.”¹²⁶ Militias have therefore become more inclined to violence as they feel increasingly threatened, and their ideological merge with QAnon has enhanced the possibility of increasing their numbers. This study proposes that, in addition to growth in size and inclination for violence, this “fourth wave” of the militia-sphere can be defined by the ideological integration of QAnon into the heart of militia ideology. Even though not all militia members believe the full extent of QAnon’s conspiracies, the way in which QAnon’s 2020 election conspiracies united the militia-sphere will likely cement its place as an ideological foundation within militia communities. QAnon conspiracies will likely continue to act as a mobilizer to violence and acts of extremism among militia members.

content/uploads/2021/04/ICSR-Report-Far-From-Gone-The-Evolution-of-Extremism-in-the-First-100-Days-of-the-Biden-Administration.pdf.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p. 24.

¹²² Siegel, Rachel. “8chan is Back Online, This Time as 8kun.” *The Washington Post*. November 4, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/11/04/chan-is-back-online-this-time-kun/>.

¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 53.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 51.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. i.

Though aligning with, and expanding upon, trends found in existing research, this study was limited in the size of its data set, interaction with individuals studied, and time. Although QAnon election fraud conspiracies served as the principal motivation of individuals on January 6th, due to time constraints, the data set was limited to 18 arrestees recorded by START as being connected to both a militia and QAnon. For safety reasons, the researcher did not interact directly with these individuals, and instead drew upon quotes from publicly available court documents published by the Department of Justice, publicly available social media posts, news articles, and interviews. Further research should be done over an extended period with an expanded data set that incorporates arrested militia members not explicitly linked with QAnon. This study should aim to interact directly with individuals in the sample for deeper ideological analysis.

QAnon's integration into the militia-sphere has raised the threat of violence going into the 2024 presidential election. Following the FBI's search and seizure of classified documents from Trump's Mar-a-Lago home in Florida on August 8th, 2022, incidents of online violent extremist rhetoric have soared.¹²⁷ Offline acts of extremism have also increased. On August 11th, 2022, Ricky Shiffer, a Navy veteran under investigation for connection to militias, and who may have been at the Capitol on January 6th, attempted to breach the FBI field office in Cincinnati armed with an AR-15 and a nail gun. Although Shiffer is not included in my data set, his rhetoric preceding the attempted attack shows another individual mobilized to violence by QAnon 2020 election conspiracies. With another presidential election on the horizon, election conspiracies flourishing in mainstream politics, and the increasingly violent chatter within the militia-sphere, the U.S. is a powder keg. We must not provide it with a spark.

¹²⁷ Rosen, Jacob and Nicole Sganga. "Online violent extremist rhetoric soars after Mar-a-Lago search." *CBS News*. August 12, 2022. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/online-violent-extremist-rhetoric-soars-after-mar-a-lago-search/>.



Program on
Extremism