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The Origin of the Militia Movement

Numerous groups in United States history have formed around a nostalgic vision of the past, around the belief that their own time is inferior to some earlier version of American society. Their idealized past is most often one where white men held exclusive political and economic power relative to today's increasingly inclusive framework. Modern domestic militias are one such nostalgic group, but two things separate them from many others in this lineage. First, militias are not necessarily overtly racist (in contrast to, for example, the KKK's open embrace of racism and racial terror). Some units include racism as an ideological component, while others spurn racism and even attempt engagement with anti-racist measures in their communities. Second, the modern militia movement began less as a backlash to growing equality or growing social power of other demographic groups, although such backlash has been relevant for understanding the growth of the movement in recent years during both President Obama's and President Trump's administrations. The movement's origins can nonetheless best be considered a response to three specific events that inflamed their fears of the federal government: Ruby Ridge, Waco, and the passage of the Brady Bill.

Ruby Ridge was a 1992 standoff between FBI agents and the Weaver family in Idaho. The siege resulted in the deaths of Mrs. Weaver, the Weaver's teenage son, a family friend, and a federal agent. Many citizens across the political spectrum were horrified at the news coverage of the siege and worried about government overreach resulting from what many believed to be exaggerated charges. Senate hearings regarding the standoff ultimately found that federal agents had acted unconstitutionally and with excessive force, and several federal agents were professionally disciplined for their roles in the siege. Randy Weaver was acquitted of the most serious charges that had formed the basis of the FBI's intervention, and the surviving members of the Weaver family received a large civil settlement.

In 1993, a siege at a Waco, Texas compound exacerbated concerns about growing federal tyranny. Here, federal agents targeted a small religious sect called Branch Davidians for two separate raids, both of which went poorly and cumulatively resulted in the deaths of at least 75 people, including 4 ATF officers. The second of these raids occurred during the first week of Randy Weaver's trial, keeping both events at the forefront of people's attention and mutually compounding distrust in the government. Official investigations eventually concluded that the FBI had again acted improperly at Waco, this time losing evidence and not acting within clearly-defined hostage scenario protocols.

Later in 1993, the Brady Bill (formally, the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act) was passed and signed into law. Some people believed that this legislation was meant to be the first step toward severely limiting individual gun rights. Some further believed that the Brady Bill and subsequent, anticipated legislation was specifically intended to curtail their ability to protect themselves or their families against the very kind of government tyranny they perceived to be exemplified in Ruby Ridge and Waco.

The Brady Bill went into effect in February 1994, just three months before the official inception of the modern militia movement. The movement started in Montana and Michigan before quickly spreading to other states. People who joined militias at this time were so alarmed by the government's actions in the above three events that they felt they should arm themselves,

mentally prepare, and practice to prevent future violence from the government. Many members at that time believed that there was a high probability of violent confrontation originating—in their view—from the government. Others believed that their collective and visible actions might alone be enough to "remind the government that it serves the people, and not the other way around," as one member told me. This emphasis on self-defense and protection as a primary militia goal is one reason that we continue to see men comprising the bulk of the movement even today, because men continue to be disproportionately tasked with the roles of protector and provider.

Militia Trajectory to the Modern Day

Having accurate counts of either militia groups or militia members at any given time is very difficult for at least two reasons. First, some groups optimistically inflate reports of their formal membership numbers. They often consider people who have only attended a single event as a confirmed supporter, even if that event was an information session rather than a training event that required gear or other more visible and verifiable markers of dedication. Few militia units maintain membership rosters to support their size claims, saying they fear that such a list could be used by the government or others to unjustly target them.

Second, units are also constantly fracturing because of internal personality disputes. One unit may start and have members quickly calve off to other units for a variety of reasons. The remaining members might then merge with yet another group or, alternatively, cease their militia participation altogether. Large, stable groups may exist for years—in rare cases, even decades—while smaller groups may have lifespans of only a few weeks.

Thus, even if it were theoretically possible to obtain a perfectly accurate count of militias and their members today, that list would rapidly become outdated because of the internal nature of the militia movement. Additionally, some units only exist online. Their websites or social media pages sometimes aspirationally convey a strength and presence that has no in-person backing, making it difficult to use public pages as an accurate indicator of unit size and activity.

Despite the difficulties obtaining precise numbers, we can still follow the movement's general trends in both size and intensity. In late 1994/early 1995, the Michigan Militia alone boasted a membership size of 10,000. Given the fervor of that moment, that number is likely close to reality. Membership numbers in most other states probably ranged from a few hundred to a few thousand. Michigan had charismatic, visible leaders who were successful in quickly organizing more of an organized, top-down structure for militia units than was true in many other places

Membership numbers did not stay that high for long. After the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995, members of Michigan's militia were investigated for possible links to bomber Timothy McVeigh. Following the bombing and, even more so, the subsequent Congressional hearings that proved embarrassing for militia leaders, the movement nationally lost all but the most dedicated members. The membership in Michigan dropped to, at most, a few hundred through the late 1990s, according to long-term member reports that are compatible with archival communications that I have examined from that time. The militia became what sociologists call a movement in abeyance, where inactive former members and potential new members could still easily

reorganize if something new happened to activate their underlying concerns about government overreach.

We next saw a surge in militia size in 1999. People became concerned about the possibility of global economic and social collapse resulting from speculated computer difficulties in "Y2K." Some people reached out to lingering militia groups or started their own units for help stockpiling, farmsteading, or otherwise preparing for potential catastrophe.

Once disaster failed to happen at the turn of the millennium, most of those newer members fell away, again resulting in a movement that was largely inactive except for a dedicated few. Long-term members report a similar, temporary increase in membership immediately after the 9/11 terror attacks, as some people were similarly searching for a way to feel safe and prepared, with some wanting to symbolically protect a nation under threat.

The movement did not truly return or reestablish a stable membership base until early 2009. Many pundits have attributed this renewal to President Obama's inauguration. His administration was indeed important for spurring the foundation of both the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters. During my fieldwork, I directly observed and talked with members who joined during this time, either in anticipation of or shortly after Obama's election. These new members told me that their concerns about gun control, immigration policy, and socialism spurred their decisions to seek out an organization they believed to oppose those issues. These stated motivating concerns of opposition to increasingly liberal political policies precisely echoed those of militia members who joined under Democrat Bill Clinton's administration. However, it is impossible to completely rule out racism-based motives for some members who joined during either period. Even members who think of themselves as anti-racist may subscribe to elements of xenophobia, believing immigrants to be a negative economic and cultural influence. Some militia members, for example, told me they believe immigrants "unfairly" use social benefits like welfare or that they "demand special privileges" like medical care that members believe U.S. citizens pay for, but immigrants do not. Such sentiments, where immigrants are understood to be fundamentally and unchangeably different from U.S. citizens can easily be stoked into a broader racism. Non-immigrant demographic groups can be included under this framework of fear or hatred if members also start to see them as un-American because of their actions or political beliefs. This expanding framework can also create increased opportunities for militias to have greater agreement and collaboration with other groups, including those who are overtly racist and prone to violent actions, as they increasingly perceive threats to be shared across those group lines.

Militia experts do typically expect to see an increase, even if not a stable one, in militia activity during Democratic Presidential administrations relative to Republican ones. Militia adherents tend not to like either major party (instead describing themselves as Libertarians or Constitutionlists), but have a stronger negative response to Democrats because members see them as a greater threat to the values they hold most dear. Many of the men who joined in response to Obama only attended a handful of meetings, some saying that gun control legislation had not been immediately implemented as they had feared when distancing themselves from the militia movement.

In my observation, the primary driver of new membership in 2009, particularly of stable, long-term membership, was not Obama's presence; rather, it was the Department of Homeland Security's report on rightwing extremism. This report, first leaked in April 2009, discussed the possibility of returning veterans evolving into violent terrorists after being recruited to militias and other nostalgic groups. It stated that some groups may specifically seek out veterans to enhance members' capacities for violence, and generally employed imprecise language that blurred distinctions between veterans as a whole and veterans facing specific challenges, as well as distinctions between overtly racist groups and other recruiting organizations.

These claims angered former service members, especially veterans who had recently returned from the Iraq War. According to what these new members told me, they interpreted the report as a direct attack on their character. Many believed it described *all* veterans as racist or as a violent threat to citizens. They believed they were being depicted as somehow irretrievably damaged from their time in the service and as unable to reintegrate back into society. Some said they were being treated exactly as Vietnam veterans had been, reporting that they believed they had been put into a losing situation, blamed for an undesirable outcome, and left without any support when they returned home.

One long-term unit leader excitedly told me, "This is what it should have looked like years ago!" when he saw his own group grow in size from half a dozen regular attendees to about forty consistent attendees, an increase that happened immediately after the report's release. The majority of those new members were recently-returned service members. A few were their supporters—family members as well as other veterans whose service had ended many years prior—all people who wanted to express solidarity with those returning veterans. That general pattern of increased and stable participation from individuals who were incensed by the DHS report matched what I directly witnessed in several Michigan groups, what I observed online in general social media patterns, and what groups in other states reported.

Some of these new members said they adopted an anti-government stance for the first time in response to this report. Others said they had already developed one from their service experiences and had been looking for an outlet for their frustrations. All told me that they wanted to join something like a militia to stand up to the tyranny they perceived as coming from the federal government. Much like those people who became members after Ruby Ridge and Waco, these new members believed that arming themselves, having continuing connections with other veterans and those who support them would be a tangible way to demonstrate their loyalty to the nation and its principles.

In effect, the report on extremization produced the exact sort of radicalization it had predicted. These men, however, did not see themselves as extremists. They believed they were joining patriotic organizations to fight extremism and tyranny that was originating from government actors who were ungrateful for their service. They asserted that a government that did not recognize the difference between extremists and patriots could not be trusted.

Militia attendance remained high following the release of this report and even withstood the arrest and trial of the so-called Hutaree militia in Michigan. This group was accused of plotting

to murder a police officer and then use his funeral as a venue to murder many more police officers. This group's arrest did not have a cooling effect on the movement for two reasons. First, because other Michigan militia groups saw the Hutaree as an outlier, as not a "real" militia, in contrast to their own units' purpose and actions. As an attempt to prove their differences, members of two separate units reported having cooperated with law enforcement by giving them information about Hutaree activities long before their arrests, assertions that were largely confirmed during the trial. Second, Hutaree members were eventually acquitted of most serious charges, feeding into narratives of some other states' units that the charges had been disingenuous or at least exaggerated all along. Militia numbers generally remained inflated relative to the pre-2008 era, though attendance again petered off through Obama's administration when challenges to gun rights and other ideological touch points never strongly materialized.

The Militia During President Trump's Administration

Heading into the 2016 Presidential election, new adherents joined when they feared Hillary Clinton would win. This is as we would expect given the historical pattern of stronger militia response to democratic administrations, but membership continued to climb even after President Trump won and took office. Much of Trump's messaging resonated with fears that these members have, particularly fears about immigrants or other outsiders seeking to change our culture. Having their fears legitimated, rather than allayed, meant that members became even more strongly convinced of their need for militia participation instead of being able to comparatively trust a Republican administration to protect their interests.

Membership numbers continued to swell as the pandemic hit the United States and created economic and other uncertainties. States where democratic governors enacted strong lockdown measures or mask mandates resulted in particularly strong militia interest, fueled by people who were once more worried about government tyranny and about what they described as the beginning of a "slippery slope" for civilians they believed to be uncritically "following orders." One such group felt so threatened that they allegedly constructed an elaborate plot to kidnap Michigan's governor and put her on trial for treason.

Racial unrest in the wake of George Floyd's murder also contributed to militia interest. Some militia units believed that public attention to Mr. Floyd's death would be an opportunity to oppose police and what they perceive as increasing state power, although most of these units quickly shifted their narrative. When riots and confrontations between various actors at these events began dominating news cycles, these same units insisted these conflicts were instigated by groups who were only interested in spreading anarchy, not racial justice.

These units then turned to discussions of how to oppose the spread of supposedly anarchist organizations, a shift that quickly led to greater cooperation across militias and other nostalgic groups in both online and in-person spaces. Militia groups who had traditionally and conscientiously spurned neo-Nazis, Proud Boys, and other overtly racist or violent organizations now perceived an urgent, common interest with them. Members from all these organizations were visible at the same protests nationwide, at least temporarily putting aside differences to fight what they believed to be a common enemy and, in so doing, creating opportunities for increasingly shared dialogue and ideology. In this timeframe, the militia movement publicly evinced more overt racism and anti-immigrant rhetoric than had been true for at least 20 years.

Social media deplatforming (especially Facebook deplatforming) in the fall of 2020 severely disrupted these organizations. Groups turned to a variety of new platforms but lost many members in a struggle to attract prior members to the same virtual space. The platform Parler temporarily became one of the most popular, and it was on this site where much of the open discussion occurred regarding plans attempting to “stop the steal” after President Trump failed to be reelected.

January 6th, 2021

Current public data indicates that the majority of participants who were involved in the January 6th, 2021, incursion of the capital building were previously unaffiliated with militia groups and instead probably should be considered lone actors with shared ideological perspectives and a willingness to work together toward a common end. Nonetheless, some militia organizations were heavily involved, as ongoing legal cases indicate. Some of the lone actors may have been looking for a more permanent and structured organization to reinforce their ideology. Had the law enforcement response to the insurrectionists not been so swift or visible, membership in a variety of nostalgic groups could have easily grown.

Instead, because of the legal and general public backlash to the violence of that day, many militia groups experienced further membership losses, continuing the trajectory that deplatforming had initiated. Departing members wanted to avoid further government scrutiny and negative public perceptions. Nationally, many of the larger in-person groups have all but disbanded. As of fall 2021, most groups regardless of size are still struggling to regain a consistent social media footing. Militia groups that are still active on certain online platforms may have limited in-person activity, yet may simultaneously represent some of the more extreme ideological positions of the lingering movement. Other smaller units that see themselves as law abiding continue their in-person events, but with less of a public presence. Despite this general downturn, it would be a mistake to assume that the militia movement is making its last gasp. Former members’ underlying fears and ideological positions remain, such that sociopolitical events or strong leaders may again easily bring them out of relative abeyance and into action.

Defining Militia Ideology

The federal government was the most consistent and central figure in understanding the growth of and ideology in the militia movement in the 1990s and remains so today. Militia members believe the government to be wasteful, overly large, and inherently corrupt. They are not particularly trusting of local or state levels of government, but have the most skepticism (and sometimes outright animosity) toward the federal level, which members say is most distant from constituents and therefore the most subject to politicians’ personal interests.

Not all militia members are looking for a fight with the government; most, in fact, adamantly insist that they want to avoid anything resembling such a destructive conflict. Some members are past or current government employees and even crack jokes about how they “didn’t” realize” how much they hate themselves whenever they hear over-broad descriptions of militia beliefs.

The most extreme members, however, truly do hate the federal government, believing it to be fundamentally antagonistic toward their own interests. These are the same members who, in my

opinion, are the most likely to construct or at least fantasize about violent plots. Government officials, including law enforcement officers, are often the target of such plots. Generally speaking, Democrats are most likely to face vitriol and possible threats from extreme militia members because they tend to endorse political and social policies that are more removed from members' ideals than do Republicans. Democrats who are women may face special risk from some members believe in traditional gender roles; for them, women in power who are seen as unjustly controlling men and their civil liberties may be unbearable. Officials of any party or demographic group could nonetheless be targeted when extremist members perceive them as participating in tyranny.

Extreme members who believe that confrontation with the government is inevitable sometimes seek to accelerate that confrontation. They want to take a proactive and offensive approach, hoping to initiate violence to have the temporary advantage of surprise and to bring about a new power structure that is more aligned with their vision of America. They believe their actions will “awaken” more citizens to both the need and opportunity to rise up and wrest power from the government. Such thinking, often referred to as a type of accelerationism, undergirded the response that militia members who identified with the Boogaloo ideology had to George Floyd's murder in summer 2020. This ideology generally means that adherents are looking for an opportunity to initiate a new American Revolution, though precise motives and desired outcomes can vary. Boogaloo affiliates openly talked on social media about joining protests with Black Americans and fighting to limit police powers. Some hoped merely to work through the legal system, but other accelerationist members advocated for murdering police officers as a more direct way of disrupting a system they believe to be fundamentally corrupt.

Accelerationism is often fueled by conspiratorial thinking, which has long been associated with the militia movement. In the 1990s, it was common for militia members to talk about the New World Order (NWO) conspiracy theory. This is the belief, in short, that powerful global elites, primarily in politics, are all connected to each other and somehow conspire against the interests of average citizens. This theory commonly includes open antisemitism or at least anti-semitic elements. Militias of the 90s sometimes believed that their trainings were being monitored by black helicopters, looked directly to the movie *Red Dawn* as inspiration, and generally expected a confrontation with the government to occur at a moment's notice.

Most members I have encountered in the last decade actively ridicule the comparatively few members who still openly endorse such NWO beliefs. The overarching perspective about the government has instead been that officials are collectively too inept to run such a coherent international cabal, especially one that would have a meaningful impact on average citizens. Nonetheless, fears of corruption influencing the political system share similar features with the traditional NWO framing. In recent years, militia members have been among the people who have fallen for various QAnon conspiracy fantasies that insist that Democrats, specifically, have organized networks harming powerless but patriotic citizens. This shift demonstrates how the conspiratorial focus has shifted from unknown, international outsiders to the idea of a known—and targetable—internal enemy

Militia members have most consistently bought into unsubstantiated theories regarding pedophilia rings, stolen elections, and false flags. “False flag” refers to the claim that someone,

typically a government actor, initiates some crisis in a way that it can be blamed on a different group and used to implement harmful legislation or practices. Although militia members may label a variety of incidents (including January 6th Capitol incursion) as false flag events, they most frequently employ the concept with mass shooting incidents, which some believe to be acts of theater intended to eliminate private firearms ownership.

All militia members I have encountered believe that the Second Amendment is effectively sacred. They say that Amendment sets the United States apart from other nations and, in practice, is what allows US citizens to have all other rights. They believe mass firearm ownership is the only measure that prevents government officials from capriciously infringing on property rights or even on the First Amendment. This is a major reason why militia groups prioritize their own firearm ownership and proficiency. It is also why they interpret any efforts to place restrictions on firearms ownership as an alarming signal of more infringements to come. Most do not believe that restricting legal firearm access will reduce school shootings, for example, but do believe that such restrictions will result in an unarmed citizenry that is captive to the whims of self-serving government officials.

Even members who say they reject conspiracy theories have had a tendency in recent years to follow them and share them on social media pages, saying they want other people to be able to evaluate them for themselves or that they want to “research” and be aware of the theories “just in case” they end up having an element of truth. This means that even members who consider themselves as disengaged from conspiracy theories may become susceptible to them through habituated online exposure.

Additional Information on the Three Percenters

Two militia world groups that did have a number of participants in the January 6th incursion are the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters. Both groups began at least in part as a response to fears of the Obama administration—i.e., fears related to communism or socialism commonly induced by a democratic administration. Both groups initially started as online-only organizations, connecting people through message boards and encouraging individuals to align with their respective philosophies.

The Oathkeepers are meant to appeal to current and former military and law enforcement, desiring to underscore their respective oaths to serve citizens, to uphold their rights, and not to obey orders from a corrupt or anti-citizenry government. In recent years, the Oathkeepers have evolved into more of an organized and in-person organization with units that hold training exercises and publicly engage with high-profile events. Different units in the Oathkeepers may have closer connections to visible leaders like Stewart Rhodes than others and may also differ in the degree to which they adhere to principles or plans put forth on the national website.

Three Percenters rely on the claim that only 3% of the early colonists stood up to Britain during the American Revolution. They claim that their members are similarly unique among the population because they are aware of and willing to fight government tyranny while expecting their small numbers to have a disproportionately patriotic and noble impact. Three Percenter adherence largely serves to underscore ideology that pre-exists in other militia organizations. It has tended to be the case that militia members belong to a local unit with its own name that tacks

on a Three Percenter label to capture their ideological agreement as a sort of double affiliation. Some groups do exclusively label themselves as a Three Percenter organization and enhance their perceived legitimacy through regular participation on national message boards or other websites. Nonetheless, in practice the Three Percenters have not had a stable, top-down structure where different state groups truly report up a chain of national command. Groups may occasionally coordinate some actions, but most operate completely independently and in accordance with the idea that militia units should be engaged more with community than national needs. They set their own agendas and training regimens while maintaining varying degrees of contact with each other on social media so that they could attempt to coordinate more organized action in the event of some perceived emergency.

Scope of the Threat: A Militia Typology & Veteran Recruitment

To understand the scope of the threat that the militia movement may pose, it is important to understand that there has traditionally been a two-part typology within that movement, identified by historian Robert Churchill. Constitutionalist units are those that want to maintain a literal reading of the Constitution, who see themselves as taking a defensive, as opposed to offensive, stance against the government. They typically have a strong public presence, are generally law-abiding, often cooperate with local and federal law enforcement, and pose a very low risk of violence or other threats against anyone. Millenarian units capture the extreme components of the militia movement. They tend to operate more secretively, invest heavily in a variety of conspiracy theories, and often believe it is their responsibility to initiate violence against the government or other threats.

Although millenarian groups have only comprised about 10% of all militia groups until recently, most, if not all, of the groups that have been publicly identified as having engaged in violent actions or plots have been millenarian. What is concerning is that in recent years, the proportion of millenarian groups has risen, with perhaps as much as 25% of units meeting millenarian criteria leading into fall 2020. This shift occurred as members who had previously held a constitutionalist outlook became more radicalized via conspiracy theories and rhetoric about social unrest.

Both constitutionalist and millenarian militias idealize veterans from all branches of service, seeing them as true patriots. This adulation most applies to veterans who have seen combat but encompasses all who have honorably served. Both types of units include members without service experiences who desire to learn tactical and survival skills from veterans. These non-veteran members also like to vicariously experience the so-called glory days of service, listening to stories of training hardships or of harrowing adventures during deployment. In units I have studied, about 40% of militia leaders and 30% of other members have some degree of military experience.

Some militia units actively recruit veterans, and, from my observations, the most extreme millenarian units are most likely to prioritize veteran recruitment as an urgent unit goal. Millenarian units in earlier years were particularly successful in attracting disaffected Vietnam veterans who were still angry with the treatment they received following their service. More recently, some millenarian groups have also succeeded in attracting veterans who have similar attitudes about their service experiences in the Middle East. Extremist units who want to attack

government officials or any other target may specifically seek out veterans who have familiarity creating and using explosives. In other words, they want to weaponize these veterans and their skillset to kill or otherwise harm perceived enemies.

Another too-often overlooked element of the dynamic between militias and military veterans is how many units do no active recruitment whatsoever. Potential members, including veterans, instead proactively seek them out. Veterans often join with good intentions, primarily looking for a place, in their view, to continue serving their country by using and sharing their skills. Militia participation can be a substitute for the camaraderie they experienced while enlisted, giving them connections to others with similar experiences and values. Above all, many of these veterans seem to be looking for a place where they can have a renewed feeling that their service is appreciated.

Veterans often quickly move into leadership positions in constitutionalist groups where they help set the agenda and tone for events, establishing goals for their unit's target shooting or setting up land navigation courses, for example. In millenarian groups, veterans are highly valued but may be more likely to remain outside of leadership roles, instead looking to others to set the unit agenda and risking being pushed into more violent action than they anticipated when first joining.

Most veteran militia members that I have met say that they have no desire to harm their country. Some even report that they attended events of one unit, found it too extreme or too volatile, and left to find another that they believed to be more aligned with their interests in preserving and sharing skills, especially target shooting. Others, however, may be so upset from their recent experiences, feeling betrayed by their government and disconnected from their loved ones, that they may latch onto any group that makes them feel welcome and valued. Millenarian groups can use conspiracism to further stoke the anger and fear of such veterans, radicalizing them even further and possibly pushing them into violent plotting.

The reality is that all militia units, regardless of their place in the typology, vehemently complain about the government. General comments about all officials being "rotten" or even "needing to be hanged" are frequently thrown around during meetings when members are complaining about new, perceived infringements to personal liberty or complaining about "the direction" of the country as a whole. It is typically fairly easy to determine whether a unit is more constitutionalist or millenarian (although this task is complicated by deplatforming). In contrast, it can be nearly impossible without insider connections to determine which millenarian units may merely be fantasizing about violent action and which ones intend serious harm as they search for explosives-knowledgeable members. Even millenarian units that recruit veterans with no concrete plan or apparent violent intent have the potential to evolve in that direction.

The ongoing threat that extremist militias and their supporters pose is difficult to quantify, but those extreme elements must be taken seriously as an important and continuing presence. The overall movement is again in a state of comparative abeyance, but could easily reactivate in coming years, particularly as another Presidential election cycle approaches.

Militia members who feel directly targeted or unfairly treated by the government or law enforcement can become more radicalized, withdrawing from existing cooperative networks with law enforcement and instead investing even further in their motivating ideology. Some go so far as to join or start comparatively more extreme and secretive units. I personally observed such radicalization in several individual members during my fieldwork, and, historically, entire groups that survive some sort of law enforcement intervention or negative public incident tend to increase their hostility toward authority.

It would be unsurprising if we see similar responses from those connected to the January 6th insurrection, including from those arrested: some will likely withdraw their participation, but others, whose fears and anger are only heightened by what they perceive to be a stolen election and unfair treatment of the insurrectionists, are likely already embedded in other groups. These groups may be other militias that are preparing for future activation, or they may be other nostalgic groups with greater histories of overt violence, ranging from the Proud Boys, to neo-Nazi organizations, to as-yet unrealized organizations that will likely become evident as the next Presidential election cycle begins. These groups will continue to value veterans because of the patriotism that they represent. Groups that are hoping to capitalize on veterans' combat or explosives knowledge may be especially adept at recruiting veterans who are resentful of their service experiences or of their treatment when returning home.