



Insurgency as a Conceptual Model for Right-wing Extremism in the Trump Era

Kent Heiner

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Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Introduction	1
Alternate Definitions of Insurgency	1
Objectives	2
Is This Discussion Really Necessary?	2
Methods.....	5
Primary Research	5
Secondary Research	5
Results.....	6
Primary Research Results.....	6
Definition of Insurgency in the Context of Foreign Conflict	8
Common Scholarly Uses of the Term in the Context of US Politics.....	9
Toward a Synthesis of the Two Usages of the Term “Insurgency”	9
The Core Definition of Insurgency and Its Applicability to Trumpism	9
Secondary Characteristics of Insurgency in Relation to Trumpism	14
How Serious Is It?	16
Discussion.....	18
Summary and Recommendations.....	20
References	21
Appendices.....	27
Appendix A: Survey Questions.....	27
Appendix B: The “Sagebrush Insurgency”	29
Appendix C: Right-Wing Propaganda	30

Abstract

This report contrasts the common usage of the term “insurgency” (in reference to Trumpism and other political upsets) with the definition used by agencies of the United States government to refer to armed uprisings. It then explores how and whether this latter definition is applicable to the context of contemporary American politics, and whether the average educated American might find it relevant.

Field research was conducted in the form of an online survey which gathered opinions and perceptions from a small group of college students. Scholarly sources were consulted regarding the definition and attributes of insurgency in the context of armed conflict and asymmetric warfare.

This report finds that public awareness of this phenomenon is limited at best, and that a large number of seemingly disconnected acts of violence and civil disorder are part of a nationwide armed insurgency seeking to fundamentally change civil rights protections, political dominance, and in the most extreme cases the religious and racial/ethnic composition of the country. The main recommendation of this report is for further research into the applicability in the United States of known (foreign) counterinsurgency techniques.

Introduction

The purpose of this introduction is to identify the problem area being discussed and the objectives of this report's research. One problem being addressed is that the term "insurgency" has widespread use under two different meanings. This diminishes the usefulness of the term somewhat in being able to quickly communicate one particular idea.

Alternate Definitions of Insurgency

Government-published sources on the subject of "insurgency" agree that it is a well-understood concept which is characterized by armed conflict and has as its objective the overthrow of an established government. Three resources stand out as excellent examples of scholarly work defining the nature of insurgency. (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.; U.S. Department of the Army, 2004; U.S. Department of State, 2009). The implicit context of the analysis in these sources is one of *foreign* conflict, as *domestic* unrest is under the purview of agencies (in the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice) which typically do not use the term.

In contrast to this definition is a more metaphorical sense used in academic journals in reference to inter- or intra-party changes of fortune in US politics (Dyck, *et al.* 2018; Lawrence *et al.*, 2017; Milner, 2017; Moon, 2020; Pabst, 2016). This sense is also the one behind the book title "Insurgency: How Republicans Lost Their Party and Got Everything They Ever Wanted" (Peters, 2022).

We see then, that the term "insurgency" is used in two different senses, describing phenomena which are distinct but sometimes related. Relatively few sources, even fewer of them scholarly, relate the former phenomenon to the latter in the context of US politics (Nance, 2022; AlBzour, 2022; to be discussed later), but this connection is one that I feel may be transformative in how we view current events.

The academic establishment is reluctant and government entities are unable to have frank discussions about the violent and/or criminal behavior of a major political candidate or party, for fear of being seen as unfairly biased (Harwin, 2023). Even major media outlets tend to be timid in this regard. There may also be a "that could never happen here" mentality in play among opinion leaders or the public they are trying to connect with. That lack of frankness threatens to contribute to an environment in which violence and criminality are left unchallenged.

Objectives

This research aims to fill a gap in scholarly research by applying the “armed-conflict” definition of insurgency in a US context, providing both scholars and the general public a starting-point for a discussion of how this definition might inform our view of contemporary US politics.

Among the objectives of the current proposal are the following:

1. Determine whether Americans feel that extremism is on the rise, what form(s) they might perceive it in, and what parties they might identify as its source.
2. Determine whether Americans feel familiar with the term “insurgency” and understand it.
3. Determine a definition of the term insurgency from multiple scholarly sources, as well as its agreed-upon characteristics, tactics, and consequences; and determine to what degree this understanding is applicable to Trumpism.
4. To the extent possible, determine whether a scholarly understanding of insurgency might offer insight into countering the rise of demographically-based harassment, discrimination, or violence; or into preventing mass uprisings and rebellions of the type seen in recent years.

Being a starting point, this report will identify many specific relevant phenomena as possible areas for further research without exploring them fully here.

After this introduction, this report will discuss the methods of research used in its preparation, the results of that research, and discussion of the significance and reliability of those results.

Is This Discussion Really Necessary?

The most alarming development of the Trump years has been the increasing frequency and volume of calls not simply to *defeat* political opposition but to *eliminate* it. This report will show many instances in which right-wing extremists hope for or advocate *genocide*; and that they are encouraged in those hopes by some mainstream politicians (Appendix C).

“When do we get to use the guns?” an audience member asked at a Q&A session with a nationally-known right-wing speaker. “How many elections are they gonna steal before we kill these people?” he added, prompting support from many of the others gathered there (Neiwert, 2023). Kyle Rittenhouse became a celebrity on the right for his shooting of two civil rights protesters in the summer of 2020. Threats of violence against minorities seem to have grown more frequent and shrill in recent years; a pastor recently told his congregation that “Any parents that would have their child have a transgender surgery done on them. Any parent that would do that should be shot in the back of the head.” (Anglesly, 2023). Rhetoric of this type is shockingly common among American religious figures (Neiwert, 2023); far more common and insidious are Sunday sermons making no explicit call for violence but implying that a Biblical declaration of the death penalty for homosexuality is somehow relevant to questions of LGBTQ+ civil rights. Such were the remarks of an Arlington Washington pastor when opposing a Pride festival planned in that city in 2023.

The purely political violence called for in the first quotation and the transphobia-motivated violence implied in the last quotation are not unconnected. Indeed, they have long-standing connections in right-wing ideology and mythology, as I will shortly explain here and make clearer in this report.

The word “groomer” has recently infected the national dialog as an accusation of pedophilia against transgender and/or non-heterosexual persons. Events at public libraries are often protested and even

disrupted by right-wing gangs who oppose the right of such persons to read to children (Campoamor, 2022; Wiggins, 2022). Many of these gang members are Proud Boys, some two hundred of whom took a key role in the Capitol siege (Reneau *et al*, 2022) and several of whom were consequently convicted of seditious conspiracy. In early 2021, the Proud Boys was designated a terrorist organization by the government of Canada. A somewhat common motto on Proud Boys merchandise is “All our enemies are pedophiles,” an idea which is wildly popular on the right and has origins that might be traced back through the (equally popular) QAnon movement (Appendix C) and thence to the “Pizzagate” conspiracy theory which inspired an armed invasion of a Washington DC pizza parlor (Rothschild, 2021). The Department of Homeland Security this year called attention to what it calls a “heightened threat environment” for racially- and ethnically-motivated attacks (Lyngaas, 2023). Dozens of members of the right-wing street mob Patriot Front came to Coeur d’Alene Idaho to disrupt a Pride celebration in 2022. They were all arrested on charges of conspiracy to riot, and five have been convicted so far (Cabeza, 2023).

Everyday Americans such as the man asking “When do we get to use the guns?” look for leadership from persons at all levels of society and many different walks of life. Thousands of social media “influencers” organized transportation and urged their followers to come to the US Capitol on January 6th; and dozens, if not hundreds came in person. General Michael Flynn, whose role in this alleged insurgency deserves to be examined in great depth (and is touched upon somewhat in Appendix C), once remarked favorably on the possibility of a military coup in the US (MacGuill, 2021).

A recent spate of attacks on critical infrastructure (Morehouse, 2022), particularly power facilities, suggests another aspect to this right-wing war on the *status quo*. These attacks call to mind Russia’s recent acts of low-intensity warfare, such as the 2014 attack on the Ukrainian power grid. But whereas Russia is thought to have caused the Ukrainian power failures by means of direct cyberattack, the US attacks have been physical in nature and inspired by online content (Miller, 2022). According to *The Guardian*, a set of documents recently leaked from a Russian government contractor “suggest that Russia sees attacks on civilian critical infrastructure and social media manipulation [in the US and elsewhere] as one and the same mission, which is essentially an attack on the enemy’s will to fight.” (Harding *et al*, 2023). The foreign-influence aspect of many insurgencies, and of Trumpism in particular, is unfortunately beyond the scope of this report.

Apart from the ongoing losses of life and property that will be detailed later in this report, there is much more at stake. As is typical both of authoritarian movements (Snyder, 2018) and of Russian disinformation operations (Rid, 2020), even the very idea of objective truth is under attack (Stelter, 2021). The term “fake news” originated as a reference to online influence campaigns such as that undertaken by Russian intelligence to influence the 2016 election in Trump’s favor (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019); but led by Trump, the term was soon appropriated (if not to say perverted) by the right wing to refer to any journalism, legitimate or otherwise, which was critical of Trump. Trump maligned the press as “the enemy of the people.” Attacks on journalists became widespread under Trump. Local and federal police shot at and brutally beat journalists covering the 2020 civil rights protests (BBC, 2020; Safi *et al* 2020; Schuster, 2020). The pro-Trump mob at the US capitol attacked journalists and destroyed their equipment. Inspired by Trump and the hysterical right-wing propaganda ecosystem that supported him, in 2018 Cesar Sayoc mailed bombs to prominent Democrats and to CNN offices. Numerous smaller and less-publicized attacks on the press took place. For example, regional journalist Alissa Azar was chased and sexually assaulted by a gang of Proud Boys (Neiwert, 2023).

The press are not the only targets of a growing right-wing hostility toward objective truth. As the sun began to set on the Trump administration, one of Trump’s campaign lawyers took this appalling shot at

an official Trump had fired for refusing to join Trump's conspiracy to defraud the United States: "Anybody who thinks the election went well, like that idiot Krebs who used to be the head of cybersecurity. That guy is a class A moron. He should be drawn and quartered. Taken out at dawn and shot." (Acosta *et al*, 2020). This was by no means an isolated incident, and the battle against facts continues. Per the *New York Times*, "Republican lawmakers and activists are mounting a sweeping legal campaign against universities, think tanks and private companies that study the spread of disinformation" (Myers & Frenkel, 2023). In June 2023, House Republicans took the unprecedented step of censuring Representative Adam Schiff for his role in calling Trump to account for his well-documented acts of corruption and insurrection, having managed the first of Trump's two impeachment trials and having served on the Select Committee investigating the January 6th attack. The resolution to censure accused Schiff of launching "an all-out political campaign built on baseless distortions against a sitting U.S. president." The *New York Times* characterized the move as "the first in what could be a series of votes seeking to punish those whom Republicans have deemed enemies of the party" (Broadwater, 2023).

Another front in the conflict is the integrity of our elections, which was after all central to the pretext for the siege at the U.S. Capitol. Defeated first at the ballot box, then in court, and then in a bloody battle at the Capitol, Trump supporters began seeking positions of authority to oversee elections at the state and local level. Former Washington state legislator Robert Sutherland gave his full support to Trump's claims of voter fraud in the 2020 election and is now running for Snohomish County Auditor. Mark Finchem was the 2022 Republican nominee for the office of Secretary of State in Arizona (Levine, 2021). Finchem belongs to the Oath Keepers militia, members of whom were convicted last year for seditious conspiracy in the siege at the Capitol. Finchem was allegedly among the crowd on the Capitol's restricted grounds during the siege as well. This more recent apparent power grab takes place in addition to the long-standing right-wing efforts in many states to re-district voters, intimidate voters, change voting regulations, and/or purge voter rolls in hopes of gaining partisan political advantage.

Lastly, but importantly, our right to conduct public business without fear of violence is at stake. In addition to reporters and politicians, almost any sort of public official can be the target of terrorism. Poll workers, librarians, school board members, and families of law enforcement officers all face harassment and death threats. In *The Age of Insurrection*, David Neiwert writes:

A November 2021 *New York Times* piece described the politics of menace that had inundated rural America, explaining that it had become an essential component of modern Republican politics – and how living under that cloud has exactly the powerful anti-democratic effect its users intend.

Ask yourself when the last time was that your representative in Congress held a town hall meeting. This trend toward terrorism and eliminationism must be reversed.

Methods

Primary Research

A link to a survey hosted on SurveyMonkey.com (see Appendix A) was distributed to academic peers as a means of accomplishing this research's remaining objectives (see Objectives), namely to determine the opinions and perceptions of the target audience. Respondents answered multiple-choice questions to gauge their agreement or disagreement with several statements regarding the direction of trends in harassment, discrimination, and civil unrest. Open-ended questions were designed to draw out more detail regarding the respondents' own opinions. Contrary to the original intent, the survey link was not shared on the author's social media page, as responses from these peers would likely have shown noticeable diversion from those of a more general population.

No money was budgeted for the survey, and SurveyMonkey.com allows a maximum of ten free questions in a survey. This unfortunate limitation prevents greater insight into the perceptions of respondents. SurveyMonkey also reports maximum of ten survey responses on a free basis, limiting the statistical reliability of the sample data somewhat; in a pool of ten respondents, one outlying result can carry far greater weight than in a pool of one hundred respondents.

Secondary Research

Three government-published sources (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.; U.S. Department of the Army, 2004; U.S. Department of State, 2009) were consulted for a common definition of "insurgency" and for the agreed-upon characteristics of "insurgencies" thus defined. The intersection of agreement in these sources constitutes the "core" definition of insurgency used in this report's findings. Additional or "secondary" characteristics of insurgency are discussed as well.

Numerous additional sources, mostly describing relevant current events, were consulted in the process of determining how applicable this conception of "insurgency" is to American politics and demographically-motivated unrest, particularly to the changes of the past ten years.

Results

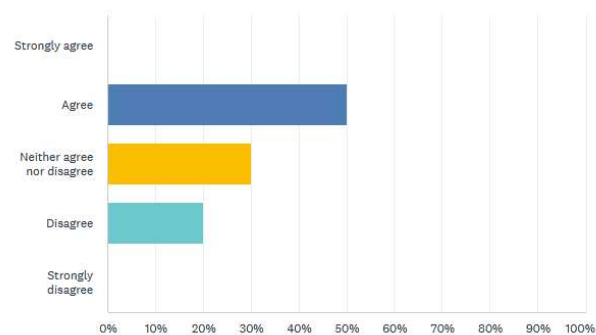
Primary Research Results

Survey results were unexpectedly positive, with more respondents agreeing than disagreeing that they (and Americans in general) are less likely to experience prejudicial harassment than ten years ago; and with respondents being evenly divided on a similar question with regard to discrimination rather than harassment.

Among ten survey results, five respondents agreed that Americans in general are less likely to experience harassment than ten years ago; two disagreed, and three gave a neutral response. Asked the same question regarding their individual likelihood to experience harassment, the response was slightly more positive, with five in agreement that such a thing had become less likely, only one disagreeing, and four responding neutrally.

I feel that Americans are less likely to experience harassment due to their particular demographic now than they would have ten years ago.

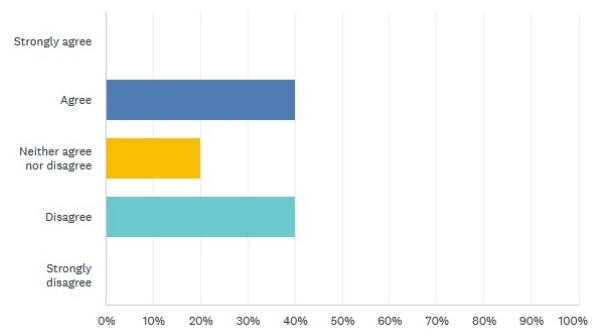
Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



With regard to discrimination, five respondents agreed that they (and Americans in general) are less likely to experience discrimination than ten years ago; two disagreed, and three gave a neutral response.

I feel that Americans are less likely to experience discrimination due to their particular demographic now than they would have ten years ago.

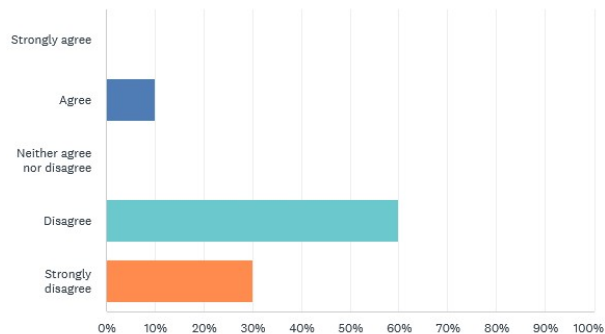
Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



The respondents' view of trend in American political beliefs and potential behaviors was more negative, showing a fairly strong opinion that the country has become more extreme in its beliefs, and showing a less strong but clear disagreement with the idea that the country "faces a lesser threat from armed rebellion or mass uprising."

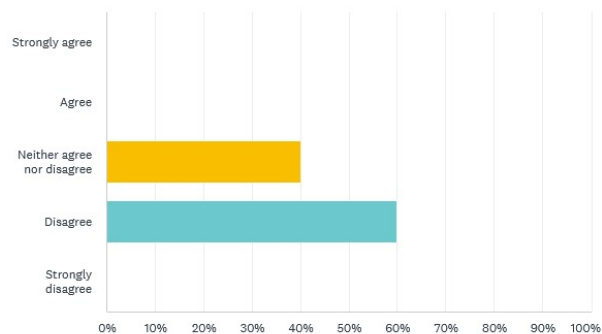
Americans are less likely to have extreme political beliefs and motivations now than they were ten years ago.

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



The American system of government faces a lesser threat from armed rebellion or mass uprising now than it did ten years ago.

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



When given the opportunity to comment on the most likely sources of such discrimination, harassment, or civil unrest, respondents did not tend to assign blame to a single party or belief system, even though far more respondents identified as "liberal" (four) rather than "conservative" (one). Four comments were made on what respondents saw as extremism evident in both of two opposing factions.

Definition of Insurgency in the Context of Foreign Conflict

Government-published sources on the subject of “insurgency” agree that it is a well-understood concept which is characterized by armed conflict and has as its objective the overthrow of an established government. Three resources stand out as excellent examples of scholarly work defining the nature of insurgency. All were produced by a department or agency of the United States government having insurgency-related responsibilities. (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.; U.S. Department of the Army, 2004; U.S. Department of State, 2009).

A Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency was produced by the CIA during the 1980s and released for public use in 2009. This brief document (24 pages) makes clear that insurgency is a well-understood phenomenon with agreed-upon characteristics, and includes armed combatants. The CIA is a large and well-funded agency of the United States government, chartered by the Congress in the National Security Act of 1947. It maintains a close relationship with academia, with analysts frequently recruited from and departing to university faculty positions. During the 1980s, the CIA had an even more central role than it does today in the collection and analysis of foreign intelligence for the informational needs of policymakers in the executive and legislative branches of government. By the time of publication, the CIA had been instrumental (if not always successful) in either countering or supporting insurgencies in many foreign nations.

The *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* from the State Department reinforces both of above points, also asserting that the aim of an insurgency is the overthrow of a constituted government.” As the title suggests, this majority of this document describes approaches to defeating insurgencies, but it begins with a more generally-useful introduction to the concept of insurgency. This document is highly credible as a secondary source and of great significance as a primary source. The State Department is an organization within the United States government headed by the Secretary of State, who reports directly to the President. The department demands a high degree of scholarship from its analysts and foreign service officers. Other contributors to this guide included the departments of Defense, Justice, Treasury, Transportation, Agriculture and Homeland Security.

All three of the foregoing points are supported by the Department of the Army’s *Counterinsurgency Operations*, one of the Army’s many “Field Manuals.” Like the State Department document, this manual is primarily concerned with methods of defeating insurgencies, but it begins with an introduction to the concept of insurgency. This document is highly credible as a secondary source and of great significance as a primary source. The United States Army is a large and extremely well-funded organization within the United States government which operates numerous postsecondary schools. At the time of publication (2004), the Army was responsible for counterinsurgency operations in multiple foreign occupied territories, including Iraq and Afghanistan. The lives of its personnel depend to no small extent on the Army’s ability to understand and respond to insurgencies.

The implicit context of the analysis in these sources is one of *foreign* conflict, as *domestic* unrest is under the purview of agencies (in the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice) which typically do not use the term.

Common Scholarly Uses of the Term in the Context of US Politics

In contrast to this definition is a more metaphorical sense used in academic journals in reference to inter- or intra-party changes of fortune in US politics (Dyck, *et al.* 2018; Lawrence *et al.*, 2017; Milner, 2017; Moon, 2020; Pabst, 2016). A search of academic databases for the combined terms “insurgency” and “Trump” returns results including the following articles:

- “The populist insurgency and its Russian friends” mentions Trump’s rise as part of a Russian-supported rise in populism worldwide. Aside from the title, the term “insurgency” is used only once and refers to Europe’s distinction as the epicenter of this rise in populism. No reference is made to armed conflict as being part of such insurgency (Milner, 2017).
- “The Role of Cultural Production in Celebrity Politics: Comparing the Campaigns of Jesse ‘The Body’ Ventura (1999) and Donald Trump (2016)” notes that Jesse Ventura’s trash-talking rhetoric distinguished him as “an insurgent against the existing political system” (Moon, 2020).
- “Primary Distrust: Political Distrust and Support for the Insurgent Candidacies of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in the 2016 Primary” defines an “insurgent” candidate as one who “occasionally comes along and unseats a well-known and possibly well-loved incumbent or the party’s presumptive nominee.” (Dyck *et al.*, 2018).

Toward a Synthesis of the Two Usages of the Term “Insurgency”

Thus we see that the term is used in two different senses, describing phenomena which are distinct but sometimes related. Relatively few sources, even fewer of them scholarly, relate the former phenomenon to the latter in the context of US politics (Nance, 2022; AlBzour, 2022), but this connection is one that I feel may be transformative in how we view current events.

The term “insurgency” has often been used to describe the changing American political landscape, particularly the subordination of the Republican Party to Donald J. Trump as an individual. In the early days of Trump’s rise, the term was used almost exclusively in a very loose sense, not implying an actual armed uprising but rather the transition of power within the Republican party (Peters, 2022). Subsequently, as such uprisings and political violence became more frequent and severe (Riotta, 2019), eventually including an armed attack on the presidential election process at the US Capitol, there was little if any scholarly discussion of whether the more serious sense of the term “insurgency” might actually apply to current events, and whether existing research into the nature and consequences of armed insurgency might provide greater insight into the state of the union. Most scholarly uses of the term continue to be this loose, especially in journals in political science disciplines. Of the scholarly sources surveyed, only AlBzour, writing in a journal on language and literature, dares to accuse Trump of “inciting riot and instigating insurgency” (AlBzour, 2022). One notable non-scholarly resource appears in the above-mentioned search of academic sources: MSNBC commentator Malcolm Nance is bold, giving to the Trump movement the ISIS-like acronym “TITUS” for “the Trump Insurgency in the United States” (Nance, 2022).

The Core Definition of Insurgency and Its Applicability to Trumpism

Among the areas of agreement for the three government-published sources (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.; U.S. Department of the Army, 2004; U.S. Department of State, 2009) was the following:

1. The goal of an insurgency is to replace an established government as the authority exercising control over a given geographical area.
2. An insurgency inherently includes military activity by the insurgent party. In other words, it necessarily includes armed conflict; but typically, only to the extent necessary to shift the balance of power.

The first of these two qualifications would seem to apply to either of America's two major political parties in circumstances where they are not dominant. Third parties have historically enjoyed little if any representation in the presidency or either of the houses of Congress, at either the federal or state level. Votes take place along partisan lines, without the formation of coalitions of the types seen in other countries.

The single greatest distinction between insurgency and politics as usual is found in the second qualification, the use of violence in the pursuit of political dominance.

One might assert that right-wing violence has risen steadily since the declaration of Donald Trump's candidacy for president, but it would be more difficult to show that such incidents during his presidency were intended to displace either Trump, the Republican party, or the federal government as the dominant party in the United States. Insurgency entails violence by a *non-dominant* power, and violence by a dominant power is typically categorized as repression.

For this reason, while not discounting the right-wing attacks undertaken during the Trump years with the goal of overthrowing either the federal government itself or a local or state government, the beginning of a nationwide state of *insurgency* is much more readily identifiable in the siege at the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021, after the 2020 election in which Donald Trump lost the presidency. While Trump remained in office through that time, the events of January 6th represented an attack against not only the incoming administration but against the federal government responsible for the peaceful transition of power. Rioters called for the deaths of Republican Vice President Mike Pence, Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, and the local and federal police defending them. Their weapons included knives, baseball bats, stun guns, bear spray, and pepper spray. (Dreisbach & Mak, 2021; York 2021). As of July 21, 2023, a database maintained by NPR shows that of the 1106 defendants in the siege, 296 have been charged with violence or assault (NPR Staff, 2021).

Right-wing insurgent violence and terrorism has continued in numerous smaller incidents after the January 2021 siege at the US Capitol. The Supreme Court was evacuated in August 2021 due to a bomb threat by a man demanding Trump's reinstatement as president. In August 2022, the Cincinnati field office of the FBI was attacked by an armed individual immediately following the FBI's execution of a search warrant at Trump's Florida residence. The attacker, who died in the confrontation, had also been among the crowd at the Capitol siege (Collins et al, 2022). In October 2022, Nancy Pelosi's home was invaded and her husband assaulted with a hammer in a politically-motivated attack. A Seattle-area man with a previous warrant related to the Capitol siege was arrested in June 2023 while running toward the Obamas' home in Washington DC. Multiple weapons were discovered in his vehicle. Also of relevance

are right-wing attacks on protesters and counterprotesters (and possibly neutral bystanders) at numerous events since the attack on the Capitol and potential attacks prevented by law enforcement.

- Dozens of members of the right-wing militia Patriot Front were arrested in their apparent attempt to disrupt a Pride celebration in Boise Idaho in 2022. Several have been convicted of conspiracy to riot.
- At least two arrests were made in connection with a Proud Boy rampage in Portland in the summer of 2021. Proud Boys Miles Furrow and Tusitala Toese were charged with assault. Toese (whose charges included four counts of assault, including assault with a weapon, two counts of unlawful use of a weapon, two counts of riot and two counts of criminal mischief) was sentenced this year to 8 years of imprisonment. He was previously jailed in connection with a January 6th 2021 storming of the Washington State governor's mansion, charged with unlawful entry, assault, and obstruction.
- Tony Moon in many ways personifies the Trump insurgency. Though it is by no means exceptional, his career as a right-wing street fighter demonstrates a common thread between Trump election denialism, right-wing paranoia, violence against LGBTQ+ persons and the media, and increasing levels of unrest at local civil events. Moon was present on restricted grounds during the attack on the US Capitol and at several subsequent violent incidents in his home state of California. One such incident was a July 2021 protest in Los Angeles attended by Proud Boys and QAnon adherents and connected to an alleged incident involving a transgender person; Moon was accused on social media of having attacked a woman at the event (see image below). At an anti-vaccination rally outside Los Angeles City Hall (and in the immediate vicinity of police headquarters) the following month, there were multiple assaults on media and counterprotesters; photographs and video available on social media appear to show Moon and Proud Boy Adam Kiefer assaulting journalists at the event (see also Goodman, 2021). The pair turned up again at a protest that turned violent outside a school board meeting in Glendale in June 2023.



Chad Loder (they/them) has done extensive work on Twitter documenting right-wing violence. Because their account was disabled soon after the platform's takeover by Elon Musk, the tweet shown in the Google search results above is no longer available.

Much larger, more lethal, and more numerous attacks have taken place against minorities; though these attacks are not typically described as political in nature and are less demonstrably intended to affect a political balance of power, it is difficult in the current political environment to ignore their political implications. Whether to intimidate or simply eliminate persons of color, or to accelerate an anticipated "racial holy war" (for background, see "[Far-right accelerationist terrorism](#)" in Wikipedia's article on

accelerationism) in hopes of destroying our current system of government, white supremacist attacks in the United States are and always have been inherently political. To the significant extent that these attacks target a political system which the attackers see as offering insufficient advantage to whites, they are acts of insurgency, one that might be said to have begun in earnest with the attack on Fort Sumter in 1861, the assassination of President Lincoln at the Civil War's end, or with the reconstruction-era terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan.

"Accelerationism" pairs white supremacist hatred with a belief that America's system of government is beyond reform and must be destroyed. The ideology has been tied to the recent attacks on the US power grid mentioned in this report's introduction: "Notably in 2020, a 14-page document released in a Telegram channel favored by accelerationists groups seeking to speed the overthrow of the US government featured a white supremacist instruction guide to low-tech attacks meant to bring chaos, including how to attack a power grid with guns. ... The writer goes on to frame how massive blackouts would aid in the toppling of society which is a key accelerationist goal." (Miller, 2022). Accelerationism was behind a 2021 plot to blow up an Amazon data center. The would-be perpetrator, Seth Aaron Pendley, claimed to have been among the mob at the January 6th siege at the Capitol. According to the criminal complaint, "Pendley thought this act of destruction would 'provoke a reaction' from the ruling 'oligarchy' that would thereby convince the American people to take up arms against the 'dictatorship.'" (Hoffman, 2022). Accelerationism is also the key idea behind the infamous "Boogaloo" movement, adherents of which killed two law enforcement officers and injured others in two attacks in the Spring of 2020.

A more detailed report would discuss the online culture of radicalization among accelerationists, including the "manifestos" often left behind by racially-motivated mass shooters and the "copycat" nature of these shootings, with one manifesto referencing another.

There seems to have been a conscious, persistent courtship of white supremacists and accelerationists by Team Trump. The neo-nazi "dog whistles" that came from the Trump administration and its allies were clear to those who were sensitive to them, allies and adversaries alike. The 14-word title of a Department of Homeland Security press release, "[We Must Secure The Border And Build The Wall To Make America Safe Again](#)," was an oblique reference to the notorious "14 Words" of the white supremacist credo "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children" (Kalmbacher, 2018). From the street-brawling Proud Boys all the way up to Trump himself, right-wing trolls adopted a somewhat ambiguous "white power" hand sign (see images below) and dared the rest of America to call them out on it (Neiwert, 2018). Trump's Twitter interactions with white supremacist accounts and content were extensive and disturbing (Hathaway, 2016; Sommarlad, 2019; Swasey, 2020).



President Trump; Trump strategist Roger Stone and a group of Proud Boys; Senior Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway

Trump called the white supremacist mob of the “Unite The Right” rally in Charlottesville “very fine people” despite one of their number having murdered a peaceful protester with his car and having injured dozens more. Trump’s chief strategist at the White House was Steve Bannon, one of the founders of the anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant website Breitbart News. Another of Trump’s senior advisers, Stephen Miller, shared the view of white supremacists that white Americans were in danger of being replaced by immigrants (Wilson, 2019). “Miller influenced the editorial direction of the highly trafficked conservative website Breitbart.com, sharing white nationalist and anti-immigrant propaganda with their editors in an effort to buoy Trump’s [2016] run” for the presidency (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.).

The GOP's open flirtation with white supremacists continues well beyond the Trump administration. A staffer for the campaign of prominent presidential candidate Ron DeSantis recently retweeted a video showing DeSantis in front of a Nazi symbol (Palmer, 2023). The office of Congressman Paul Gosar (who had a prominent role in Trump's January 2021 coup attempt and was censured by the House for promoting a video depicting him killing a particularly outspoken and liberal Democratic congresswoman) recently issued a newsletter containing a link to a pro-Hitler web site (Hananoki, 2023). Gosar has often promoted anti-semitic sources on Twitter (Hananoki, 2022).

In the era of Trumpism – in which the mainstream right has not only courted white supremacists, but in which widespread and oft-repeated right-wing propaganda also identifies LGBTQ+ persons with the political opposition on the left, and then attributes the most heinous crimes imaginable to their opposition in general (Rothschild, 2021; Steck *et al*, 2020) but LGBTQ+ persons in particular (Tenbarger, 2022) – attacks on gay and transgender persons might be viewed as part of that same insurgency.

Since the January 6th Capitol siege, not counting smaller attacks on individuals, mass attacks by racists and/or against ethnic or other minorities have taken dozens of lives. One person was killed and several others injured in a mass shooting at a Black Lives Matter protest in Portland Oregon in February 2022. Ten died in a racially-motivated shooting in Buffalo New York in May 2022. Seven died in another such shooting in Highland Park Illinois in July 2022. Five died in a mass shooting at a gay bar in Colorado Springs in November 2022. In May 2023, eight were killed in a mass shooting in Allen Texas perpetrated by a man with Nazi tattoos.

Secondary Characteristics of Insurgency in Relation to Trumpism

Having taken our core definition of insurgency as the attributes agreed on by all three key resources previously identified (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.; U.S. Department of the Army, 2004; U.S. Department of State, 2009), we will now examine some further characteristics of insurgency as outlined by some (but not necessarily all) of these three sources.

Readers skeptical of a “vast right-wing conspiracy” (a phrase made famous in 1998 by Hillary Clinton) may object to this report's juxtaposition of Republican party leadership with racist mass shooters and fascist street gangs. But an insurgency need not be homogenous nor have central leadership. According to *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, “Modern insurgencies are increasingly being recognized as complex matrices of irregular actors with widely differing goals.”

The CIA (Central Intelligence Agency, n. d.) identifies these four stages of an insurgency:

1. **Preinsurgency.** “Leadership emerges in response to domestic grievances or outside influences.”
2. **Organizational.** “Infrastructure built, guerrillas recruited and trained, supplies acquired, and domestic and international support sought.”
3. **Guerilla warfare.** “Hit-and-run tactics used to attack government.”
4. **Mobile conventional warfare.** “Larger units used in conventional warfare mode.”

These stages will of course overlap to some degree, and history will repeat itself. It has been over 150 years since the United States experienced the fourth stage. Memorable third-stage incidents in recent history include:

- The bombings of the US Capitol and the Pentagon by the leftist terrorist group the Weather Underground in 1971-72;
- The bombings of the US Capitol, an FBI office, and multiple military facilities by the Communist terrorist group M19 in the early 1980s (Thulin, 2020);
- The 1995 bombing (in which 168 people died) of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City by right-wing terrorists;
- The 2016 armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge (which will be discussed at greater length below and in Appendix B) by right-wing insurgents; and
- The 2021 siege at the U.S. Capitol (Select Committee, 2022).

Arguably, acts of vandalism at the federal courthouse in Portland in July 2020 might be put into this category as well, if one interprets the intention behind these acts as the overthrow of the Trump government rather than as the expression of outrage at alleged government failures to enforce or observe civil rights laws. The July 2017 shootings perpetrated by an anti-Republican terrorist at a practice session for the annual Congressional baseball game could possibly be interpreted in the same way. The assaults on law enforcement at the White House perimeter during civil rights protests at the end of May 2020 would be more difficult to characterize as being “insurgent” in their intent, although Trump did retreat at the time to a nearby bunker meant as a refuge from terrorist attacks.

Donald Trump’s 2016 candidacy certainly stands out as a stage-one event, and has obvious connection to the 2021 stage-three attack on the Capitol. Any attacks in stages three and four would obviously depend on some type of preparation in stage two. The siege at the Capitol unfolded as far – and no further – than was provided for in terms of recruitment, training, and supply. A thorough assessment of the activities listed in stage two ought to inform our view of what is possible in regards to stages three and four.

So what of stage two? What are the number of potential combatants on the right, how much training do they have, what supplies do they have, what organizational infrastructure have they built, and what domestic and international support do they enjoy? These questions are beyond the scope of this report, and an area for further research; well-considered answers to these would include assessments of:

- The intersection between extremist groups and active or former U.S. military and law enforcement (Anti-Defamation League, 2021; Cooper, 2021; Rubin, 2021). Military-style civilian training among extremists is reported to be of poor quality (Nance, 2022; Neiwert, 2023), but some skills acquired as part of military service would be transferable in an insurgent campaign.
- Firearm ownership among extremist groups and their political allies (see images below)
- Russian sponsorship of extremist propaganda and influence among right-wing politicians (US Department of Justice, 2019), and liason with the National Rifle Association in particular. The NRA sent a delegation to Russia in 2015 to meet with a Putin loyalist who had been sanctioned

by the United States in connection with Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine (Mak, 2017). The details of the meeting are unknown. In 2019, Maria Butina was sentenced to 18 months in prison for her efforts to infiltrate the NRA on behalf of Russia.



Family Christmas photos from Republican congressional representatives Thomas Massie, Andy Ogles, and Lauren Boebert. A study more extensive than the current report would do well to examine current cultural and political trends in regards to assault weapons.

How Serious Is It?

"The most alarming signs ... associated with the development of an insurgency" and indicating a "serious threat" fall into one of six categories, according to the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.). Under these six categories, the CIA lists twenty-eight specific indicators, most of which are not currently evident in the United States. There are six notable exceptions, being as follows:

- *Evidence that the number of sympathizers is growing – for example, people who are not formal members but support demonstrations.* Support and sympathy for defendants in the Capitol siege and for extremist groups such as the Proud Boys is widespread on the political right (Dreisbach, 2022).

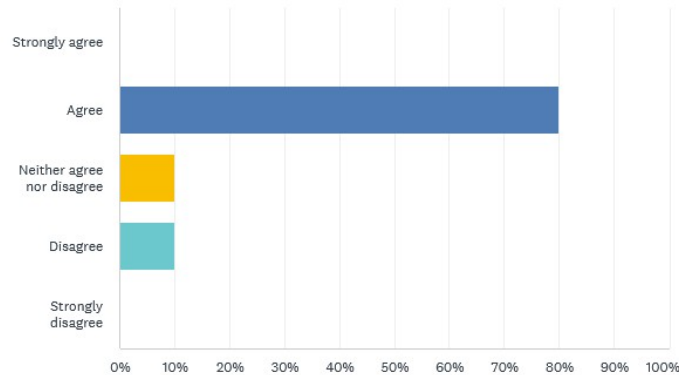
- *Evidence that insurgents have connections with legitimate groups – political parties, labor unions, the church.* QAnon themes were retweeted by Trump during his tenure as president and have been adopted by the Republican party at the national and local levels; the Republican party took no measures to oppose the candidacies/nominations and eventual victories of several dozen candidates associated with the movement (Palmer, 2021; Neiwert, 2023).
- *Emergence of radical violence, including bombings and attacks against government personnel and buildings, essential utilities, symbolic targets, or foreign-owned properties.* The attacks on the Obamas, the Pelosis, the FBI, the Capitol, and public utilities have been mentioned previously. If we include the period before the siege, and during Trump’s presidency (incidents occurring during a time when the term “insurgency” would seem less applicable, but still demonstrating right-wing capabilities for violence and disruption which persist today) we have the Sayoc bombing campaign mentioned previously. Other such incidents during this period included a terrorism arrest at the Hoover Dam in 2018 (attributable to the effects of QAnon propaganda) and a train derailment in 2020 (which had been inspired by conspiracy claims around the COVID-19 vaccine).
- *Overzealous support of land reform, including non-government-sponsored expropriation of land or the establishment of squatters’ encampments.* Two related incidents during the pre-Trump years, a 2014 ranchers’ standoff with the Bureau of Land Management and the 2016 armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, clearly fall into this category and have aspects that overlap with the larger Trumpist insurgency. These two incidents and their relevance to the larger picture are discussed in Appendix B.
- *Production and circulation of large quantities of radical propaganda.* Much has already been written elsewhere about the extreme epidemic of toxic and dangerous right-wing propaganda, and the support it enjoys from mainstream Republicans. A full treatment of this topic is beyond the scope of this report, but the reader is referred to Appendix C for some details.
- *Reports of people receiving training outside the country or of travelers to countries sympathetic to insurgents.* The above-noted NRA visit to Moscow fits in this category, as does a visit to Moscow that same month by General Michael Flynn (Appendix C), during which Flynn sat at Putin’s right hand for a dinner celebrating the 10th anniversary of Russia’s English-language propaganda outlet RT. The NRA donated more to Trump’s 2016 campaign than any other PAC. During this period, the NRA acted as a ‘foreign asset’ for Russia, according to a September 2019 Senate report (Mak, 2019). “NRA Officers and Donors Met with High Level Russian Government Officials and Oligarchs Close to Vladimir Putin on Multiple Occasions,” says the title of a 14-page section of the report (U.S. Senate Committee on Finance Minority Staff, 2019). Last but not least, we must note the Trump Organization’s business in Russia and its satellites, including Trump’s own 2013 visit to Moscow during which he made contacts that would play a role in the infamous 2016 meeting with Natalya Veselnetskaya at Trump Tower.

Discussion

The results of primary research seem to indicate some public awareness of rising extremism, with respondents generally seeing it not as a rising threat on a personal level but as an increasingly likely source of civil unrest. This extremism is not generally viewed as being evident on a particular side of a given issue or set of issue, but rather on both sides of divisive issues.

I am familiar with the term “insurgency.”

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



Most respondents reported being familiar with the term “insurgency” but did not indicate in their free-text responses the applicability of the term to a discussion of likely conflicts.

The secondary research for this report endeavored to investigate a recent history of insurgent attacks without political bias, and found that right-wing attacks have become both more frequent and more violent than those attributable to the political left. This finding would seem to disagree with the perceptions reported in the primary research. This could be due in part to the extensive right-wing campaigns to excuse the excesses on the right, and to accuse leftists of the malevolent behaviors that the right engages in.

This disagreement could also be due to limitations in the sample size and sampling methods of the primary research. No money was budgeted for the survey, and SurveyMonkey.com allows a maximum of ten free questions in a survey. This unfortunate limitation prevents greater insight into the perceptions of respondents. SurveyMonkey also reports maximum of ten survey responses on a free basis, limiting the statistical reliability of the sample data somewhat; in a pool of ten respondents, one outlying result can carry far greater weight than in a pool of one hundred respondents. As results came in, their character did noticeably change over time, and the nature of any responses beyond the initial ten remains unknown.

This report was successful in finding a common core definition of “insurgency” in its three chosen key sources (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.; U.S. Department of the Army, 2004; U.S. Department of State, 2009); in evaluating the applicability of this term to recent events of civil unrest; in outlining other characteristics of insurgency as defined in these key sources; and in identifying many of these characteristics in recent events.

Due to time and space constraints, this report was not able to fully explore many of the ways in which signs of insurgency were evident; nor was it able to discuss the applicability of counterinsurgency techniques to present situations of civil unrest.

What is now evident via this report is that right-wing extremism in the Trump era definitely qualifies as insurgency. Whether it is best understood in this context or whether the violence accompanying Trumpism is to be regarded as a tragic anomaly besetting America's otherwise legitimate political discourse remains a matter of opinion; but the latter position continues to lose credibility. It also seems clear that as an insurgency, Trumpism's most likely path to success is victory at the polls rather than via armed confrontation; the January 2021 attack on the Capitol was disorganized and ineffective even though partisans from all around the country came to Washington knowing the stakes.

Summary and Recommendations

In summary, the United States is experiencing a low-level insurgency and we must not be too hasty to suppose that the kinds of violence we have seen take place in other countries can't happen here.

Future research may build on this report toward the unmet goals referred to in the Discussion section above, for example evaluating the applicability of counterinsurgency techniques to present situations of civil unrest.

The policies of the Biden administration seem consistent with the principles of counterinsurgency, though these policies are not presented in those terms. Prosecution of insurgent crimes is important, and is taking place; but in some cases the government's most effective strategy is to remedy the conditions that promote radicalization. This seems to be the strategy of the current administration: to act and to claim to be acting in the interest of all citizens, as it does in its focus on the economy. The Biden administration also seems to have been countering this insurgency in the information-warfare space by working with social media companies to combat disinformation online.

Further research might also more deeply examine Russia's role in the insurgency. There has been a near-perfect historical overlap between Trump's apparent Russian grooming (2013), rise and prominence (2016-present) in US politics on one hand; and Putin's operations in Ukraine (2014-present) on the other hand. Recent developments raise a question of whether Putin's recent losses in Ukraine (including his falling-out with Viktor Prigozhin, the man responsible for Russia's 2016 pro-Trump social media campaign) may change the nature of Russia's information operations in the United States in support of Trumpism, and if so, whether we might expect to see less extremism in US politics as a result.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Questions

Multiple-choice answers are shown below with the number of respondents who chose each.

For the following four questions, the term “demographic” should be taken to mean race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation.

- 1.1 I feel that Americans are less likely to experience harassment due to their particular demographic now than they would have ten years ago.

Strongly agree: 0; **Agree: 5**; **Neither agree nor disagree: 3**; **Disagree: 2**; Strongly Disagree: 0;

- 1.2 I feel that Americans are less likely to experience discrimination due to their particular demographic now than they would have ten years ago.

Strongly agree: 0; **Agree: 4**; **Neither agree nor disagree: 2**; **Disagree: 4**; Strongly Disagree: 0;

- 1.3 I feel less likely to experience harassment due to my particular demographic now than I would have ten years ago.

Strongly agree: 0; **Agree: 5**; **Neither agree nor disagree: 4**; **Disagree: 1**; Strongly Disagree: 0;

- 1.4 I feel less likely to experience discrimination due to my particular demographic now than I would have ten years ago.

Strongly agree: 0 **Agree: 4**; **Neither agree nor disagree: 2**; **Disagree: 4**; Strongly Disagree: 0;

- 1.5 Americans are less likely to have extreme political beliefs and motivations now than they were ten years ago.

Strongly agree: 0; **Agree: 1**; Neither agree nor disagree: 0; **Disagree: 6**; **Strongly Disagree: 3**;

- 1.6 The American system of government faces a lesser threat from armed rebellion or mass uprising now than it did ten years ago.

Strongly agree: 0; Agree: 0; **Neither agree nor disagree: 4**; **Disagree: 6**; Strongly Disagree: 0;

- 1.7 I am familiar with the term “insurgency.”

Strongly agree: 0; **Agree: 8**; **Neither agree nor disagree: 1**; **Disagree: 1**; Strongly Disagree: 0;

- 2.1 I identify as:

conservative: 1; **liberal: 4**; **other: 5**;

Responses to open-ended questions were as follows:

3.1 Do you feel that in the past ten years, a particular segment of American society (a race, gender, political preference, profession or otherwise) has become more likely to harass, discriminate against, or use violence against others (for example: minorities, professions, or an opposing political party)? If so, which segment and how?

- political party and gender.
- political preference
- It seems like Americans in general have become more willing to use violence against others. Both politically and non-politically.
- The people who make up the far right and the far left are the segment of the population that are most likely to engage in this type of behavior.
- I would say that this is happening in general. I cannot specify a certain segment.
- I've found most segments of society are more likely to harass each other in general
- Yes. There seems to be a lot of uproar against and by a few groups. Just off the top of my head I would say police officers, black lives matter, and Trump proponents
- I don't feel as if any race, profession, or political agenda is getting "massively targeted". I do think that race/identity quotas for things like hiring could snowball and become a serious issue down the road. In other words, we are all born to our race. We cannot simply shame others for something they can't change.

3.2 Do you feel that in the past ten years, a particular segment of American society has become more likely to engage in armed rebellion or mass uprising?)? If so, which segment and how?

- nurses
- political preference
- White supremacists remain the most likely to stage an armed rebellion in my opinion
- Yes, the extremes of each political party are the people who are more likely to engage in armed rebellion or mass uprising. The January 6th insurrection was the right uprising and the protests in Portland and Seattle, which promoted defunding the police, was the left uprising
- Again, I would say that this is happening in general. I cannot specify a certain segment.
- I do not.
- Black lives matter and Trump proponents
- Well, in my opinion, the most likely "segment" of American society to rebel would be the Political Right. There are many good reasons as to why they would do this. Everything from money laundering, cheating, flat-out lying to Americans, running our economy into the ground, being immune to the law, and trying to drag us into WW3 with Ukraine and Russia (plus MUCH more) is what the Political Left is "currently" pushing. Not to mention trying to strip our 1st and 2nd amendments like it's just no big deal. I heard an excellent quote from a congress member that sums this up, "If the Left wants take away the 2nd amendment after this country's 247 years of existence, they are probably planning on doing something you would shoot them for". It's important to mention I sit in the middle of both political isles. I simply use information around me to make original political beliefs

Appendix B: The “Sagebrush Insurgency”

A report commissioned by the Washington state legislature (the “Rampart Group report”) identifies two armed standoffs staged by ranchers as part of an “insurgency” in the American west with roots in the legislative “Sagebrush Rebellion” of the late 1970s (Rampart Group, 2019). The first incident took place near Bunkerville Nevada in April 2014 as the Bureau of Land Management arrived to remove privately-owned cattle being grazed illegally on public lands. Rancher Cliven Bundy, who had been in a legal dispute with BLM over the use of the area for years, led an armed protest against the roundup. Some of these armed protesters caused a two-hour shutdown of the nearby interstate highway. No shots were fired and no arrests were made. A second incident involving Bundy and his sons Ryan and Ammon followed in January 2016 at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in southeastern Oregon. Ammon Bundy led an armed party who took over the site’s headquarters to protest the convictions of a pair of local ranchers and the federal ownership of land which Bundy believed rightly belonged to the states. After a month-long standoff, over two dozen insurgents, including the Bundys, were arrested and charged with felony conspiracy. The Rampart Group report characterizes both of these incidents as acts of “terrorism.”

What, then, is the relevance of these incidents to the “bigger picture” of the nationwide Trumpist insurgency? The answer lies in the Bundys’ militia connections and the support their rebellion enjoyed from a group of Republican politicians calling themselves the Coalition of Western States (COWS). One of their members (Matt Shea, details to follow) has been accused of domestic terrorism, and another is Mark Finchem, the aforementioned Arizona legislator who traveled to Washington DC to support Trump’s attempted coup. COWS members visited the Harney County courthouse in 2016, intending to convince the sheriff to support the militants at Malheur. They were led by Matt Shea, a Washington state legislator who in 2014 had travelled to Bunkerville to support the earlier armed protest (Sepulveda, 2016). Shea’s political career ended in 2021 after the Rampart Group report asserted that he not only “planned, engaged in, and promoted a total of three armed conflicts of political violence against the United States government” (Romo, 2019) but also that he held accelerationist beliefs, “engaged in and supported the training of adults and children to fight a Holy war and/or civil war,” privately advocated for a genocidal theocracy, and held meetings to plan for the creation of a “provisional government” (Rampart Group, 2019). He cooperated extensively with several militias, including the Three Percenters and Oath Keepers groups implicated in the Capitol attack, and was seen meeting personally with Oath Keepers leader Steward Rhodes (who was convicted with several of his group members of seditious conspiracy in connection with the attack). In this light the Trump insurgency appears to be a coalition of multiple smaller, pre-existing armed insurgencies, none of which presented a high-level threat on their own.

Appendix C: Right-Wing Propaganda

Hate speech abounds on social media, with some major tech companies working to eradicate it and too many of them determined to give it a platform. Other forms of toxic and dangerous right-wing propaganda are spread by media outlets and Republicans at all levels of leadership.

Fox News, a major media outlet, worked in undisguised partnership with the Trump administration and Trump's 2020 campaign, then supported Trump's claims of election fraud. Lesser and more extreme right-wing propaganda networks such as InfoWars still enjoy immense popularity. InfoWars has repeatedly described American liberals as "demonic" and made outlandish claims of left-wing conspiracy which have inspired countless instances of harassment (against, for example, the parents of children murdered at Sandy Hook elementary) and at least one armed attack (the Pizzagate incident mentioned above). Right Side Broadcasting Network has between one and two million subscribers on YouTube and focuses on coverage of Trump rallies. In July 2023, RSBN interviewed a rallygoer who expressed a wish to kill President Biden, all leftists, and even anti-Trump Republicans. "... every one of 'em! Kill 'em all! Kill 'em all!" he said. "I agree with you on that!" the interviewer responded.

The QAnon movement is a less-centralized propaganda network and has also been written about extensively. It continues to spread even on social media sites such as Facebook that are attempting to suppress it. Q-affiliated Facebook accounts are often suspended, only to reappear under another name and with the "friends" of the former account assisting in the quick rebuilding of the network; one such Facebook user, "Dave," boasts of having survived dozens of such suspensions. I found him on Facebook after loading a leaked list of Three Percenter emails into the "contacts" list of a burner phone, then connecting that contacts list to a new Facebook account and allowing Facebook to identify my "friends" for me. After viewing his shared photos, I soon recognized "Dave" from a picture I had seen elsewhere, taken in Washington DC on January 6th, in which he was wearing the same Three-Percenter shirt. With some help from other researchers, I was able to identify him and his close friend "QAnon John" Sabal (more regarding him below) among the mob on restricted grounds during the riot.

The FBI issued a warning in 2019 that the spread of QAnon propaganda was likely to result in violent crime. They were right. Writing for *Foreign Policy*, Emily Brumfield-Hessen had this to say about QAnon and related "conspiratorial delusions" of the right:

QAnon has lured millions of people into a cult, including half of all Trump supporters ... Normal people are being recruited into fringe groups, immersed in alternate realities, and convinced that the world is a terrifying place ruled by child-molesting cannibals and the servants of demons ... Over and over, irresponsible politicians spread conspiracies [sic], use violent rhetoric, and claim that dissenters are puppets of fake news conjured up by enemies of the people. When their followers take things to their logical violent conclusion, they feign ignorance and issue weak condemnations while the extremists celebrate and interpret their comments as directives from their leaders. In the absence of real political or legal consequences for their actions, they only stand to benefit from this pattern. (Brumfield-Hessen, 2019).

The essence of the QAnon myth is essentially "Pizzagate" written large: that the Democrats/liberals are trafficking children, and that some day – any day now – Trump will expose and *jail or execute them all*. Attached to this myth are many other lesser beliefs, some of which are subject to debate among the faithful due to the vagueness of the Q "canon," a series of pseudonymous internet posts.

QAnon's role in the Republican party has gone from being described in the press as an "embrace" that extended beyond Trump's own early support (Rosenberg & Haberman, 2020) to a "virtually complete" takeover (Silverman, 2022).

One of the leading figures within QAnon is General Michael Flynn, Trump's first national security adviser. Among the promoters of the "Pizzagate" conspiracy theory that preceded QAnon, Flynn's security clearance was revoked in 2017 due to his alarming ties to Russia. Soon afterward he was prosecuted by Robert Mueller's office for lying to the FBI during the Justice Department's investigation of Russian influence in the 2016 campaign. While awaiting sentencing after his guilty plea, Flynn posted a video of himself taking a "QAnon oath" on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/genflynn/status/1279590652200849409>). During this time, Flynn popularized the phrase "digital warriors" in QAnon circles, both describing and encouraging people such as "Dave" (above) to spread the word on social media despite repeated attempts at censorship.

After being pardoned by Trump in November 2020, Flynn took to social media to call for a suspension of the constitution and the imposition of martial law to overturn the results of the presidential election. He appeared at the pro-Trump "Stop the Steal" rally in Washington in December, and was part of Trump's key strategists in the Willard Hotel "War Room" on the night preceding the attack on the Capitol. QAnon symbols were prominent among the attackers. In May 2021, Flynn appeared at a QAnon conference in Dallas organized by John Sabal (see above). The recent military coup in Myanmar had been a subject of great interest among attendees, one of whom asked Flynn "why what happened in [Myanmar] can't happen here." Flynn responded: "No reason. I mean, it should happen here. No reason. That's right."

Flynn's military background has prepared him well for the sort of insurgency he is now leading, and he is by no means ignorant of the consequences of his demagoguery. His new book, *The Citizen's Guide to Fifth Generation Warfare*, contains a diagram labeled "How to Make People Kill People," showing precisely the path he is leading America down (see image) while accusing his enemies of his own destructive behavior.

