



# **The Women of January 6th: A Gendered Analysis of the 21st Century American Far-Right**

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**Program on Extremism**

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## About the Program on Extremism

The Program on Extremism at 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.

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## Executive Summary

This report contextualizes women's participation in the events of the January 6th Capitol Hill Siege within the broader history of women's participation in American far-right extremism. This report underscores that women have played, and continue to play, active and important roles in American far-right extremist groups. In this movement, women are often incorporated in complementary, rather than egalitarian, roles. Because they are rarely on the 'frontlines' of far-right extremist groups' activities, women's contributions have often been marginalized or underplayed. However, women's participation in support roles and their place in right-wing extremist propaganda have been important contributions to extremist groups' activities and capabilities. In examining women's participation in the events of January 6th, this report probes how far-right extremist movements in the United States operationalize gender norms and identifies aspects of commonality and difference between groups.

The report's key findings are as follows:

- As of March 15, 2022, 102 women have been arrested for crimes related to the January 6th Capitol Siege. Women represent 13% of the total 766 federal cases and were on average older than their male counterparts at 44 years of age, coming from 28 US States.
- 33 women faced felony charges; 69 women were charged with misdemeanors.
- The Department of Justice has secured 41 convictions against women, all through guilty pleas, as of March 15, 2022. This includes 1 felony and 40 misdemeanors.
  - 24 of these convictions against women have been sentenced.
  - Only 7 women, all for misdemeanor charges, have been sentenced to jail time.
  - To date, jail sentences between men and women are relatively compatible. Women were on average sentenced to 45.5 days in jail, and men were sentenced on average to 48.8 days in jail.
- 82% of the cases brought against women included information connected to social media. Social media and the online environment has given women new on-ramps and ways of acting as spokespeople for far-right movements, often making their messaging appear more palatable to mainstream audiences.

- Nearly 1 in 10 women in the dataset are alleged to have engaged in or conspired with others to carry out violence on January 6th. This may highlight one of the key fissures in the far-right on how to incorporate women. While some groups have included women in front-facing positions, many argue against placing women on equal footing with men and instead suggest that women should play subordinate, but complementary roles. Women's actions on January 6th have represented a break from the norm among right-wing extremists.
- This report explores the gendered nature of defenses used by women accused of crimes related to the Capitol Siege and how this plays into our understanding of far-right ideologies. Gendered frames have been leveraged by women as they navigate the judicial system. In some cases the defense has articulated narratives emphasizing their client's naivety, vulnerability, and traditionally feminine roles. The effect of these appeals can be to depoliticize women's activities in support of far-right movements.
- Finally, this report emphasizes that a gendered analysis is necessary in order to have a holistic understanding of the events of the January 6th Capitol Siege and women's participation in far-right extremism in the United States.

## Introduction

As rioters were seen entering the US Capitol through a broken window on the building's west side, videos posted to the internet showed women alongside male counterparts pushing their way into the halls of democracy. Throughout the events of that day, several vocal women expressed explicit anger and distrust with the results of the election and seemingly endorsed overt violence against sitting members of Congress.<sup>1</sup> Other women reportedly encouraged the men present to demonstrate their masculinity by engaging in violence, leveraging traditional gender expectations towards violent ends.<sup>2</sup> Still, others are charged with taking part in the violence themselves.<sup>3</sup> As more information about the events of the January 6th Capitol Siege have come to light, it has become clear that women played active roles in the day's events.

While investigations are still ongoing, at the one-year mark of January 6th, women made up 13% of the individuals charged for their alleged involvement in the Capitol Siege. Despite this small share, it is vital not to underestimate their participation in the events of that day and their continued support and belief in the range of far-right ideologies that led to these riots. Despite oft-repeated narratives about women's inherent peacefulness and capacity for nurturing, as research has shown, women's

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<sup>1</sup> Kornfield, Meryl. 2021. "Woman charged in Capitol riot said she wanted to shoot Pelosi 'in the friggin brain,' FBI says." *The Washington Post*, January 29, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/01/29/dawn-bancroft-capitol-riot-pennsylvania-pelosi/>. ; Pulver, Dinah et al. 2021. "Capitol riot arrests: See who's been charged across the U.S." *USA Today News*, January 15, 2021. <https://www.usatoday.com/storytelling/capitol-riot-mob-arrests/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Statement of Facts." 2021. United States of America v. Gina Bisignano. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. January 16, 2021 - <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Gina%20Bisignano%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Ruben, Olivia and Will Steakin. 2021. "'We did our part': The overlooked role women played in the Capitol riot." *ABC News*, April 8, 2021. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/part-overlooked-role-women-played-capitol-riot/story?id=76924779>.



participation provides logistical support, lends reputation to a cause, and facilitates recruitment within the far-right.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the pervasiveness of such gendered assumptions about women can make it more difficult to hold women accountable for their participation in political violence, especially when women's roles in these organizations reflect or reinforce traditional gender roles. This is often the case in far-right extremism. However, more recently, women have taken on greater public-facing roles in far-right extremism, often challenging or buttressing up against traditional gender roles historically promoted by these movements.<sup>5</sup>

The events of the January 6th Capitol Siege highlight many of these new public-facing roles and the consequences of these actions. In fact, during the events of the Capitol Siege, Ashli Babbitt, a 14-year veteran of the US military and QAnon adherent, was shot by a Capitol Police officer as she tried to crawl through a broken window, bolstered by male demonstrators.<sup>6</sup> In the months since January 6th, Babbitt has been portrayed by far-right extremists as a Vicki Weaver-esque martyr<sup>7</sup> - a visceral

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<sup>4</sup> Blee, Kathleen M. 2017. "Similarities/Differences in Gender and Far- Right Politics in Europe and the USA." in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan.; Blee, Kathleen M. 2008. *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*. University of California Press.; Bacchetta, Paola, and Margaret Power. 2013. *Right-Wing Women: From conservatives to extremists around the world*. Routledge.; Eager, Paige Whaley. 2016. *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists: women and political violence*. Routledge.; Goodwin, Matthew. 2013. "The Roots of Extremism: The English Defence League and the Counter-Jihad Challenge." Chatham House.; Kottig, Michaela, Renate Bitzan, and Andrea Peto, eds. 2017. *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan.; Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. 2018. *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.; Miller-Idriss, Cynthia, and Hilary Pilkington. 2020. *Gender and the Radical and Extreme Right: Mechanisms of Transmission and the Role of Educational Interventions*. Abingdon: Routledge.; Pilkington, Hilary. 2017. "'EDL angels stand beside their men...not behind them': the politics of gender and sexuality in an anti-Islam(ist) movement." *Gender and Education* 29 (2): 238-257.

<sup>5</sup> Ebner, Julia, and Jacob Davey. 2019. "How Women Advance the Internationalization of the Far-Right." in *Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender, & Violent Extremism*, Program on Extremism at The George Washington University.

<sup>6</sup> Barry, Ellen, Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, and Dave Phillips. 2021. "Woman Killed in Capitol Embraced Trump and QAnon." *The New York Times*, January 7, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/08/us/who-was-ashli-babbitt.html>.; Healy, Jack. 2021. "These Are the 5 People Who Died in the Capitol Riot." *The New York Times*, January 11, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Vicki Weaver was killed at the Ruby Ridge shootout. Wilson, Jason. 2017. "Ruby Ridge, 1992. The day the American militia movement was born." *The Guardian*, August 26, 2017.

demonstration of the so-called threat that the supposed state overreach presents.<sup>8</sup> There is also the case of Anna Morgan-Lloyd, a 49-year-old woman from Indiana, who was the first person sentenced for their activities on January 6th, and who was given 120 hours of community service and fined \$500.<sup>9</sup>

While many aspects of the events of January 6th represent uncharted territory for modern American politics, the available evidence suggests that women's participation in the Capitol Siege resembles, in many ways, how women have participated in far-right extremism throughout modern American history. In short, women's participation on January 6th should not surprise researchers and policymakers, in scale or form. Both the history of far-right mobilization in the United States and the study of political violence underline that women's participation in the Capitol Siege is not exceptional.

This report explores women's involvement in the events of January 6th and compares the pattern of women's activities and sentencing to their male counterparts. Moreover, this report contextualizes the role of women in the Capitol Siege within the broader history of women's participation in far-right extremism in 21st Century America.

To do so, this report proceeds in five parts. Part I explores the use, and importance, of a gendered lens. Part II provides a brief background on the history of women and far-right extremism in the United States in the 21st Century. It is essential to acknowledge that this is not a complete history of women in the American far-right but rather is a brief overview of the dynamics of their participation in modern right-wing extremist groups. Next, Part III delves into the event itself, using the 766 cases brought against individuals for participating in the Capitol Siege between January 6, 2021,

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<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/26/ruby-ridge-1992-modern-american-militia-charlottesville>.

<sup>8</sup> Simultaneously, Babbitt's death has been called a false flag operation by some in the far-right, who claim she is still alive, highlighting the lack of trust in institutions, and prevalence of disinformation. For example, see: Schwartzman, Paul and Josh Dawsey. 2021. "How Ashli Babbitt went from Capitol rioter to Trump-embraced 'martyr'." *The Washington Post*, July 30, 2021.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/07/30/ashli-babbitt-trump-capitol-martyr/>; Palmer, Ewan. 2021. "QAnon Supporters Think Capitol Shooting Victim Ashli Babbitt is Still Alive." *Newsweek*, January 8, 2021. <https://www.newsweek.com/qanon-ashli-babbitt-alive-conspiracy-lin-wood-1559989>.

<sup>9</sup> Melendez, Pilar. 2021. "Capitol Rioters Are Breathing a Sigh of Relief After Slap on Wrist for Grandma." *The Daily Beast*, June 23, 2021. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/capitol-rioter-anna-morgan-lloyd-sentenced-and-rioters-are-breathing-a-sigh-of-relief>.

and March 15, 2022. The report explores these cases, highlighting women's participation through four categories: militant networks, spontaneous clusters, organized clusters, and inspired believers. Part IV, using a gendered lens, presents initial findings from the aftermath of the events, exploring the gendered defenses used by women. Finally, Part V demonstrates the critical policy implications and conclusions.

## Part I: Gendered Lens

Taking a gendered lens to violent extremism is essential for understanding the ways in which these groups and movements recruit, fundraise, and operate. ‘Taking a gender lens’ means considering the gendered norms, appeals, and division of labor in violent extremist movements. Critically, this approach means considering the roles of both men and women within these movements and the manner in which organizations justify their participation in those positions. In examining women’s participation, this report probes how groups within the far-right extremist ecosystem in the United States operationalize gender norms and identifies aspects of commonality and difference both over time and between groups.

In the past, there has been a reticence to apply a gendered lens to domestic and far-right extremism in the United States. For example, when examining the history of the KKK, historians often emphasized men’s public-facing violent roles. However, when applying a gendered lens, Kathleen Blee found that women’s activities as part of the “poison squads,” spreading rumors and organizing consumer boycotts, “complemented those of Klansmen, making the Klan’s influence both more extensive and more deadly than the actions of Klansmen alone would suggest.”<sup>10</sup>

Considering the gendered dynamics of women’s participation in far-right extremism furthers efforts to examine how patriarchal ideologies underpin violence around the world. As Megan Stack astutely observed:

“In the United States, fathers dress up their daughters in white and slip purity rings on their fingers, staking a claim on their hymens. A big brother is expected to frighten his sister’s date, to establish himself as a kind of psychological guard dog in the middle of her sexual awakening. We admit no connection, none at all, between these practices and the guardianship laws and honor killings we fetishize overseas, even though they are various fruit of the same tree: the internationally ubiquitous notion that a woman’s body belongs to the men of her family, that she herself is a valuable that must be protected.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Blee, Kathleen M. 2008. *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Stack, Megan. 2021. “The Inconsistency of American Feminism in the Muslim World.” *The New Yorker*, October 7, 2021. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-inconsistency-of-american-feminism-in-the-muslim-world>

Far-right extremism in the United States has tapped into misogyny, encouraging (generally white men to demonstrate their masculinity by engaging in violent confrontations with those institutions, movements, and people that would dislodge them from their position in the social, political, and economic hierarchy.

Women's work to support violent extremist groups is vital to understanding how these groups operate. Even if women constitute a minority of members or fill less public-facing roles than men, their efforts should not be underestimated or ignored, as research has shown they are essential to violent extremists' ideological, practical, and recruitment efforts. For example, a 2003 report noted that "women now make up 25 percent of right-wing groups in the United States and as much as 50 percent of new recruits, and these young women want a greater role in their organizations, including leadership, than their predecessors have demanded."<sup>12</sup> Ignoring women's contributions will thus provide an incomplete understanding of far-right extremist groups' activities.

This report underscores that women have often served to soften and mainstream the image of far-right extremist groups in the United States. They have done so by leveraging their identities as mothers, daughters, and citizens in need of protection (or acting as protectors themselves, particularly of their children) to galvanize support for far-right groups and objectives. It would be a mistake to overlook women's agency when they invoke gender norms and their gender identity to mobilize support for a specific political agenda. While it may be easier to identify radical gender politics when they challenge traditional gender norms (as subsequent waves of feminist activism have done), embracing and performing traditional gender norms is also a political act. As feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe stated in an interview, "[t]aking women seriously is hard to do because it means you have to listen to women whom most people don't think of as experts or don't think of as politically aware, including women who seem to be very domestically confined."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cunningham, Karla J. 2003. "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26 (3): p 177.

<sup>13</sup> Hook, Stephanie Van. 2012. "How militarism manipulates the lives of women - an interview with feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe. *Waging Nonviolence*, September 13, 2012. <https://wagingnonviolence.org/2012/09/taking-womens-lives-seriously-an-interview-with-cynthia-enloe/>

A gendered lens is vital for understanding gender role expectations (of femininity and masculinity that play into the radicalization process of both men and women, an individual's role once they have entered these groups, as well as their exits from these movements.

Furthermore, examining women's participation in far-right extremism in the United States also illuminates the ways that women act to uphold patriarchal systems, buying into the protection racket offered by patriarchal systems, or to obtain more influence within these structures.<sup>14</sup> As this report will show, women can leverage their vulnerability, compelling men to fulfill their role as protectors to defend them from perceived threats, yet the very agency that women exhibit in making these demands for protection can lead to friction between far-right leaders and their female members.

The persistent underestimation of women's roles in far-right extremism is not a function of an absence of women from these groups and movements. Instead, it reflects a systematic unwillingness to consider how women's political interests and activities can contain contradictions and defy the widespread perception of women as inherently peaceful or altruistic. Indeed, women in armed groups have exploited the blindspots created by this perception of women to both engage in more effective operations for extremist groups and to skirt accountability for their contributions.<sup>15</sup>

The January 6th Capitol Siege was a snapshot of modern far-right extremism; through this cataclysmic event, the gender dynamics of the movement become evident. Prior to delving into the groups and gender dynamics of the Capitol Siege participations, this report briefly reviews the history of far-right extremism in the United States, paying particular attention to the roles that women played and the gender norms that such participation reflected.

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<sup>14</sup> Sjoberg, Laura and Jessica Peet. 2011. "A(nother) dark side of the protection racket." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13 (2): 163-182.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander, Audrey, and Rebecca Turkington. 2018. "Treatment of terrorists: How does gender affect justice?." *CTC Sentinel* 11(8): 24-29.; Stefija, Izabela, and Jessica Trisko Darden. *Women as war criminals: gender, agency, and justice*. Stanford University Press, 2020.; Thomas, Jakana L. 2021. "Wolves in sheep's clothing: assessing the effect of gender norms on the lethality of female suicide terrorism." *International organization* 75(3): 769-802.

## Part II: History of Women's Participation in Far-Right Extremism in the United States

Modern far-right extremism in the United States is not a homogenous movement; it is composed of a range of different groups (themselves varying in structure and composition) with significant ideological differences. Today, within the far-right, there are relatively new movements like QAnon as well as long-standing organized racist groups like the Ku Klux Klan. There are also militia movements like the Oath Keepers, and more diffuse associations such as the Three-Percenter, anti-immigration activists, and misogynistic involuntary celibates (or “incels”).<sup>16</sup>

It is, of course, beyond the scope of this report to provide a detailed analysis of the gendered aspects of women's participation in each and every American far-right group. Rather, this report provides a brief history of women's involvement in far-right extremism in the late 20th and 21st Century. This brief historical review underscores that women's participation in the January 6th Capitol Siege is merely the latest entry in a long history of women's contributions to such movements in American history.

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<sup>16</sup> Blee, Kathleen M. 2017. “Similarities/Differences in Gender and Far- Right Politics in Europe and the USA.” in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan.; Blee, Kathleen M. 2008. *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*. Berkeley: University of California Press.; Castle, Tommy, and Meagan Chevalier. 2011. “The Women of Stormfront: An Examination of White Nationalist Discussion Threads on the Internet.” *Internet Journal of Criminology*.; Ebner, Julia, and Jacob “How Women Advance the Internationalization of the Far-Right.” in *Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender, & Violent Extremism*, Program on Extremism at The George Washington University.; Leidig, Eviane. n.d. “Lipstick Nationalism: Far-Right Female Influencers,” Forthcoming. <https://www.evianeleidig.com/lipstick-nationalism>.; Mattheis, Ashley A. 2018. “Shieldmaidens of Whiteness: (Alt) Maternalism and Women Recruiting for the Far/Alt-Right.” *Journal for Deradicalization*, (17): 128-162.; McRae, Elizabeth G. 2018. *Mothers of Massive Resistance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.; Perliger, Arie. 2020. *American Zealots: Inside Right-Wing Domestic Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press.; Squire, Megan. 2019. “Which way to the wheat field? Women of the radical right on Facebook.” *Data Analytics, Data Mining and Machine Learning for Social Media*. doi: 10.24251/HICSS.2019.272.

### ***The Ideological Importance of Women in the Far-Right***

Women have served important ideological and symbolic roles in modern far-right movements. For example, the central nature of women's roles are implicit in the famous neo-Nazi slogan the "14 Words," popularized by extremist David Lane, which states, "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children;" the importance of women to the movement is even more explicit in the less well-known corollary, "Because the beauty of the White Aryan woman must not perish from the earth." Emblematic of women's roles as promoters and legitimizers of white supremacist and extremist ideology, Lane's wife was instrumental in the operation of the 14 Words Press, which published neo-Nazi and white-supremacist writings while Lane was in prison.<sup>17</sup>

Fundamentally, many far-right extremist groups articulate a gender ideology that venerates and purports to protect white womanhood; as a result of this ideology, numerous groups advance separate, complementary roles for men and women. The hyper-masculinity associated with far-right extremist groups implies a hyper-femininity that needs to be protected and venerated.<sup>18</sup> As Cynthia Miller-Idriss notes,

"White women are key to the domestic realms that helped sustain white supremacy, from birthing and raising white babies to fighting school integration, making attention to 'home and the spaces of everyday life, to care and community work, and to the role of white women in nurturing and producing the white nation,' a critical aspect of the relationship between space, place, and the far right."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> ADL. n.d. "David Lane."

[https://web.archive.org/web/20130114082454/https://www.adl.org/learn/Ext\\_US/lane.asp?xpicked=2&ite m=lane](https://web.archive.org/web/20130114082454/https://www.adl.org/learn/Ext_US/lane.asp?xpicked=2&ite m=lane); Thank you to Kathleen Blee for highlighting that we often see this kind of instrumental role for women while men are imprisoned or indisposed.

<sup>18</sup> Kimmel, Michael, and Abby L. Ferber. 2000. "'White Men Are This Nation': Right-Wing Militias and the Restoration of Rural American Masculinity." *Rural Sociology* 65(4): 582-604.; Kitchener, Caroline. 2017. "The Women Behind the 'Alt-Right'." *The Atlantic*, August 18, 2017.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/the-women-behind-the-alt-right/537168/>; ADL. n.d. "'Venerating the Housewife': A Primer on Proud Boys' Misogyny."

<https://www.adl.org/blog/venerating-the-housewife-a-primer-on-proud-boys-misogyny>

<sup>19</sup> Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. 2022. *Hate in the Homeland*. Princeton University Press. p. 34.



For example, the Alternative-right, or Alt-Right, was a term coined in the late 2000s by white supremacists like Richard Spencer to soften their brand of hate and make it more palatable. It is a young, membership-less, big-tent, far-right ideological movement that advocates for a return to “traditional western civilization,” often holds anti-immigration, racist, and anti-Semitic views, with origins in North America.<sup>20</sup> Many of these groups came together for the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, which was organized and headlined by individuals including white supremacists Jason Kessler, Richard Spencer, and Chris Cantwell, and which was attended by white supremacist groups such as Vanguard America, Identity Evropa, the Traditionalist Worker Party, and National Socialist Movement, among others. Some leaders encouraged women associated with their movements to stay home because they anticipated violent confrontations.<sup>21</sup> On the day of the rally, white supremacist and rallygoer James Alex Fields drove his vehicle into a crowd of peaceful counter protestors, murdering one and injuring 35.<sup>22</sup>

For the women associated with the Alt-Right movement and other far-right extremist groups, there is a push to reject modernity and embrace traditional values.<sup>23</sup> The activities of female members help to mainstream these ideas. As Eviane Leidig argues, “these women operate within an adjacent network seeking to cultivate a long-term agenda of social and cultural change, i.e., metapolitical change, not short-term gains at the ballot box. They’re deeply embedded in helping to achieve a far-right utopia.”<sup>24</sup> Part of this utopian propaganda focuses on motherhood.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> SPLC. n.d. “Alt-Right.” <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/alt-right>

<sup>21</sup> “Jury Trial Day 17 Transcript.” 2021. Elizabeth Sines, et al. v. Jason Kessler, et al., United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia.; The authors would like to thank Kathleen Blee for highlighting this point.

<sup>22</sup> Blout, Emily, and Patrick Burkart. 2020. “White Supremacist Terrorism in Charlottesville: Reconstructing ‘Unite the Right’.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1 (22).

<sup>23</sup> Leidig, Eviane. n.d. “Lipstick Nationalism: Far-Right Female Influencers,” Forthcoming. <https://www.evianeleidig.com/lipstick-nationalism>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Mattheis, Ashley A. 2018. “Shieldmaidens of Whiteness: (Alt) Maternalism and Women Recruiting for the Far/Alt-Right.” *Journal for Deradicalization*, (17): 128-162.

Women sympathetic to far-right extremist groups often express disdain for feminism and gender-egalitarianism. Julia Ebner and Jacob Davey note that “in an oxymoronic trend, this anti-feminist ideology is proving effective in the recruitment of women to far-right causes. A number of women identifying with far-right groups highlight conflict with feminists and hostility towards conservatives as being driving causes for their radicalization.”<sup>26</sup> Because the appeal to women’s identities as mothers can depoliticize women’s actions (as they are merely acting on behalf of their voiceless, vulnerable children), it has been an especially effective and common rhetorical tool among far-right women in the United States. As numerous studies of the American far-right emphasize, the image of ‘concerned mothers’ has historically been effective advocates for the enforcement of segregation, the censoring of criticism of American history, and even for the establishment of a white ethnostate.<sup>27</sup> This means that analysis of the activities of these groups cannot write off women’s activities as inconsequential or apolitical -- the performance of domesticity in-line with radical far-right ideology is a political endeavor.

For many of these organizations, the very performance of far-right versions of domesticity and white womanhood are seen as furthering far-right causes. For example, during a standoff with the federal government, a leader in the Oath Keepers movement (a far-right anti-government group) recalled that they “were actually strategizing to put all the women up at the front,” in order to produce media images of the federal government attacking women.<sup>28</sup> Consider also the assertion of the Proud Boys (a violent far-right, chauvinist movement) that they “venerate the housewife,” encourage white women to have children with white men, and publicly condemn women who do not fulfill traditional gender roles.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the neo-Nazi National Alliance encourages women to further the movement by giving birth to white babies.<sup>30</sup> Rhetorical appeals that emphasize women’s vulnerability and need for protection and those which demand

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<sup>26</sup> Ebner, Julia, and Jacob Davey. 2019. “How Women Advance the Internationalization of the Far-Right.” in *Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender, & Violent Extremism*, Program on Extremism at The George Washington University.

<sup>27</sup> Blee, Kathleen M. 2008. *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*. Berkeley: University of California Press.; McRae, Elizabeth G. 2018. *Mothers of Massive Resistance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>28</sup> Neiwert, David. 2014. “Richard Mack Explains Nevada ‘Range War’ Strategy: ‘Put All The Women Up In The Front’.” Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2014/04/15/richard-mack-explains-nevada-range-war-strategy-put-all-women-front>

<sup>29</sup> ADL, “‘Venerating the Housewife’: A Primer on Proud Boys’ Misogyny.”

<sup>30</sup> Ferber, Abby L. “The construction of race, gender, and class in white supremacist discourse.” *Race, gender & class* (1999): 67-89.

protection based on their relationships with men (as wives, daughters, etc.) are a part of this hyper-feminine project.

This has sometimes led to the veneration of women who have suffered violence at the hands of groups the far-right opposes. The events at Ruby Ridge in 1992 (a multi-day standoff involving federal law enforcement officials that was initially related to Randy Weaver's failure to appear in court regarding firearms charges) and Waco in 1993 (in which a firefight and multi-week siege involving federal law enforcement officials followed an attempt to execute a warrant to search the Branch Davidians' religious compound on suspicion of illegal weapon stockpiling) served as catalysts for these movements and became foundational narratives related to the dangers of "government overreach."<sup>31</sup> Notably, one of the people killed during the 11-day siege at Ruby Ridge was Vicki Weaver, Randy Weaver's wife -- who has since been portrayed as a martyr.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, two pregnant women were among the victims of the violence at Waco.<sup>33</sup> Narratives around victimhood and martyrdom among the far-right extremists are gendered.

While many far-right ideologies venerate the 'right' type of women, actual relations with women in the organizations can be tense. For example, while the KKK venerated the *idea* of white womanhood, its actual relationship with the white women that supported it was strained, and in some cases contributed to vitriolic attacks on WKKK members, even by members of the Klan.<sup>34</sup> Conflict often emerges when women in the group attempt to participate in the same sorts of activities as male members or when they attempt to take on public roles. The competing visions of women-as-helpers and women-as-members (a division that exists within and between groups) have continued into modern right-wing groups.

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<sup>31</sup> Doxsee, Catrina. 2021. "Examining Extremism: The Militia Movement." Center for Strategic and International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/blogs/examining-extremism/examining-extremism-militia-movement>

<sup>32</sup> Belew, Kathleen M. 2018. *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*. Harvard University Press. p.166

<sup>33</sup> Wright, Stuart A. 2019 "Waco after Twenty-five Years: Media Reconstructions of the Federal Siege of the Branch Davidians." *Nova Religio* 22 (3): 108-120.

<sup>34</sup> Blee, Kathleen M. 2018. "Women in White Supremacist Movements in the Century after Women's Suffrage" in *100 Years of the Nineteenth Amendment: An Appraisal of Women's Political Activism* by Holly J. McCammon and Lee Ann Banaszak. Oxford Scholarship Online.

### ***Women in the Far-Right in the 21st Century***

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the variation among far-right extremist groups' objectives and organization, women's roles vary between and within these organizations. Women's participation in these movements in the 21st Century often lies on two ends of a spectrum: those that adhere to traditional gender roles where women operate behind the scenes in largely auxiliary roles, and those that defy or challenge those traditional gender roles to take on more public-facing or even violent participation. Even within the same manifestation of the far-right, such as militia movements, there can be multiple groups that adhere to different ideological drivers, and thus have different levels of female participation.

For example, after taking root in the KKK and Aryan Nations,<sup>35</sup> the Christian Identity movement had become a core tenant of many white supremacist ideologies. Connected to the British-Israelite movement, the Christian Identity (CI) movement believes that white Anglo-Saxons and Germans are the true Israelites, and espouses racist and antisemitic rhetoric.<sup>36</sup> Many of the militias that emerged in the 1990s were guided by not only white supremacist ideology, but also fundamentalist Christianity and even Christian Identity beliefs (or those that advocate for antisemitic and racist theology).<sup>37</sup> Groups like "The Order" and "Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord" (CSA) closely intersected with Christian Identity.<sup>38</sup> The CI movement holds women in subordinate and auxiliary roles; women are seen as "the helpmates of men and

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<sup>35</sup> Aryan Nations, also known as the Church of Jesus Christ Christian, was a Neo-Nazi, white supremacist, Christian Identity group active in the 1980s and 1990s. See: "Aryan Nations" ADL.

<https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/aryan-nations> ; "Aryan Nations" Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/aryan-nations..>

<sup>36</sup> Barkun, Michael. 1997. *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

<sup>37</sup> For a history of the Christian Identity movement, see for example Barkun, Michael. 1997. *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.; CTEC Staff. 2021. "Christian Identity's New Role On The Extreme Right." Middlebury Institute of International Studies - Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism.

<sup>38</sup> Anti-Defamation League (ADL). n.d. "Christian Identity."

<https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/christian-identity> ; Hofmann, David C. 2015. "Quantifying and Qualifying Charisma: A Theoretical Framework for Measuring the Presence of Charismatic Authority in Terrorist Groups." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38 (9): 710-733.

the nurturers of the next generation.”<sup>39</sup> Modern technology has provided these movements with new platforms to spread their extremist ideology and recruit new members.<sup>40</sup> While groups like Christian Identity peaked in the 1990s, the internet ensured that their influence is still widespread, especially among neofascist accelerationist groups.<sup>41</sup>

Conversely, while many women in far-right militias play auxiliary roles, in other militias women participate on seemingly equal footing with male members. The role articulated for women in these groups is an interesting and valuable axis of differentiation between modern far-right militias. For example, while some militias may espouse CI ideology,<sup>42</sup> other anti-government groups including some militias, sovereign citizens, and other conspiracy theorists, have incorporated women to greater extents.<sup>43</sup> While members may hold misogynistic or white supremacist views, the aim of these groups is to push against the federal government, which they believe to be tyrannical and illegitimate.

Women have a long history of helping to mainstream far-right ideology. For instance, when the KKK re-emerged in the 1960s, women not only contributed to the day-to-day logistics of the group’s operations but also helped rehabilitate the KKK’s public image, helping to mainstream its ideology.<sup>44</sup> White women who were invested in the prevailing racial hierarchy became integral spokespeople for the system, perpetuating it through both formal policies and informal racist practices.

The emergence and mainstreaming of the internet has provided women with even more

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<sup>39</sup> Blee, Kathleen M. 1996. “Becoming a Racist: Women in Contemporary Ku Klux Klan and Neo-Nazi Groups.” *Gender & Society*. 10 (6): 680-702.

<sup>40</sup> SPLC. 1999. “Women Extremist Organizations Stake Their Claim on the Web.” <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/1999/women-extremist-organizations-stake-their-claim-web>

<sup>41</sup> CTEC Staff, “Christian Identity’s New Role on the Extreme Right.”

<sup>42</sup> Anti-Defamation League (ADL). n.d. “Christian Identity.”; Hofmann, David C. 2015. “Quantifying and Qualifying Charisma: A Theoretical Framework for Measuring the Presence of Charismatic Authority in Terrorist Groups.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. 38 (9): 710-733.

<sup>43</sup> Jackson, Sam. 2020. *Oath Keepers*. Columbia University Press.; Sarteschi, Christine M. 2020. *Sovereign citizens: A psychological and criminological analysis*. Springer Nature.

<sup>44</sup> Blee, Kathleen. 2018. “Women in White Supremacist Movements in the Century after Women’s Suffrage” in *100 Years of the Nineteenth Amendment: An Appraisal of Women’s Political Activism* by Holly J. McCammon and Lee Ann Banaszak. Oxford Scholarship Online.; Perliger, Arie. 2020. *American Zealots: Inside Right-Wing Domestic Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

opportunities to contribute to far-right extremist groups. As women have historically done for far-right extremism in the United States, online they play important roles in public-facing positions and recruitment efforts. Jennie King and Eisha Maharasingam-Shah note, “young women are seen to provide a more ‘accessible’ face for neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups, whose image is otherwise tainted by historic associations. This re-branding has been notably effective online, where articulate and attractive social media stars... draw in large followings and can facilitate the ‘redpilling’ of young, vulnerable followers.”<sup>45</sup> Far-right women have emerged as social media influencers, who use “gendered narratives in recruitment and radicalisation towards achieving community building and a sense of belonging in the far-right.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Julia Ebner and Jacob Davey argue, “Women are becoming increasingly important as broadcasters, dramatically amplifying messages across the spectrum of worldviews that comprise the international far-right, ranging from European cultural supremacists and anti-Muslim activists, to the United States alt-right, to more traditional neo-Nazi and Skinhead groups.”<sup>47</sup> Some far-right extremist groups have established online forums for women within their movement.<sup>48</sup>

An example of this comes from the ‘tradwife’ (a portmanteau of ‘traditional wife’) movement, which gained prominence in the mid-2010s and has been bolstered by social media platforms.<sup>49</sup> Tradwives and their advocates assert that women should reject modernity and embrace domesticity and homemaking. The movement has connections to the white supremacy movement. A well-known tradwife figurehead, Ayla Stewart, issued a “white baby challenge,” in which she encouraged followers to counter declining birth rates among Caucasians.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> King, Jennie, and Eisha Maharasingam-Shah. 2020. “On the Frontline: The Under-Told Story of Women in Extremist Movements.” Peace Lab Blog. <https://peacelab.blog/2020/07/on-the-frontline-the-under-told-story-of-women-in-extremist-movements>

<sup>46</sup> Leidig, Eviane. 2021. “‘We are worth fighting for’: women in far-right extremism.” International Center for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT).

<sup>47</sup> Ebner, Julia, and Jacob Davey. 2019. “How Women Advance the Internationalization of the Far-Right.” in *Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender, & Violent Extremism*, Program on Extremism at The George Washington University.

<sup>48</sup> Squire, Megan. 2019. “Which way to the wheat field? Women of the radical right on Facebook.” *Data Analytics, Data Mining and Machine Learning for Social Media.*; Castle, Tommy, and Meagan Chevalier. 2011. “The Women of Stormfront: An Examination of White Nationalist Discussion Threads on the Internet.” *Internet Journal of Criminology*.

<sup>49</sup> Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. 2020. “Democracy and Human Rights: In Who’s Interest?” *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*.

<sup>50</sup> Darby, Seyward. 2020. *Sisters in Hate: American Women on the Front Lines of White Nationalism*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.; ADL. n.d. “Identity Evropa.”

Recently, many attribute QAnon's rise - and women's prominence within it - to social media. The widespread umbrella ideology argues that there exists a "cabal" or secret political faction or "deep state" conspiracy controlling world politics, international banking, and running a child trafficking ring, among other things.<sup>51</sup> Some scholars of American far-right extremism note that this movement, relative to other far-right groups, has incorporated women in especially high-profile and violent roles.<sup>52</sup>

QAnon's ideology appears more gender-inclusive than other far-right extremist groups, and women have played a significant role both in disseminating and creating QAnon propaganda.<sup>53</sup> Marc-Andre Argentino has labeled this phenomenon "Pastel QAnon," in reference to the online female influencers, many of whom began as lifestyle bloggers,<sup>54</sup> present across multiple platforms who use a unique pastel aesthetic to soften and spread their messaging.<sup>55</sup> Leveraging their womanhood, the group utilized the online space to spread the QAnon conspiracies, including hijacking the hashtag #SaveTheChildren, which not only helped recruit other women but also appealed to younger audiences.<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, unlike many other far-right movements, the QAnon movement has seemingly successfully mainstreamed. In the 2020 election, two QAnon supporting candidates made it into office, both women.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, in the upcoming 2022 congressional

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<https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/identity-evropa>; Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. 2020. "Democracy and Human Rights: In Who's Interest?" *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*.

<sup>51</sup> Amarasingam, Amarnath, and Marc-André Argentino. 2020. "The QAnon conspiracy theory: A security threat in the making." *CTC Sentinel*. 13(7): 37-44.; Moskalenko, Sophia, and Clark McCauley. 2021. "QAnon." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15(2)2: 142-146.

<sup>52</sup> Kelly, Annie. 2020. "Mothers for QAnon." *The New York Times*, September 10, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/10/opinion/qanon-women-conspiracy.html>

<sup>53</sup> Argentino, Marc-André, and Blyth Crawford. 2021. "The WQmen of QAnon." *Global Network on Extremism and Technology*.

<sup>54</sup> Tiffany, Kaitlyn. 2020. "The Women Making Conspiracy Theories Beautiful." *The Atlantic*. August 18, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/08/how-instagram-aesthetics-repackage-qanon/615364/> ;

Meltzer, Marisa. 2021. "QAnon's Unexpected Roots in New Age Spirituality." *The Washington Post*. March 29, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2021/03/29/qanon-new-age-spirituality/>

<sup>55</sup> Argentino, Marc-André. 2021. "Pastel QAnon." *Global Network on Extremism and Technology*.

<sup>56</sup> Argentino, Marc-André. 2021. "Pastel QAnon."; Argentino and Crawford. "The WQmen of QAnon."

<sup>57</sup> Crawford, Blyth and Marc-André Argentino. 2021. "QAnon Women in Politics Part Two: QAnon Careers." *Global Network on Extremism and Technology*; Brewster, Jack. 2020. "Congress Will Get Its Second QAnon Supporter, As Boebert Wins Colorado House Seat." *Forbes*. November 4, 2020.

elections, several candidates (and sitting representatives) support the movement, many of whom are women.<sup>58</sup> Women's prominence in this movement may be a result of a number of factors, including the movement's outreach on digital platforms popular with women (such as Instagram), as well as the organization's misinformation-fueled campaign against child abuse and trafficking.<sup>59</sup> The QAnon ideology appears more gender-inclusive than other right-wing extremist movements, and launders its extremist views through a public concern for children. The movement's focus on the need to protect children offers particular on-ramps for women, who have often justified their involvement in far-right extremist groups as a means of protecting their children.

Conversely, in some parts of the far-right, toxic masculinity drives gender relations. For example, while there were reportedly all-female groups of skinheads which engaged in racist violence, in many cases, these groups maintained a version of traditional gender roles that included the domination of women by men as part of a political project.<sup>60</sup> Kathleen Blee argues, "many skinheads are violently masculinist, referring to women in their groups as 'oi toys' and taking pride in their ability to dominate their girlfriends and wives."<sup>61</sup> In other groups, such as the Atomwaffen division, some women have reportedly undergone arms training.<sup>62</sup>

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<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackbrewster/2020/11/04/congress-will-get-its-second-qanon-supporter-as-boebert-wins-colorado-house-seat/?sh=2bb2845a568f>

<sup>58</sup> Steck, Em, Nathan McDermott, and Christopher Hickey. 2020. "The congressional candidates who have engaged with the QAnon conspiracy theory." *CNN Politics*. October 30, 2020.

<https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/10/politics/qanon-cong-candidates/>; Zitser, Joshua, and Sophie Ankel. 2021. "A Trump-loving insurrectionist and a convicted stalker are among 36 QAnon supporters running for Congress in 2022." *Business Insider*. June 27, 2020.

<https://www.businessinsider.com/the-36-qanon-supporters-running-congress-in-the-2022-midterms-2021-6>.

<sup>59</sup> Kelly, Annie. 2020. "Mothers for QAnon." *The New York Times*, September 10, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/10/opinion/qanon-women-conspiracy.html>

<sup>60</sup> Belew, Kathleen. 2018. *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*. Harvard University Press. p.166.; Blee, Kathleen M. 2018. "Women in White Supremacist Movements in the Century after Women's Suffrage" in *100 Years of the Nineteenth Amendment: An Appraisal of Women's Political Activism* by Holly J. McCammon and Lee Ann Banaszak. Oxford Scholarship Online.; Borgeson, Kevin. 2003. "Culture and Identity Among Skinhead Women." *Michigan Sociological Review* 17: 99-118. <sup>61</sup> Blee, Kathleen M. 2018. "Women in White Supremacist Movements in the Century after Women's Suffrage" in *100 Years of the Nineteenth Amendment: An Appraisal of Women's Political Activism* by Holly J. McCammon and Lee Ann Banaszak. Oxford Scholarship Online.

<sup>62</sup> Campion, Kristy. 2020. "Women in the extreme and radical right: forms of participation and their implications." *Social Sciences*. 9(9):149.



Recently, as in previous manifestations of far-right extremism, there has also been contestation over women's autonomy and roles in specific organizations. For example, there was a well-publicized conflict between the Proud Boys and women who sought to form an associated "Proud Girls" movement.<sup>63</sup> An account associated with the Proud Boys movement responded to the group by saying, "Want to support us? Get married, have babies, and take care of your family."<sup>64</sup> In fulfillment of an ideology of women as complementary or auxiliary members whose connection to the group runs through their relationship with men, the Proud Boys established a dating site for its members; according to the ADL, "the page was advertised via the official Proud Boys Telegram channel, captioned on separate occasions with 'SEND NUDES' and 'SEND BOBS & VAGENE' -- ostensibly to elicit nude photographs. Women were also encouraged to support the Proud Boys by wearing a shirt from the group's official website, announcing, 'I would f\*\*\* the Proud Boys.'"<sup>65</sup> Promiscuity or overt sexuality among women appears to be sanctioned only when it involves sexually gratifying a Proud Boy or bearing his children in furtherance of the white race. Such instances underscore that though far-right extremism largely abides by traditional gender norms, there are challenges to these ideologies. A review of several Gab, a social media network primarily used by those on the far-right, message boards highlights that there is a significant difference between how far-right men perceive far-right women and how these women perceive themselves.<sup>66</sup> As Julia Ebner and Jacob Davey note, "Despite the increasingly prominent role of women, gender remains a heavily contested issue in the far-right space; for instance, female figureheads often have to negotiate their identity within a hyper-masculine ecosystem."<sup>67</sup>

As explored throughout this section, women's participation in the far-right in the 21st Century is rooted in women's long history of involvement in the far-right in the United States. Since its inception, women have often faced contention over the types of roles

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<sup>63</sup> Ross, Alexander Reid. 2020. "Proud Boys Are at War With Their Female Extremist Wing." *The Daily Beast*, Updated December 31, 2020. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/proud-boys-are-at-war-with-their-proud-girls-female-extremist-wing>

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

<sup>65</sup> ADL, "'Venerating the Housewife': A Primer on Proud Boys' Misogyny."

<sup>66</sup> Samuels, Sarah and Ardian Shajkovci. 2022. "Far-Right Violent Extremist Women: Threats and Security Considerations." *Women & Criminal Justice*.

<sup>67</sup> Ebner, Julia, and Jacob Davey. 2019. "How Women Advance the Internationalization of the Far-Right." in *Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender, & Violent Extremism*, Program on Extremism at The George Washington University.

they should play in far-right movements, which often adhere to more traditional gender roles and binaries for men and women. Modern far-right extremism is no different; while the rise of the internet gave women a greater platform to spread their messaging, the same gendered tensions and disagreements continue to arise within these movements. When examining women's roles in the far-right, it is important to look at the goals of the sub-movements that have emerged. While some groups and ideologies are more gender inclusive and have incorporated women into more public-facing (and even overtly political or violent) roles, others have maintained more traditional gender binaries. However, despite these differences, the majority of these groups continue to emphasize women's roles as wives and mothers to help soften their message and mainstream their ideas.

## Part III: The Event

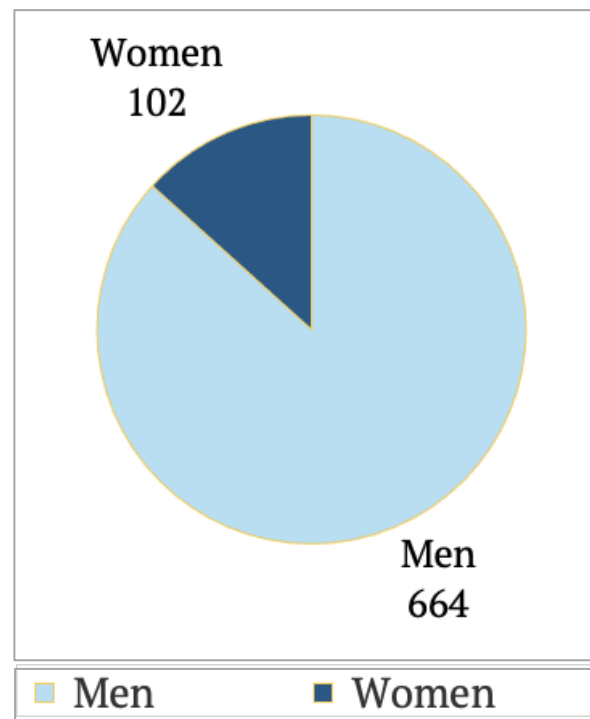
### *Methodology and Data Sources*

As discussed throughout the historical section, women have played a variety of roles within American far-right extremism, with a recent surge in involvement often associated with the online environment. This report seeks to understand the nature of women's activities today within far-right extremism by looking at the events of the January 6th Capitol Siege and mapping them onto historical patterns of women's mobilization into far-right extremism in the United States.

In order to do so, this report uses the Program on Extremism's unique Capitol Hill Siege Tracker to assess women's participation in the events of the day.<sup>68</sup> This dataset aggregates federal court records related to the events of January 6, 2021. This dataset is maintained and regularly updated by the Program on Extremism as additional individuals are charged with criminal activities and new records are introduced into the criminal justice system. The data used in this report was gathered between January 6, 2021 and March 15, 2022. While cases are still being brought against defendants, during this period, a total of 766 federal cases were brought against participants of the Capitol Hill Siege and are included in the dataset.

These cases represent a clear snapshot of the events, and include **102 women** and **664 men**. This report breaks down women's participation in the events of January 6th with an eye to understanding the gendered dimensions of these cases.

*Figure 1: Participant Gender*



<sup>68</sup> Program on Extremism (POE). n.d. "Capitol Hill Siege." <https://extremism.gwu.edu/Capitol-Hill-Siege>

This report builds from both the literature on women's participation in political violence globally, as well as previous studies of women's participation in far-right mobilization and violence in the United States to contextualize these findings. It is not a comprehensive assessment of women's participation in far-right politics or violence in the United States. Rather, it is a gender-sensitive analysis of the events of the Capitol Siege and a contribution to the study of women's participation in modern far-right violence in the United States, based on the affidavits and evidence available as of March 15, 2022. It is important to remember that this dataset relies on evidence provided by federal court records, including, but not limited to: Statements of Facts, Criminal Complaints, Indictments, Informations, Government and Defense Pre-Trial Motions, Plea Agreements, Statements of Offense, Government and Defense Sentencing Memorandums, and Judgments.

Despite the limitations and ongoing nature of this data, it is critical to address how women are alleged to have participated in the Capitol Siege. Examinations of women's roles in political violence often reside at two ends of an extreme spectrum; they are either obscured and marginalized by mainstream studies or rendered in sensationalistic detail that is devoid of larger contextual analysis. A measured approach to women's participation in political violence, which situates women's roles within the operational and ideological characteristics of an organization or movement is critical.

As explored above, women in far-right movements and groups are often incorporated in complementary, rather than egalitarian roles. This in turn contributes to the marginalization of the study of women's roles in these groups in favor of those who are more often involved in direct action. Neglecting these dynamics and women's participation, however, shortchanges our understanding of how these organizations function and the ways in which the performance of 'traditional gender roles' are vital to these organizations and ideologies. Thus, examining women's participation in these

organizations and movements can also shed light on the characteristics of the masculinity performed by men in these far-right groups. Furthermore, the Capitol Hill Siege demonstrates how women can be involved in direct action and violence associated with far-right movements.

## Findings

Between January 6, 2021 and March 15, 2022, **766 individuals** have had federal charges levied against them. From these cases of **102 women and 664 men**, a variety of findings can be gleaned, though it is important to underscore that the process of investigating the events of January 6th remain ongoing.<sup>69</sup> While women represent a minority, only 13% of the cases, as discussed throughout this report, their participation should not be ignored. Women were present in all aspects of the day, and their involvement on January 6th took a variety of forms. Moreover, women who faced federal charges were on average older than their male counterparts; women were on average 44 years of age, while men on average 39 years of age. While no conclusive implications can be tied to this, it is interesting to highlight.

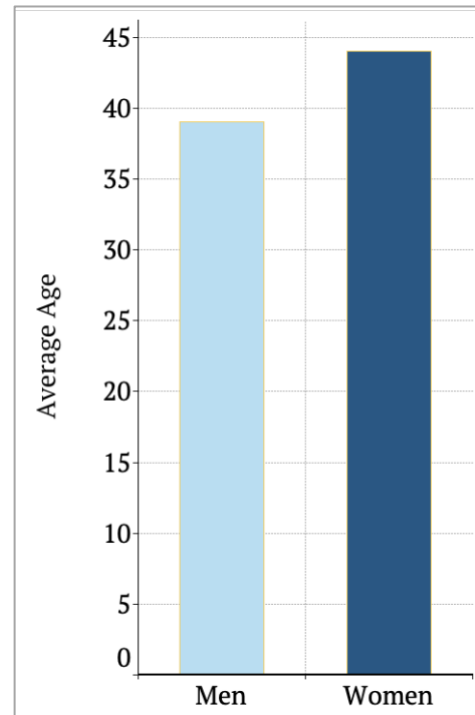
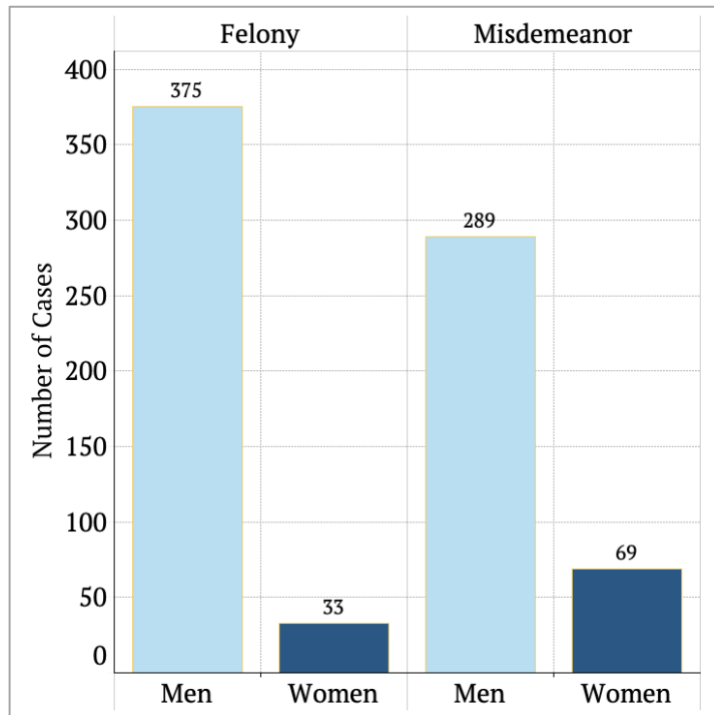


Figure 2: Average Age by Gender

As noted in the Program on Extremism’s report released in January 2022, a “substantial number of criminal complaints against the alleged perpetrators includes evidence from social media, with 77% of cases including some information obtained online.”<sup>70</sup> To break this down further, 82% of the cases brought against women included information connected to social media, while 76% of the cases brought against men included social media information. As addressed throughout the literature, social media and the online environment has allowed women to take on more active and public-facing roles in the far-right.

<sup>69</sup> Three of these 766 indictments have been dismissed. Two such cases were the result of the defendant having died.

<sup>70</sup> Clifford, Bennett and Jon Lewis. 2022. “This is the Aftermath: Assessing Domestic Violent Extremism One Year After the Capitol Siege.” Program on Extremism at The George Washington University.

*Figure 3: Charges by Gender*

When looking at the specific breakdown of federal charges, a slight majority of men (57%) faced felony charges, while on the other hand, a majority of women (65%) faced misdemeanor charges. In total, **408 individuals (33 women and 375 men) faced felony charges.** In comparison, **358 individuals (69 women and 289 men) faced misdemeanor charges.** When specifically looking at felony charges, more men (173 individuals) than women (only 4 individuals) were charged with assault. Of those 766 cases examined in this study, the

Department of Justice has secured **236 convictions**, all but two through guilty pleas as of March 15, 2022.<sup>71</sup> This includes 36 felonies (1 woman and 35 men) and 200 misdemeanors (40 women and 160 men).<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, 125 of these 236 secured convictions have been sentenced as of March 15, 2022. This includes 101 men and 24 women. In fact, the first case sentenced related to the events of January 6th was a woman, Anna Morgan-Lloyd, who was given 120 hours of community service and fined \$500 in June 2021.<sup>73</sup>

The majority of the cases sentenced, 115 out of 125 cases, have been for misdemeanor charges. Of the 408 individuals charged with felony charges, 36 have pleaded guilty or been convicted by trial, with 10 sentenced to date - all men. It is important to note

<sup>71</sup> Dreisbach, Tom. 2022. "In the first Jan. 6 trial, a jury found Capitol riot defendant Guy Reffitt guilty." *NPR*. March 8, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/08/1085147532/in-the-first-jan-6-trial-a-jury-found-capitol-riot-defendant-guy-refitt-guilty>

<sup>72</sup> Recently a defendant died by suicide after pleading guilty to felony charges, and before sentencing. At time of writing the case had not been dismissed.; Lenthang, Marlene. 2022. "Capitol rioter awaiting sentencing dies by suicide, coroner says." *NBC News*, March 2, 2022. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/capitol-rioter-awaiting-sentencing-dies-suicide-coroner-says-rcna18270>

<sup>73</sup> Melendez, Pilar. 2021. "Capitol Rioters Are Breathing a Sigh of Relief After Slap on Wrist for Grandma." *The Daily Beast*, June 23, 2021.

that 33 women have been charged with felonies, so these numbers and rates are expected to change.

When looking at jail time, only 50 of the 125 people sentenced have received jail time (7 women and 43 men) to date. But it is also important to break this down by charges. For example, all 10 individuals sentenced for felony charges, all men, received jail time.

Moreover, for misdemeanor charges, 7 women (out of the 24 women sentenced) and 33 men (out of 91 men sentenced) for misdemeanor charges also received jail time. Thus, 29% of women sentenced for misdemeanor charges faced jail time and 36% of men sentenced for misdemeanor charges received jail time.

When factoring in differences between men and women sentenced to jail for misdemeanor charges, women were on average sentenced to 45.5 days, and men were sentenced on average to 48.8 days in jail. To date, sentencing is relatively compatible. Future sentencing trends could reveal gendered differences in sentencing patterns, as have been noted in other contexts.

### ***Categorizing the Capitol Siege Participants***

In March 2020, the Program on Extremism released its initial report, “‘This Is Our House!’ A Preliminary Assessment of the Capitol Hill Siege Participants.”<sup>74</sup> This report, based on early information made public in the two months following the January 6 attack, looked at 257 individuals that had been charged in federal courts for their involvement. It divided participants into three categories: militant networks, organized clusters, and inspired believers.

In January 2022, an updated report was released titled “‘This is the Aftermath’ Assessing Domestic Violent Extremism One Year After the Capitol Siege.”<sup>75</sup> In this report, the dataset had grown to more than 700 individuals, and the participant categories were further contextualized into four categories: militant networks,

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<sup>74</sup> POE. 2021. “‘This Is Our House!’: A Preliminary Assessment of the Capitol Hill Siege Participants.” Program on Extremism at The George Washington University.

<sup>75</sup> Clifford, Bennett and Jon Lewis, “‘This is the Aftermath: Assessing Domestic Violent Extremism One Year After the Capitol Siege.” Program on Extremism at The George Washington University.

spontaneous clusters, organized clusters, and inspired believers. As noted by Clifford and Lewis, “[t]he 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.”<sup>76</sup> Examining these cases as they continue to roll out and develop has allowed for a more nuanced understanding of individual participation.

*Figure 4: Categories of Capitol Hill Siege Participants*

	<b>Militant Networks</b>	<b>Spontaneous Clusters</b>	<b>Organized Clusters</b>	<b>Inspired Believers</b>
<b>Organization (vertical)</b>	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
<b>Networks (horizontal)</b>	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
<b>Planning</b>	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
<b>Violence</b>	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

When examining the overall alleged participants in the day’s events, these numbers can be broken down to:

**-Militant networks (9%) 66 individuals**

- Of which: 8% (5) women; 92% (61) men

**-Spontaneous clusters (23%) 176 individuals**

- Of which: 2% (4) women; 98% (172) men

**-Organized clusters (33%) 255 individuals**

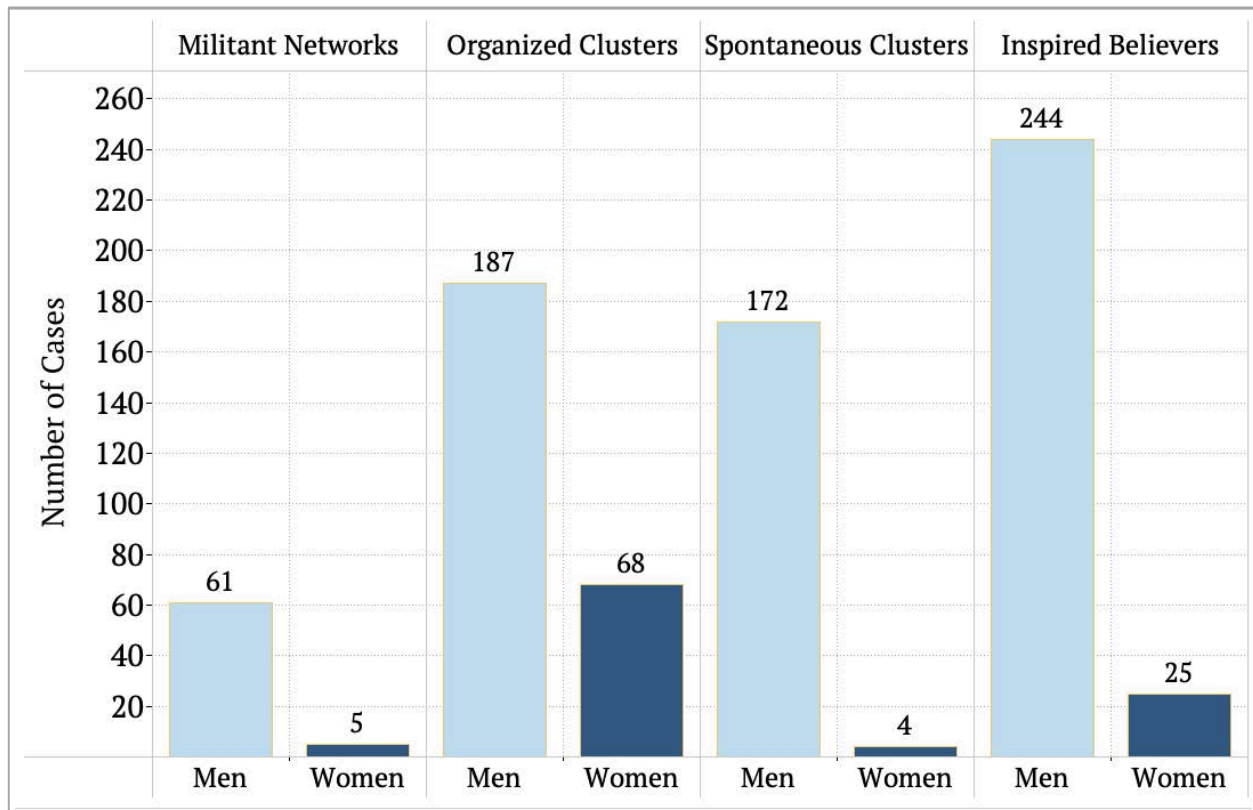
- Of which: 27% (68) women; 73% (187) men

**-Inspired believers (35%) 269 individuals**

- Of which: 9% (25) women; 91% (244) men

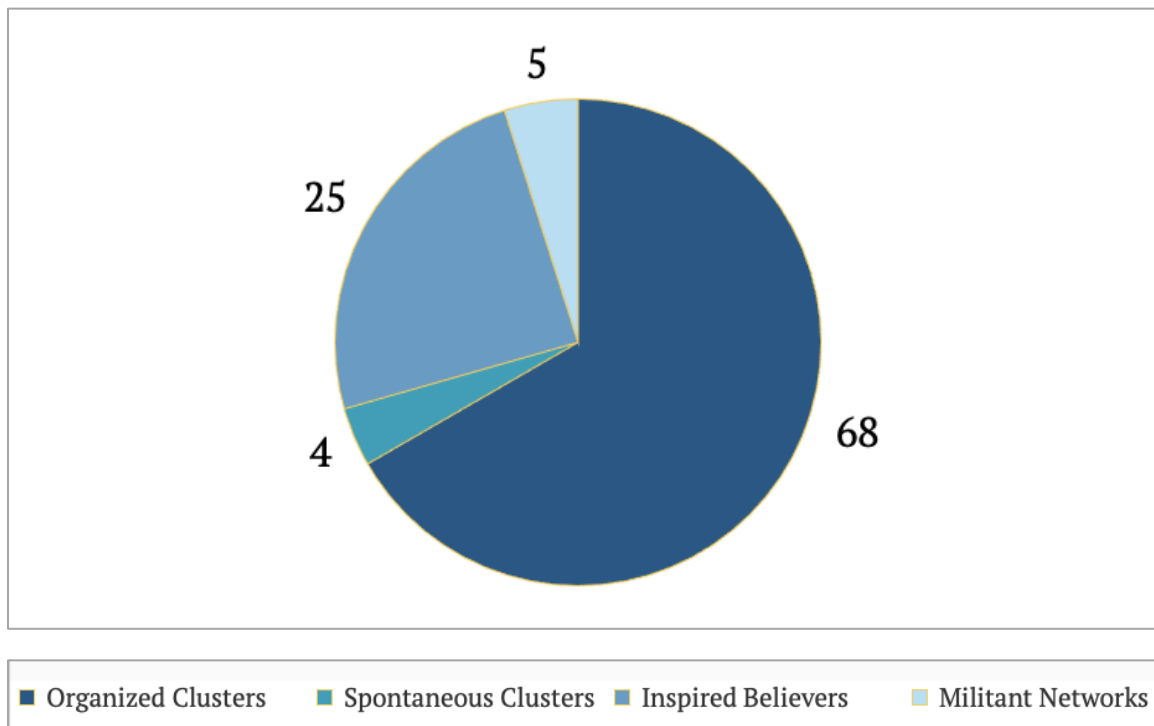
<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p. 22.



*Figure 5: Categories of Capitol Hill Siege Participants by Gender*

First, it is clear that the majority of the men and women who participated in the Capitol Siege were not part of formal, hierarchical militant networks. Moreover, the data shows that men represent the majority of the cases in all categories. However, as discussed throughout this report, it is vital to not underestimate the role of women in far-right extremism due to their less public-facing roles. The following section will delve into women's participation in these four categories during their participation in the Capitol Siege and explore case studies related to each.

Figure 6: Women's Categories of Participation



### **Militant Network**

The first category - *militant networks* - is the most premeditated and organized category of participants in the Capitol Siege. Militant networks were characterized by hierarchical domestic violent extremist organizations and top-down chains of command which issued directives to members to prepare, participate, and in some cases, conduct violence on January 6.

Militant networks make up 9% of the 766 cases examined in this report. When broken down further, 92% of these individuals are men, and 8% are women. When specifically looking at the 102 cases brought against women, militant networks make up 5% of these cases, and only five cases total.

The far-right, which often views women's roles as being complementary to those of men, has a long history of excluding women in public-facing and violent roles in the United States. The cases here in the *militant networks* category represent a break from the norm, as women actively took part in organized and directed action and violence. However, in other ways these cases do align with women's known participation in the

far-right, as four out of the five women were part of these militant networks alongside male family members, including husbands or brothers.

The women associated with *militant networks* are affiliated with two known DVE groups: the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers. The following section will discuss those groups and the individual cases associated with the Capitol Siege.

### Proud Boys

As noted above, the Proud Boys are a Western chauvinistic supremacist movement with chapters around the United States.<sup>77</sup> The movement's ideology is male-centric, and the group prioritizes traditional gender roles, idealizing women in domestic roles such as housewives.<sup>78</sup> This ideology is one of the reasons the case of Felicia Konold is so unique.

Felicia Konold was charged alongside five other individuals (all of whom are men),<sup>79</sup> including her brother Cory Konold.<sup>80</sup> Court documents allege the group “wore tactical gear, to include camouflaged clothing, tactical vests with plates, helmets, eye protection, and radios.”<sup>81</sup> The group allegedly used force to push their way past several groups of police officers into the Capitol. Felicia Konold, along with others, was alleged to have stopped Capitol Hill police from securing the building.<sup>82</sup>

Recorded alleged statements during the event by Felicia Konold include: “fight for America.”<sup>83</sup> Moreover, Felicia Konold is alleged to have posted a video on social

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<sup>77</sup> “Indictment.” 2021. United States of America v. Christopher Kuehne et al. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. January 8, 2021.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Colon%20Kuehne%20F%20Konold%20C%20Konold%20Chrestman%20Ashlock%20Indictment.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> ADL. “‘Venerating the Housewife’.”

<sup>79</sup> The six defendants charged together include: Christopher Kuehne, Louis Enrique Colon, William Chrestman, Ryan Ashlock, Cory Konold, and Felicia Konold.

<sup>80</sup> “Indictment.” United States of America v. Christopher Kuehne et al.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> “Criminal Complaint.” 2021. United States of America v. Christopher Kuehne et al. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. February 10, 2021.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Colon%20Kuehne%20F%20Konold%20C%20Konold%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>

<sup>83</sup> “Indictment.” United States of America v. Christopher Kuehne et al.

media after the day's events, stating, "three lines of police, fence, me, not even on the ground, my feet weren't even on the ground, all my boys, behind me, holding me up in the air, pushing back. We fucking did it."<sup>84</sup>

While court records do not explicitly identify Felicia Konold or her brother Cory Konold as Proud Boys members, the government claims that the pair illegally entered Capitol ground alongside four co-defendants who were members of the Kansas City chapter of the Proud Boys.<sup>85</sup> However, in the criminal complaint filed in January 2021, the evidence includes a video posted by Felicia Konold in which she bragged about being "recruited" into the Proud Boys' chapter in Kansas City and showed off a challenge coin she received from the group.<sup>86</sup>

It is important to distinguish between possible association and explicit membership for women. Other women, such as Tara LaRosa, have also had loose associations with the Proud Boys.<sup>87</sup> The movement even had controversial auxiliary groups like the "Proud Boys' Girls," though this has been contested.<sup>88</sup> However, the Proud Boys are a distinctly male-only organization, and while Felicia Konold has been charged along with members of the Proud Boys, both the organization and the prosecution have not explicitly claimed she is a formal member of the group.

### Oath Keepers

The second DVE group examined here is the Oath Keepers. According to the Department of Justice, the Oath Keepers are a "large but loosely organized collection of individuals,

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<sup>84</sup> "Criminal Complaint." United States of America v. Christopher Kuehne et al.

<sup>85</sup> "Indictment." United States of America v. Christopher Kuehne et al.

<sup>86</sup> "Criminal Complaint." United States of America v. Christopher Kuehne et al.

<sup>87</sup> Zidan, Karim. 2021. "Tara LaRose: the worrying case of MMA's 'Proud Girl'." *The Guardian*, January 21, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/jan/21/tara-larosa-mma-far-right-proud-boys>

<sup>88</sup> Collman, Ashley. 2021. "A woman who was charged in connection with the Capitol riot bragged about being recruited by the Proud Boys." *Business Insider*, February 17, 2021. <https://www.businessinsider.com/capitol-riot-female-suspect-bragged-recruited-by-proud-boys-snapchat-2021-2>

some of whom are associated with militias.”<sup>89</sup> While the group does not limit membership, it seeks to actively recruit those with a military or security background.<sup>90</sup>

To date, twenty-seven individuals have been identified by the Department of Justice as Oath Keepers-affiliated actors involved in the events of January 6th.<sup>91</sup> In total, four out of the five women included in the militant networks category were associated with the Oath Keepers. Connie Meggs, Sandra Parker, Laura Steele, and Jessica Watkins are all alleged to have participated in the group’s activities on January 6th. Moreover, three out of the four women were associated with male family members, including brothers (Meggs and Steele) or husbands (Parker) who also allegedly participated in the day’s events.<sup>92</sup> The sole case not to be associated with a male member of the network was Jessica Watkins.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, like many of their male counterparts, two of the defendants, Laura Steele and Jessica Watkins, had former military/police/security experience.

Of the four women, the most information, so far, is known about Jessica Watkins. Prior to the events, Watkins is alleged to have said, “Biden may still yet be our President. If he is, our way of life as we know it is over. Our Republic would be over. Then it is our duty as Americans to fight, kill and die for our rights.”<sup>94</sup> Moreover, Watkins is the only identified woman alleged to have played a leadership role in the Oath Keepers, including in the lead-up to January 6th preparations and the day’s events. This includes training, gathering gear, and coordination.

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<sup>89</sup> “Leader of Oath Keepers and 10 Other Individuals Indicted in Federal Court for Seditious Conspiracy and Other Offenses Related to U.S. Capitol Breach.” 2022. *Department of Justice - Office of Public Affairs*. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/leader-oath-keepers-and-10-other-individuals-indicted-federal-court-seditious-conspiracy-and>

<sup>90</sup> Jackson, Sam. 2019. “A Schema of Right-Wing Extremism in the United States.” International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) Policy Brief - The Hague.; Kriner, Matthew, and Jon Lewis. 2021. “The Oath Keepers and Their Role in the January 6 Insurrection.” *Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) Sentinel* 14(10).

<sup>91</sup> Kriner, Matthew, and Jon Lewis. 2021. “The Oath Keepers and Their Role in the January 6 Insurrection.” *Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) Sentinel* 14(10).

<sup>92</sup> “Superseding Indictment.” 2021. United States of America v. Thomas Caldwell et al. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. January 8, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Caldwell%20et%20al%20Sixth%20Superseding%20Indictment.pdf>

<sup>93</sup> Jessica Watkins identifies as a woman and thus has been classified as such.

<sup>94</sup> “Superseding Indictment.” United States of America v. Thomas Caldwell et al.

During the events of January 6th, the Oath Keepers were alleged to be dressed in military gear and participate in organized “stack” operations, moving together into the Capitol building. All four women were part of what is now referred to as “stack one,” moving together along with approximately ten other individuals into the building in an organized manner.<sup>95</sup> As per the conspiracy charges levied against them, this large group is alleged to have planned to prevent with force the peaceful transfer of presidential power.<sup>96</sup>

What is most noteworthy about the participation of women in the Oath Keepers militant networks has been both the number of women and their level of involvement. While many of these women were associated with male members of the network, they also took a public-facing role, taking part in a premeditated operation that involved coordination and training. Moreover, Watkin’s leadership position, even over male counterparts, is a very unique manifestation in the far-right.

### **Spontaneous Clusters**

The second category of participants — *spontaneous clusters* — is notable for its violence on the day of January 6th. While these individuals were not formal members of DVE groups, they were inspired to participate in the Capitol Siege. While many of these individuals traveled alone to Washington DC, some traveled with others. However, no matter how they got there, on the day of the event, they worked with other like-minded people, to create a network, breaching the Capitol alongside these clusters, and engaged or conspired to conduct violent activities once inside.

Members of *spontaneous clusters* make up 23% of the overall number of participants in the Capitol Siege included in this dataset. 98% of these individuals were men, and only 2% were women. Within this study of those 102 women charged, the spontaneous clusters category is the smallest. Only four such cases exist, making up 4% of women in the database.

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<sup>95</sup> Kriner, Matthew and Jon Lewis, “The Oath Keepers and Their Role in the January 6 Insurrection.”

<sup>96</sup> United States Department of Justice (DOJ). 2022. “Leader of Oath Keepers and 10 Other Individuals Indicted in Federal Court for Seditious Conspiracy and Other Offenses Related to U.S. Capitol Breach: Eight Others Facing Charges in Two Related Cases.” <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/leader-oath-keepers-and-10-other-individuals-indicted-federal-court-seditious-conspiracy-and>

While this category focused on spontaneous violence, often with individuals who did not know each other prior to the day's event, all three cases involved women who traveled to the event with those that they knew previously. Without robbing women of the agency that they exercise in affiliating with these actors, it is notable that this form of participation reflects the ways in which social ties have often been important parts of women's radicalization in the far-right.<sup>97</sup>

Two such women, Jalise Middleton and Olivia Pollock, traveled with family members or partners. For example, Middleton traveled with her husband and posted about the day's events on her social media. Middleton allegedly posted, "we fought the cops to get in the Capital and got pepper sprayed and beat but by gosh the patriots got in!"<sup>98</sup> And [in response to the question "Why did they fight the cops?"] she wrote, "to get in the Capital to send them bastards a clear message that this won't be tolerated."<sup>99</sup>

A second woman, Olivia Pollack, was charged along with five others, all men, including her brother.<sup>100</sup> Parts of this group allegedly premeditated their actions, and Pollack and some of the others knew each other prior to the day's event, and came wearing military gear.<sup>101</sup> Despite this, the individuals in this group have no known or clear militia ties. During the events of January 6th, Pollack, in addition to wearing military gear, was charged with assaulting police officers; government documents related to her participation reference a video of her punching an officer.<sup>102</sup> Pollack's case is interesting in that it represents a seemingly premeditated effort to carry out violence alongside others, and she was the sole woman associated with this group.

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<sup>97</sup> Kovalski, "Women in militias say ranks are not just for angry white males." ; Belew, *Bring the War Home*. p.166

<sup>98</sup> "Statement of Facts." 2021. United States of America v. Mark Middleton. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. April 16, 2021.  
<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Mark%20and%20Jalise%20Middleton%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>

<sup>99</sup> "Statement of Facts." United States of America v. Mark Middleton.

<sup>100</sup> "Affidavit." 2021. United States of America v. Jonathan Pollock et al. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. Filed June 25, 2021.  
<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Pollock%20et%20al%20Affidavit%20in%20Support%20of%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

The third case, Audrey Southard-Rumsey, traveled with other individuals but is alleged to have entered the Capitol without her original companions but rather as part of a spontaneous cluster.<sup>103</sup> Officials allege she was one of two main agitators in harassing police officers in a hallway of the Capitol.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, during the events of the day, she is alleged to have yelled at other rioters “Alright push in here” and “you ready to go again?”<sup>105</sup> Not only Southard-Rumsey’s participation, but alleged leadership role in galvanizing other rioters is important to recognize.

While small in number, these three cases add to the examples of women found in the militant networks category, exemplifying women taking on a front-facing and violent role during the events of January 6th. Moreover, these women were not part of top-down organized militant networks, but still partook in violence, challenging women’s traditional roles in far-right extremism.

### **Organized Clusters**

The third category — *organized clusters* — were composed of small, close-knit groups of individuals who traveled to, and allegedly participated in, the siege together. These groups typically consisted of family members, friends, and acquaintances. Like the *spontaneous clusters*, these individuals were inspired by ideological fervor and lacked top-down direction from DVE groups. However, what makes this category distinctive was that this group, while they traveled to Washington DC as a cluster, did not actively engage in or conspire to conduct violence once inside the Capitol.

However, it is imperative to note that the lack of actualized violence by these individuals may not reflect some inherently peaceful nature, but rather, could be due to a lack of opportunity to attack their preferred targets. For example, consider Dawn Bancroft, who is alleged to have said in a video as she left the Capitol building,

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<sup>103</sup> “Criminal Complaint and Statement of Facts.” 2021. United States of America v. Audrey Ann Southard-Rumsey. United States District court for the District of Columbia. June 1, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Audrey%20Ann%20Southard-Rumsey%20Complaint%20and%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>

<sup>104</sup> Ibid

<sup>105</sup> Ibid



“we were looking for Nancy to shoot her in the friggin’ brain but we didn’t find her.”<sup>106</sup>  
Or Pauline Bauer, who is alleged to have called for Nancy Pelosi to be hanged.<sup>107</sup>

Overall, 33% of the 766 individuals charged fall into the organized clusters category, with 73% of those charged being men, and 27% being women. When looking at the 102 cases of women, 67% fall into this category.

This grouping is diverse. For example, it includes sovereign citizens like Pauline Bauer,<sup>108</sup> who is alleged to have organized a bus of people to the “stop the steal” rally.<sup>109</sup> Some were alleged followers of QAnon, including Donna Bissey and Anna Morgan-Lloyd,<sup>110</sup> Valerie Ehrke,<sup>111</sup> or Christina Gerding and her husband.<sup>112</sup> Others were allegedly associated with the anti-vaccine movement, such as Jessica Bustle and her husband who pled guilty to entering the Capitol,<sup>113</sup> or Simone Gold, an anti-vaccine

<sup>106</sup> Kornfield, “Woman charged in Capitol riot said she wanted to shoot Pelosi ‘in the friggin brain,’ FBI says.”

<sup>107</sup> Kunzelman, Michael. “Capitol riot arrest of restaurant owner rattles hometown.” *AP News*, July 28, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/entertainment-joe-biden-government-and-politics-arrests-coronavirus-pandemic-9d89bbfa350150ae0c07822412b013c3>

<sup>108</sup> Ruhalter, Kana. 2021. “Sovereign Citizen’s New Capitol Riot Defense: ‘I’m Not a Person’.” *Daily Beast*, September 25, 2021. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/sovereign-citizen-pauline-bauers-new-capitol-riot-defense-is-shes-not-a-person>

<sup>109</sup> “Statement of Facts.” 2021. United States of America v. Pauline Bauer. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. May 18, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Pauline%20Bauer%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>

<sup>110</sup> “Statement of Facts.” 2021. United States of America v. Dona Sue Bissey & Anna Morgan-Lloyd. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. February 23, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Dona%20Sue%20Bissey%20and%20Anna%20Morgan-Lloyd%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>

<sup>111</sup> “Statement of Facts.” 2021. United States of America v. Valerie Elaine Ehrke. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. January 16, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Valerie%20Ehrke%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>

<sup>112</sup> “Criminal Complaint and Affidavit.” 2021. United States of America v. Christina Gerding. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. January 21, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Christina%20Gerding%20Complaint%20and%20Affidavit.pdf>

<sup>113</sup> “Plea Agreement.” 2021. United States v. Jessica Louise Bustle. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. May 24, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Jessica%20Bustle%20Plea%20Agreement.pdf> ; Fischer, Jordan, Eric Flack, & Stephanie Wilson. 2021. “Anti-vax Virginia couple gets home detention on Capitol riot charge.” *WUSA9*, August 4, 2021.

doctor who is alleged to have traveled to and entered the Capitol with John Strand.<sup>114</sup> Still others were allegedly associated with right-wing groups, like “Super Happy Fun America,” which advocates for ‘straight rights,’ including Suzanne Ianni.<sup>115</sup> Finally, others were not known to have been associated with any group or movement, but traveled with family members. Virginia Spencer, for example, is alleged to have traveled with her husband and fourteen-year-old child.<sup>116</sup>

Women found in the *organized clusters* category were those who traveled to, and allegedly participated in, the siege together, but did not actively engage in or conspire to conduct violence once inside the Capitol. Holding a range of ideological beliefs, the coordinated effort and lack of actualized violence is what distinguishes this group from other categories.

### **Inspired Believers**

The last category of individuals were the *inspired believers*. These individuals, per available evidence at time of writing, were not part of known DVE groups, nor were they explicitly connected to any of the other individuals alleged to have participated in the events of January 6. These *inspired believers* were driven by a range of

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<https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/national/capitol-riots/anti-vax-virginia-couple-ordered-to-serve-home-detention-on-capitol-riot-charge-joshua-jessica-bustle-donald-trump-vaccine-covid/65-e3bc5e34-9829-4f25-86f7-c083f8988151>

<sup>114</sup> “Affidavit.” 2021. United States of America v. John Herbert Strand & Simone Melissa Gold. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. January 13, 2021.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/John%20Herbert%20Strand%20and%20Simone%20Melissa%20Gold%20Affidavit%20in%20Support%20of%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf> ; Brumfiel, Geoff. 2021. “This Doctor Spread False Information About COVID. She Still Kept Her Medical License.” *NPR*, September 14, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/09/14/1035915598/doctors-covid-misinformation-medical-license>

<sup>115</sup> “Statement of Facts.” 2021. United States of America v. Suzanne Ianni. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. January 18, 2021.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Suzanne%20Ianni%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>

<sup>116</sup> “Statement of Facts.” 2021. United States of America v. Christopher Spencer & Virginia Marie Spencer. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. February 5, 2021.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Jenny%20Spencer%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf> ; Lybrand, Holmes. “Mom who brought 14-year-old son to US Capitol riot sentenced to jail.” *CNN*, January 7, 2021.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/07/politics/virginia-spencer-january-6-rioter-mom-brought-son-sentenced-to-jail/index.html>

extremist narratives, conspiracy theories, and personal motivations. Moreover, like the *organized clusters*, these individuals did not knowingly engage in or conspire with others to carry out violent activities. However, what makes this category unique was that unlike other categories, *inspired believers* traveled to Washington DC on their own, joining the throngs of individuals who made their way into the Capitol.

Overall, 35% of the 766 individuals charged fall into the inspired believers category, with 91% of those charged being men and 9% being women. When looking at the 102 cases of women, 24% fall into this category.

Like those in the *organized clusters* category, individuals in the *inspired believers* category include a wide range of far-right ideologies and conspiracy theories. For example, alleged participants Christine Priola and Traci Sunstrum followed the QAnon conspiracy theory.<sup>117</sup> While Pamela Hemphill in a video allegedly declared, “I’m with People’s Rights. Ammon Bundy,” in reference to the anti-government militant and activist associated with the Bundy Standoff.<sup>118</sup>

Participants in the *inspired believers* category also held different levels of participation. Some were more seemingly passive like Gracyn Courtright who is alleged to have walked into the Capitol building to take pictures while chanting “USA.”<sup>119</sup> While others, like Gina

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<sup>117</sup> “Criminal Complaint & Affidavit.” 2021. United States v. Christine Priola. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. January 13, 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/page/file/1354421/download> ; Cross, Ian. 2021. “CMSD staffer who resigned last week has been charged for her involvement in U.S. Capitol riots.” *News 5 Cleveland*, January 14, 2021.

<https://www.news5cleveland.com/news/chaos-in-the-capitol/cmsd-staffer-who-resigned-last-week-has-been-charged-for-her-involvement-in-u-s-capitol-riots> ; “Criminal Complaint & Statement of Facts.” n.d. United States v. Traci J. Sunstrum. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. N.d. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Traci%20Sunstrum%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf> ; Lakamp, Patrick. 2022. “Judge sentences Amherst woman to probation for her role in Capitol riot.” *The Buffalo News*, February 24, 2022. [https://buffalonews.com/news/local/judge-sentences-amherst-woman-to-probation-for-her-role-in-capitol-riot/article\\_b4ba3906-9591-11ec-aeb4-ffd80f22e739.html](https://buffalonews.com/news/local/judge-sentences-amherst-woman-to-probation-for-her-role-in-capitol-riot/article_b4ba3906-9591-11ec-aeb4-ffd80f22e739.html)

<sup>118</sup> “Statement of Facts.” 2021. United States of America v. Pamela Anne Hemphill. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. August 2, 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/case-multi-defendant/file/1469476/download> ; Siegler, Kirk. 2020. “Cliven Bundy Armed Standoff Case Going Back To Court.” *NPR*, May 29, 2020.

<https://www.npr.org/2020/05/29/863906893/cliven-bundy-armed-standoff-case-going-back-to-court>

<sup>119</sup> “Criminal Complaint & Affidavit.” 2021. United States v. Gracyn Dawn Courtright. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. January 16, 2021.

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/page/file/1360196/download> ; “Defendant File.” 2021. United States v.

Bisignano, are alleged to have used a bullhorn to announce, “Everybody, we need gas masks...we need weapons...we need strong, angry patriots to help our boys. They don’t want to leave. We need protection” as the riots ensued.<sup>120</sup> For some women in this grouping, like the *organized clusters* category, it is important to acknowledge that the lack of actualized violence does not mean a lack of motivation, but rather perhaps a lack of opportunity.

The *inspired believers* follow a range of ideologies and participations in the day’s event. What distinguishes this group is that at time of writing, they were not part of known DVE groups, they were not explicitly connected to any of the other individuals alleged to have participated in the events of January 6, and they did not knowingly engage in or conspire with others to carry out violent activities.

Overall these cases highlight the diversity of actors that took part in the Capitol Siege. While women made up 13% of the 766 cases brought between January 6, 2021 and March 15, 2022, their actions fall into all categories of participation and they face both felony and misdemeanor federal charges. As explored above, many of these cases are ongoing. However, they provide a snapshot of the events of the Capitol Siege and represent the varied public-facing roles that women take up in far-right extremism.

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Gracyn Dawn Courtright. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. August 9, 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/case-multi-defendant/file/1430131/download>

<sup>120</sup> “Statement of Facts.” United States of America v. Gina Bisignano.

## **Part IV: A Gendered Defense: the Role of Social Media and the Double Standard**

The events of January 6th only tell part of the story. In the weeks and months following the Capitol Siege, charges have been levied against men and women for their participation, and trials and plea deals have been prepared. This section explores the gendered nature of these defenses and how this plays into our understanding of far-right ideologies.

It is important to clarify that commenting on the gendered dynamics of prosecution and sentencing is difficult because there is not yet a full accounting of who was present during the Capitol Siege and all of the charges levied. In fact, charges are still being brought daily. Moreover, it is imperative to be careful about extrapolating from this small sample of women that have been brought to court over their involvement in the Capitol Siege so far. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that defendants are innocent until proven guilty. Still, it is still instructive to consider how women are portrayed and portray themselves so far during trials.

As previously noted, while the sample of women is small, it appears that women have been less likely to be charged with felony charges than men. In total, 408 individuals (33 women and 375 men) faced felony charges. While 358 individuals (69 women and 289 men) faced misdemeanor charges. This means 57% of the 664 men charged faced felony charges, while only 32% of the 102 women charged faced felony charges. Moreover, of those 766 cases examined in this study, the Department of Justice has secured 236 convictions, two by trial and the rest through plea agreements. This includes 36 felony pleas (1 woman and 35 men) and 200 misdemeanors (40 women and 160 men).

As the cases of those accused of facilitating the Capitol Siege progress, it is crucial to bear in mind the gendered dynamics of the justice system. Studies find that “women are overwhelmingly more likely to obtain pretrial freedom, less likely to be sentenced to an active period of incarceration, and when an active sentence is ordered, women tend to receive shorter sentences than men.”<sup>121</sup> These dynamics are likely to be compounded when defendants are white, given racial biases in the American justice system.<sup>122</sup>

Statements from the attorneys for women accused of participation in the January 6th riot often emphasize their clients’ performance of traditional gender roles and norms. Thus far, this has often included drawing attention to their clients’ responsibility for care work (including their roles as mothers and wives) and their compassion.

Several defense sentencing memorandums — a document produced by the defense attorney to advocate for their preferred sentence for their client that often provides a more holistic depiction of their client’s life — help to highlight this point. For example, Anna Morgan-Lloyd’s attorney described her as “a forty nine year old grandmother who drove to Washington, D.C. on January 5, 2021 at the invitation of her hair- dresser and friend Dona Bissey,” detailed her history as a caretaker, and asserted that “her husband and her family are the world to her.”<sup>123</sup> The defense memorandum

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<sup>121</sup> Gathings, M. J. and Kylie Parrotta. 2013. “The Use of Gendered Narratives in the Courtroom: Constructing an Identity Worthy of Leniency.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 42 (6): 668-689. p. 669.

<sup>122</sup> Franklin, Travis W. 2018. “The state of race and punishment in America: Is justice really blind?.” *Journal of Criminal Justice* 59: 18-28.

<sup>123</sup> “Memorandum in Support of Probationary Sentence.” 2021. United States of America v. Anna Morgan Lloyd. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. June 15, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Anna%20Morgan-Lloyd%20Defense%20Memorandum%20in%20Support%20of%20Probationary%20Sentence.pdf>

submitted by Dona Bissey's lawyer recounted the abuse she suffered at the hands of her first husband and noted that she "serves as the primary caretaker of her disabled husband."<sup>124</sup> The document also asserted that "she views herself as a devoted wife to Mr. Bissey and a devoted stepmother to Mr. Bissey's son...She is also a devoted aunt ... a confidante to her many clients, and the sole provider in her household. And, with the birth of [her step-son]'s first child less than two weeks ago, Ms. Bissey is delighted to call herself a proud grandmother." Similarly, Brittiany Dillon's attorney submitted a defense memorandum that noted that "she is currently the caretaker for her husband's 64 year old disabled uncle and his 90 year old grandfather...She is also assisting her sister-in-law with the care of her autistic child. She brings him to school, picks him up and cares for him until his mother returns from work."<sup>125</sup> In all these cases, women's care work is emphasized.

In other cases, motherhood appears to be a particularly relevant identity emphasized by the defense. The defense sentencing memorandum for Annie Howell included testimonies from those that know her. One of these letters asserted that she "deserves the opportunity to raise her son and guide him down the right path to become a productive citizen;" similarly, the letter from her father drew attention to her identity as a mother, noting that "my daughter is a good mother to my grandson and I pray that the court would take this into consideration."<sup>126</sup> The defense sentencing memorandum for Dawn Bancroft similarly noted that her son is in the military and quoted from her statement in court in which she stated that she was taking responsibility for her activities on January 6th because "it is what I have taught my children."<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> "Sentencing Memorandum." 2021. United States of America v. Dona Sue Bissey. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. October 5, 2021.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Dona%20Sue%20Bissey%20Defense%20Sentencing%20Memorandum.pdf>

<sup>125</sup> "Supplemental Sentencing Memorandum." 2021. United States of America v. Brittiany Dillon. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. October 21, 2021.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Brittiany%20Dillon%20Defense%20Supplemental%20Sentencing%20Memorandum.pdf>

<sup>126</sup> "Sentencing Memorandum for Annie Howell." 2022. United States of America v. Annie Howell. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. February 24, 2022.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Annie%20Howell%20Defense%20Sentencing%20Memorandum.pdf>

<sup>127</sup> Sentencing Memorandum." 2022. United States of America v. Dawn Bancroft. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. February 28, 2022.

Some of the statements by defense attorneys have sought to underplay the extent to which their clients understood the significance of their actions that day. For example, the defense sentencing memorandum submitted on behalf of Jessica Bustle asserted that the political rallies she attended “became fun outings for her in which she dressed up sometimes in costumes, met others, danced and escaped from her own problems.”<sup>128</sup> Emphasizing the social aspect of rallies and associating her participation with frivolous activities like dancing serves to detract from the political messages endorsed at these rallies and from the violence of the January 6th riot.

Similarly, the attorney for Connie Meggs, a woman who is accused of being a part of a “stack” of individuals who advanced on the Capitol as part of a human chain, has sought to downplay the nature of her participation.<sup>129</sup> In a request for pretrial release, her attorney asserted that “while she is alleged to have ‘prepared herself for battle’ by donning certain protective attire, there is no allegation she possessed any type of weapon.”<sup>130</sup> The judge agreed to release Meggs to home confinement agreed with this line of argument; he stated that Connie Meggs was “not a recruiter, she’s not a leader as her husband appears to be.”<sup>131</sup>

In all these cases, the lawyers representing women who have participated in the Capitol Siege have highlighted “gendered defenses,” or those that emphasize a woman’s role as wife, mother, and caretaker, to encourage the legal system to look favorably on the case. Moreover, many of these cases have sought to underplay their clients’ actions, or their understanding of the significance of their actions, in some cases using their association with men to further this point.

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<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Dawn%20Bancroft%20Defense%20Sentencing%20Memorandum.pdf>

<sup>128</sup> “Defendant’s Position Paper With Respect to the Presentence Report.” United States of America v. Jessica Louise Bustle. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. July 15, 2021.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Jessica%20Bustle%20Defense%20Sentencing%20Memorandum.pdf>

<sup>129</sup> Fink, Jenni. 2022. “Oath Keeper Who Allegedly ‘Looked for’ Pelosi During Capitol Riot Sues House Speaker.” Newsweek, January 4, 2022. <https://www.newsweek.com/oath-keeper-who-allegedly-looked-pelosi-during-capitol-riot-sues-house-speaker-1665340>

<sup>130</sup> Reinwald, Pete. 2021. “Marion Woman Charged in US Capitol Riot ‘Languishing’ in Orlando Jail.” Spectrum News 13, March 10, 2021. <https://www.mynews13.com/fl/orlando/news/2021/03/10/marion-woman-charged-in-us-capitol-riot--languishing--in-orlando-jail>.

<sup>131</sup> Johnson, Kevin. 2021. “‘Prepared to do violence’: Oath Keeper leader jailed pending Capitol riot trial.” USA Today, March 26, 2021. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2021/03/26/oath-keeper-suspect-capitol-conspiracy-case-released-pending-trial/7013105002/>.



### ***The Impact of Social Media***

Of particular interest is the difference between how women framed their actions on social media in the days surrounding the events and how they presented their activities in court. Whereas women portrayed their actions on social media as being heroic, patriotic, and agentic, in statements to the media and in court, women have often underplayed their contributions, asserted that they did not understand the significance of the Capitol Siege, and have sought leniency based on their roles as caretakers. Of course, there may also be a chasm between how men involved in the Capitol Hill Siege portrayed their activities on social media and in the courtroom; however, unlike women, men cannot leverage gendered tropes that portray them as inherently peaceful as women can.

Consider, for example, statements from Anna Morgan-Lloyd, the first person sentenced for involvement in the January 6th Capitol Siege. In a social media post the day following the insurrection, Morgan-Lloyd allegedly described it as “the most exciting day of my life” and portrayed herself as now being in the position to “spread the truth about what happened and open the eyes of some of our friends.”<sup>132</sup> In the courtroom, however, Morgan-Lloyd and her attorney leveraged gendered appeals. Her defense attorney, for example, told reporters that his client hoped that her “lifetime of volunteer work and rearing her daughters” would keep her from going to jail.<sup>133</sup> Morgan-Lloyd herself expressed remorse in court, stating that “I’m ashamed that it became a savage display of violence that day. I would’ve never been there if I had a clue it was going to turn out that way, because it was never my intent to be a part of anything that is so

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<sup>132</sup> “Statement of Facts.” 2021. United States of America v. Dona Sue Bissey & Anna Morgan-Lloyd. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. February 23, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Dona%20Sue%20Bissey%20and%20Anna%20Morgan-Lloyd%20Statement%20of%20Facts.pdf>

<sup>133</sup> Melendez, Pilar. 2021. “Capitol Rioters Are Breathing a Sigh of Relief After Slap on Wrist for Grandma.” *The Daily Beast*, June 23, 2021.; “Sentencing Memorandum.” 2021. United States of America v. Anna Morgan LLOYD. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. June 15, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Anna%20Morgan-Lloyd%20Defense%20Memorandum%20in%20Support%20of%20Probationary%20Sentence.pdf>

disgraceful to the American people.”<sup>134</sup> This rhetorical appeal of ignorance and remorse was effective; the judge granted her leniency.

In another case, according to the FBI, Felicia Konold posted on social media that she had been “recruited” into a Proud Boys chapter. While the group later downplayed her association with the Proud Boys as previously discussed,<sup>135</sup> on social media, she also posted,

“The one thing I learned today... I’m watching the news guys, FUUUCK Dude, I can’t even put into words. I I never, I never could have imagined having that much of an influence on the events that unfolded today. Dude people were willing to follow. You fucking lead, and everyone had my back, dude, everyone fucking wall, legit in the air, up against the fence, three lines of police, fence, me not even on the ground, my feet weren’t even on the ground, all my boys behind me, holding me up in the air, pushing back.”<sup>136</sup>

Similar to other gendered appeals, her attorney, who also represents her brother Cory, has emphasized Felicia’s identity as a single mother in statements about her case.<sup>137</sup>

In another example, the attorney for Riley Jones Williams, who is implicated in an ongoing case related to the theft of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s laptop, portrayed her client as getting swept up in the days’ events. She stated, “it is regrettable that Miss Williams took the president’s bait and went inside the Capitol.”<sup>138</sup> The FBI’s

<sup>134</sup> Nelson, Sarah. 2021. “Indiana woman becomes 1st person to be sentenced in Capitol riots, will not serve time.” *IndyStar*, June 23, 2021.

<https://www.indystar.com/story/news/crime/2021/06/23/capitol-riot-sees-1st-sentence-given-indianas-anna-morgan-lloyd/5309991001/>

<sup>135</sup> ADL, “‘Venerating the Housewife’: A Primer on Proud Boys’ Misogyny.”

<sup>136</sup> “Criminal Complaint.” 2021. United States of America v. Christopher Kuehne et al. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. February 10, 2021.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Colon%20Kuehne%20F%20Konold%20C%20Konold%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>

<sup>137</sup> Ryman, Anne. 2021 “Plea deals may be in the works for 6 people facing criminal charges in U.S. Capitol riot.” *AZCentral*, June 24, 2021.

<https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona/2021/06/24/plea-deals-possible-6-u-s-capitol-rioters/7777350002/>

<sup>138</sup> Jones, Dustin. 2021. “Woman Accused Of Stealing Pelosi’s Laptop Released From Jail.” *NPR*, January 21, 2021.

<https://www.npr.org/2021/01/21/959446771/woman-charged-in-theft-of-pelosis-laptop-released-from-jail>

affidavit regarding Williams' behavior, however, suggests that she was actively directing others towards Speaker Pelosi's office.<sup>139</sup> The affidavit also includes screengrabs of posts on Discord, ostensibly from Williams, that state, "I stole shit from Nancy Polesi [sic]" and "I dont [sic] care I took Nancy Polesis hard drives I dont care kill me [sic]."<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, an investigation into Williams' online activity revealed that she had been active in promoting right-wing extremist content, including a video in which she allegedly stated, "heil Hitler."<sup>141</sup>

Social media played a significant role in the events of January 6th, with approximately 77% of cases including some information obtained online.<sup>142</sup> The above section has demonstrated just some of the many cases going through the US court system related to the Capitol Siege, and the contradiction that exists between women's online presence and how they have portrayed themselves in court.

### ***A Gendered Double Standard?***

Not surprisingly, the failure to demonstrate remorse or to try to obscure the degree of agency underlying their actions on January 6th can lead to harsher sentencing. For example, on January 6th, Jenna Ryan posted a video of herself stating she was going to "storm the Capitol" and filmed others entering the building.<sup>143</sup> After January 6th, Ryan was quite vocal in defending her participation in the day's events; Ryan went so far as to post on Twitter, "Definitely not going to jail. Sorry I have blonde hair white skin a great job a great future and I'm not going to jail...I did nothing wrong." Though she said in court "I made a mistake and I'm sorry," the judge was not

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<sup>139</sup> "Statement of Facts." United States of America v. Riley June Williams. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. January 19, 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/page/file/1357051/download>

<sup>140</sup> Ibid

<sup>141</sup> Evans, Robert. 2021. "Woman Accused of Stealing Nancy Pelosi's Laptop Appears in Video Making Nazi Salute." Bellingcat, February 24, 2021. <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/americas/2021/02/24/woman-accused-of-stealing-nancy-pelosis-laptop-appears-in-video-making-nazi-salute/>

<sup>142</sup> Clifford and Lewis. "This is the Aftermath: Assessing Domestic Violent Extremism One Year After the Capitol Siege."

<sup>143</sup> Weiner, Rachel. 2021. "She said she wasn't going to jail for Jan. 6, citing 'blonde hair white skin.' A judge sentenced her to 60 days behind bars." *Washington Post*, November 4, 2021. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/jenna-ryan-jail-capitol-jan-6/2021/11/04/c94cd8c2-3d82-11ec-8ee9-4f14a26749d1\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/jenna-ryan-jail-capitol-jan-6/2021/11/04/c94cd8c2-3d82-11ec-8ee9-4f14a26749d1_story.html)

convinced that she was remorseful about her participation, and Jenna Ryan was sentenced to 60 days in custody for her actions in the Capitol Siege.<sup>144</sup>

Moreover, women who break societal gender norms are judged more harshly. For example, Virginia Spencer is alleged to have traveled with her husband and fourteen-year-old child.<sup>145</sup> Spencer received 90 days in jail. In the sentencing memorandum, it was noted, “As described above, the defendant’s participation in a riot that actually succeeded in halting the Congressional certification combined with the defendant involving her minor child renders a sentence of incarceration both necessary and appropriate in this case.”<sup>146</sup> Thus, the US government proposed that her harsher sentencing is seemingly linked to her bad parenting. At the time of writing, Spencer’s husband has pleaded not guilty and his case remains pending. However, as it proceeds, it will be important to see if such a judgment related to his parenting also arises.

These examples, just some of the 102 cases of women who participated in the Capitol Siege and were charged between January 6, 2021 and March 15, 2022, underscore that women’s pre-siege identity characteristics and activities during the events of the day will shape which of these gendered defenses are available to them. For example, women like Jessica Watkins, alleged to have played a leadership role in the Oathkeepers and was not associated with any male family member, will not be able to take the same gendered defense as Cindy Fitchett, categorized as an *organized cluster* as she traveled with others. In her defense, Fitchett argued she lived a quiet “law-abiding life” and was the sole caregiver to her husband. She received 1 month of home detention and 36 months of probation.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid

<sup>145</sup> “Criminal Complaint & Statement of Facts.” 2021. United States of America v. Virginia Marie Spencer. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. February 5, 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/case-multi-defendant/file/1371521/download> ; Lybrand, “Mom who brought 14-year-old son to US Capitol riot sentenced to jail.”

<sup>146</sup> “Government Sentencing Memorandum.” n.d. United States of America v. Virginia Marie Spencer. United States District Court for the District of Columbia. n.d. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Virginia%20Marie%20Spencer%20Government%20Sentencing%20Memorandum.pdf>

<sup>147</sup> “Defense Sentencing Memorandum.” 2021. United States of America v. Cindy Fitchett. November 2, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Cindy%20Fitchett%20Defense%20Sentencing%20Memorandum.pdf>

This brief and preliminary examination suggests that many of the frames used in court and in the popular media echo historical justifications for women's participation in far-right activities in the United States and in political violence generally. As in other instances of women contributing to political violence dynamics, women's activities are often understood through the frames of being "mothers, monsters, [or] whores."<sup>148</sup>

The use of gendered narratives in court can be consequential. Previous research suggests that gendered frames can result in more lenient sentences for terrorism-related offenses.<sup>149</sup> This is in line with the "chivalry theory," which argues "a variety of practical and extralegal factors weigh upon criminal justice decision-making, creating greater leniency for female than male offenders."<sup>150</sup> These factors often focus on women as caregivers, as well as less dangerous or culpable than men.

However, as Bontrage et al. argue, this is only true for women who fit certain traditional ideas of femininity.<sup>151</sup> For female defendants and their legal representation, this means emphasizing their identities as wives, mothers, and daughters. It may also mean portraying their participation as a function of their family ties or of ignorance, deflecting agency and accountability for their actions.

On the other hand, "evil woman theory" argues that when women are perceived as having "committed a double offense: breaking the law and violating gender roles in society," they can be "singled out by the criminal justice system and incur stiffer sentences than men."<sup>152</sup> As women are tried for their activities during January 6th, it is important to be attentive to how both the defense and prosecution attempt to leverage gendered narrative frames in court. The pride that women have demonstrated on social media regarding their contributions to the Capitol Siege have, in some

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<sup>148</sup> Sjöberg, Laura, and Caron E. Gentry. 2007. *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics*. 1st ed. London: Zed Books. Web Copy at <http://www.tinyurl.com/y44gwkys>

<sup>149</sup> Alexander, Audrey and Rebecca Turkington. 2018. "Treatment of Terrorists: How Does Gender Affect Justice?" *CTC Sentinel*, 11(8).; Strømme, Ester. 2016. "Female Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Da'Esh: Victims or Perpetrators?." *PluriCourts Research Paper* 17(01) ; Jackson, Summer, Katie Ratcliff, and Jeff Gruenewald. 2021. "Gender and Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism in the United States." *Crime & Delinquency*.; Gathings and Parrotta, "The Use of Gendered Narratives in the Courtroom."

<sup>150</sup> Bontrager, Stephanie, Kelle Barrick, and Elizabeth Stupi. 2013. "Gender and sentencing: A meta-analysis of contemporary research." *Journal of Gender Race & Justice*. 16. p. 352.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. p. 355.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. p. 353.

instances made it easier for the prosecution to undercut defense strategies that rely on portraying women as being ‘swept up in the moment’ or influenced by family members or social networks. In some instances, their social media posts have been leveraged by prosecutors and reporters to advance ‘evil woman’ or ‘monster’ narratives. The examples provided above illustrate the friction between defense strategies and women’s self-reported perceptions of the day’s events.

As more women are brought to trial for their alleged participation in the January 6th riot, it will become all the more important to pay attention to the ways in which gender norms are employed by both the defense and prosecution.

## Part V: Policy Implications and Conclusions

This report has unpacked how women involved in the January 6th Capitol Siege fit into archetypes of women common to far-right extremism. It considered how women advanced these archetypes through their activism, their statements, and through direct action. Moreover, it considered aspects of continuity and, where relevant, change, underscoring the lead-footed approach that domestic law enforcement agencies have taken to address women's roles in these organizations. By doing so, this report has highlighted that incorporating a gendered lens into analysis of far-right extremism can not only illuminate women's roles in these movements but also shed light on how modern far-right extremist groups and movements function.

These findings are not only of academic interest, but also have practical implications for policymakers and practitioners. This report underscores that women have played, and continue to play, active and important roles in American far-right extremism. Women are often incorporated in complementary, rather than egalitarian roles in these groups. Because women have not often been on the 'frontlines' of far-right extremist groups' activities, their contributions have often been marginalized or underplayed. While we are not in favor of 'guilt by association,' it is important to consider the ways in which women that are wives, daughters, or otherwise associated with male members of such groups may themselves contribute to the organization's objectives. Furthermore, it is important to consider how the performance of 'traditional gender roles' by female members are vital to these organizations and ideologies. Ultimately, overlooking their participation hampers our ability to fully understand and respond to the activities of such groups.

While this report has underlined that women's participation in far-right extremist groups in America is a long-standing characteristic, it has also unpacked some of the ways in which women's recruitment and contributions have shifted. Social media has given women new on-ramps and ways of acting as spokespeople for far-right groups, often making their messaging more palatable to mainstream audiences. While social media has not radically re-written women's roles in these groups — it has given women affiliated with these far-right ideologies a new platform to leverage in support of their cause.

This report has also shed light on some of the fissures in the far-right about how to incorporate women. Whereas QAnon has included women in front-facing positions, many groups in the Alt-Right argue against placing women on equal footing with men and instead suggest that women should play subordinate, but complementary roles. Among women in the far-right there are also differences in what roles they *aspire* to play in these organizations. While some women are eager to take up leadership positions or engage in traditionally masculine behavior, other women in the movement take explicitly traditionalist positions and advocate for women to play auxiliary roles to men. It is imperative to not underplay the importance of women advocating for separate or complementary roles; the performance of traditional gender roles in-line with radical far-right ideology is a political endeavor.

In focusing on the January 6th Capitol Siege, we have been able to examine the dynamics of continuity and change in women's participation in far-right groups. One of the most significant aspects of women's participation on January 6th was that women were active in public-facing roles and, in some instances, participated in direct violence. In some cases, even when direct violence did not occur, there was rhetoric that demonstrated a motivation for violence, and the absence of such could be due to other strategic factors. Women's actions on January 6th have represented a break from the norm, and our historical understanding of women in the far-right in the United States. More attention needs to be paid to these actions to better understand if they are a unique manifestation or a possible new trajectory for women's contributions.

Furthermore, this report has allowed us to probe how gendered norms, expectations, and narratives influenced not only women's participation in the events of January 6th, but also how these frames affect whether and how women are held accountable for their activities. In some cases the defense has articulated narratives emphasizing their client's naivety, vulnerability, and traditionally feminine roles; the effect of these appeals can be to depoliticize women's activities in support of far-right movements. Gendered narratives, particularly othering frames and tropes about 'evil women' or 'monsters,' have been used by the prosecution in some cases. Both of these rhetorical tools leverage gendered expectations to press for their desired outcomes.



This report has provided a descriptive account of women's activities during the January 6th riot and the process of holding these participants accountable, contextualizing this event in the broader history of women's contributions to right wing-extremism. Given that the process of investigating and prosecuting those involved with the January 6th Capitol Siege is still in its early stages and that this report covers only from January 6, 2021 to March 15, 2022, the numbers presented in this report are far from comprehensive. Rather than being the final word on the scale, composition, and significance of women's contributions, this report should be considered a call to action. Assessing the significance of far-right extremism in America and designing an appropriate response to this threat requires considering the roles that women play in supporting these movements. Taking a gendered lens to the events of January 6th is necessary if we are to have a holistic understanding of the events of that day.

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