"PRESIDENT TRUMP IS CALLING US TO FIGHT":

WHAT THE COURT DOCUMENTS REVEAL ABOUT THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND JANUARY 6 AND NETWORKED INCITEMENT

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OVERVIEW / ABSTRACT

In this qualitative study, we analyze federal court documents related to the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol, in an effort to identify, categorize, and quantify the most frequently cited reasons for participating in the breach of the Capitol Building. We describe the beliefs, ideologies, fears, conspiratorial narratives, and other themes that most often contributed to the decision to participate in the attack, and present representative excerpts from court documents. In order to estimate the relative popularity of each motivation, researchers coded the contents of 469 charging and sentencing documents, representing 417 defendants. These excerpts provide a unique window into the defendants' thinking and plans in the weeks and days before the attack, as well as in its aftermath. Our analysis reveals that the members of the Capitol riot were far from consistent in their reasons and goals, although most seemed to share a fear of sociocultural status loss. Some defendants describe a desire for "revolution" or "civil war," while others describe the attack as a simple "flexing of muscles," or a demonstration of their frustration with the status quo. We find that the largest fraction of defendants were motivated to come to Washington DC on January 6 by either their desire to support President Trump, their concerns about the integrity of the 2020 election, or some combination of both.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

In the time since the violent breach of the US Capitol by a mob of Trump supporters, militia members, conspiracy theorists, and others, diligent news reporting and other research has revealed much about how the accused rioters planned and executed this unprecedented domestic attack on the US government.

For example, *Just Security* reported only four days after the attack that Facebook and Twitter—as well as other popular, publicly accessible social media platforms—had been used by political elites and far-right organizers to spread disinformation about the 2020 election and mobilize Americans from every corner of the nation to make their way to DC for a "historic" demonstration of political unrest (Holt 2021).

The *New York Times* and BuzzFeed News revealed that alt-tech platforms, such as Parler and Gab, also played host to a number of extremist groups and local militias as they planned for a violent uprising at the Capitol that day (Frenkel 2021; Hensley-Clancy and Lytvynenko 2021).

Some, including the [University of Chicago](#) and the [NPR Investigations team](#), have published and maintained databases containing demographic information and other important statistics about the individual members of the mob, including militia members, rioters, protestors, and other attendees at the Capitol on the day of the attack.

Others, namely *The Congressional Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol*, have taken a special interest in the role that Donald Trump played in both planning the attack and systemically seeding disinformation that motivated so many to participate.

In the first of a series of hearings beginning in June 2022, Committee Vice Chair Elizabeth Cheney laid out a case suggesting that Trump had knowingly subverted the election results, in part by strategically spreading various accusations of voter fraud and unfounded conspiracy theories about the election that he knew to be false—a campaign that has since been dubbed "The Big Lie."

Cheney said, "President Trump summoned the mob, assembled the mob and lit the flame of this attack."

But did the members of the mob see it that way? Did they see themselves as Trump's personal volunteer army, or as dedicated (albeit frustrated) countrymen, trying to defend democracy? Relatedly, did they even believe Trump's claims, or were they simply protesting the outcome of the election, rather than the process by which it was decided?

Despite much speculation as to the Capitol attackers' motivations, very little research has been conducted to answer these questions. There are several reasons for this. Many of the Capitol attackers are currently in jail or on house arrest awaiting trial dates, and are thus unavailable for interviews about their actions and motivations on the 6th as it may influence their trial outcomes. What's more, many of their social media accounts have been cleaned of all potentially incriminating content or removed altogether in the time since the attack, either by personal deletion or by the massive effort by platform companies after Jan 6th to remove violating content, leaving very few traces of their digital history for researchers to parse.

In order to identify, compare, and analyze the motivating factors that brought the mob to the Capitol in 2021, we have conducted a discourse analysis of what we consider to be the largest and most far-reaching publicly available archive of social media posts, private messages, and direct quotes attributed to the members of the mob: their court documents.

These documents—prepared and compiled by dozens of FBI agents, defense attorneys and others in the initial weeks following the attack—reveal that Rep. Cheney was mostly correct in her assessment. Far and away, we find that the two most commonly-cited reasons for breaching the US Capitol were a desire to support Trump on January 6th in DC and concerns about election integrity.

What's more, a significant number of the defendants specifically mentioned or implied that they had come to the Capitol on January 6 at the express invitation of Donald Trump, who they believed had requested their assistance in "defending democracy" from election fraud.

The documents show that Trump and his allies convinced an unquantifiable number of Americans that representative democracy in the United States was not only in decline, but in imminent, existential danger. This belief translated into a widespread fear of democratic and societal breakdown, which, in turn, motivated hundreds of Americans to travel to DC from far corners of the country in what they were convinced was the nation's most desperate hour.

California Rep. Adam Schiff described this mobilization process in the fourth hearing held by the special congressional committee on June 21, 2022, saying, "If you can convince Americans that they cannot trust their own elections, that any time they lose it is somehow illegitimate, then what is left but violence to determine who should govern?"

Despite this expected result, we also observed that the January 6 participants were anything but unanimous in their goals and motivations for the attack. In truth, the defendants' stated reasons for invading the Capitol vary widely, and at times conflict with one another. Less common motivations run the gamut, ranging from a desire to "peacefully protest" against pandemic restrictions, to genuine aspirations to assassinate elected officials. We will explore each of these motivations in depth in the "Other Motivations" section of this paper.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of documents analyzed did seem to share a common thread: an insidious paranoia that the Capitol attackers' sociocultural status, livelihoods, and way of life were just as much in jeopardy as Trump's hold on the Presidency.

This paranoia, coupled with a deep-seated resentment for the people and groups they see as enemies, and a sincere belief that there was no alternative, nonviolent means of preserving the status quo, underwrote every stated motivation we tracked across the documents, and permeates nearly every excerpt we present in this report. Indeed, many defendants went so far as to describe their actions at the Capitol Building as a

desperate, last-ditch effort to "save" the United States from foreign invaders, communism, the "deep state," or some other imagined threat.

In this analysis, we employ contemporary understandings of political violence as an intelligible (though reprehensible) form of collective action, as well as Sociologist Rory McVeigh's "power devaluation model" of social movements as a theoretical context for categorizing and understanding these mobilizing beliefs and motivations.

Together, these frameworks help us to understand the attack at the US Capitol as an intentional, strategic means of preserving the political power and privileges of a sufficiently motivated political faction, rather than merely a psychosocial, cross-cultural outburst that materialized suddenly as a consequence of widespread pandemic and economy-related frustrations, as some have proposed.

In this report, we describe and provide examples of the most commonly stated reasons for breaching the US Capitol, as described by the defendants and their lawyers, as well as other observations made about the Capitol rioters in the process of reading and analyzing 469 court documents associated with this historic, domestic attack on the United States government.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE

Political Violence as Collective Action

For decades, scholars of sociology, political science, social psychology and several other disciplines have sought to understand the socioeconomic, political, cultural, and/or psychological factors that enable individuals or groups to engage in political violence. Some have argued that specific personality traits can contribute to an individual's likelihood of participating in political violence (Kruglanski et al. 2018; Bartusevičius, van Leeuwen, and Peterson 2020). Others have dedicated years of research to the question of whether and why governments engage in political violence against citizens (Kalyvas 2006). For this report, our scope will be limited to sociological understandings of "one-sided" political violence; specifically, violence committed by non-state collective action groups.

Contemporary scholarship conceives of non-state political violence as the use of physical force, coercion, or intimidation by some group to pursue a desired political change. These acts are understood to be a purposefully-chosen means to an intelligible political or ideological end, rather than simply a consequence of "social pathology" (Bosi and Malthaner 2015). This suggests that coordinated, violent attacks like the one

carried out on January 6 do not erupt spontaneously from otherwise non-politically motivated groups (Hazen 2009; Horgan 2008). On the contrary, attacks such as these are committed intentionally and strategically, by political movements which are sufficiently coordinated, capable, and motivated. This work suggests that political violence is, indeed, a tool of collective action, albeit an extreme and taboo one (Galtung and Fischer 2013).

Bosi and Malthaner (2015) argue that the decision to engage in political violence is triggered by the groups' shared political goals and identities. Additionally, the authors argue that politically violent groups often "respond to changing environments and actions of their opponents and/or allies." That is to say, the events and conditions that may serve as a "trigger" for political violence are entirely subjective, and determined by movement members and leadership.

It is also worth noting that these triggering events and actions need only exist in the imaginations of movement members, and they are often exaggerated or entirely fabricated by movement leadership. In the case of the Capitol attack, for example, the mob was inspired by non-existent threats to the electoral process, propagated by an elaborate media manipulation campaign using the hashtag "#StopTheSteal" to connect, collaborate, and organize messaging, resources, and several calls to action across the US in the months after the election culminating with an all-hands call to the Capitol in DC for January 6th, 2021.

And while common goals or shared political identities often serve as catalysts in the formation of politically violent groups, scholars have found that the presence of shared *ideologies* is what allows members to develop "deep partnerships" and "alliances" with one another. In turn, these interpersonal connections provide group members with the necessary motivation to remain committed to the cause even after facing harsh social disincentives or legal consequences for their participation (Blair et al. 2021).

And while ideologies of all stripes have been used to justify various forms of political violence throughout history, Webber et al. (2020) argue that religiosity and conservatism—two ideologies that have been found to be particularly popular among Capitol rioters (Boorstein 2021; Schor 2021)—tend to be "particularly adept" at motivating individuals to participate in political violence. Webber et al. argue this is because both religiosity and conservatism satisfy certain psychological needs inherent to humans—including the need to feel significant, and the need to avoid cognitive dissonance—which then enable the individual to engage in violence for the sake of the cause.

Other political factors which have been found to increase the likelihood of political violence at a mass-public level include weak political institutions and rapid economic decline (Besley and Persson 2009). Both of these factors contribute to widespread unrest among citizens, who then have few or no reliable, established means of pursuing political change or economic relief. Knowing this, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Capitol attack occurred in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in a record-breaking rise in unemployment in the US (Smith, Edwards, and Duong 2021), and after a several years-long campaign by the former president and his cohort to sow public distrust in several of United State's most central institutions, including Congress, the Democratic Party, journalism, education, the FBI, and more.

Power Devaluation and Great Replacement Fears

In "The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics," Rory McVeigh describes the power devaluation model as a response to classical understandings of social movements, including resource mobilization theory and political opportunity theory, which he argues "were designed to explain how relatively powerless groups are able to engage in collective contention to bring about social change," and therefore fail to explain right-wing movements, like the Klu Klux Klan, which seek instead to preserve their own relative power, and ensure that other groups do not gain power.

McVeigh's model argues that relatively politically advantaged groups (white, middle-class Christians, for example) are mobilized by a fear that their sociocultural status, political power, and institutional privilege are under threat of being given to other groups. According to McVeigh, this fear motivates people to employ all manner of collective action, up to and including political violence, as a means of preserving their own power and privilege, even at the expense of others.

The fear that McVeigh describes is similar to the anxieties stoked by the popular "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory, which has been most-recently popularized by far-right, white nationalists via social media (Rose 2022). Like power devaluation fears, the Great Replacement theory perpetuates the notion that previously disempowered groups such as racial minorities will soon be outnumbering, outvoting, or politically overtaking the current majority group (Bauder 2022).

Recent studies have revealed that most of the Capitol attackers belong to what McVeigh would consider relatively advantaged demographic groups. A study performed by Robert Pape, for example, found that the attackers were more than 95 percent white and 85 percent male (Pape 2021). Furthermore, Pape found that more than half of the rioters "were white-collar workers such as business owners, architects, doctors and

lawyers" (Tong and McMahon 2022). Lastly, a small minority of Capitol attackers were known to have been affiliated with local militia groups or established extremist groups such as the Proud Boys, the Three Percenters, The Oathkeepers, and Sovereign Citizens. (Chicago 2022).

Our coding shows that both Great Replacement fears and power devaluation concerns were prevalent among Capitol rioters in the days leading up to the attack, as well as the weeks afterward.

METHODOLOGY

We conducted a qualitative discourse analysis of 469 documents filed to the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, representing 417 defendants charged with federal crimes related to January 6. These documents consist of 311 charging documents (331 statements of facts and 80 affidavits) prepared by law enforcement officers (mostly FBI agents) and 51 sentencing memoranda.

The charging documents were selected to represent each defendant in the dataset for two reasons: First, because these documents lay out the government's case against each defendant, describing what law enforcement officers knew about the defendant's crimes at the time of arrest, and how it knew those things, and second, because it is the only document type that is consistent across every criminal case; which is to say that every single defendant has one, a fact which is not true of other document types.

In cases where a single criminal case was brought against multiple defendants, law enforcement agents typically only file the same statement of facts or affidavit for each co-defendant. In these cases, we included only one copy of the statement or affidavit, and separate memoranda for each co-defendant whose lawyer had filed one before January 28, 2022; the final date of data collection.

We chose to include sentencing memoranda in the dataset as a means of including a "defense" of at least some of the defendants. This was done in hopes of increasing balance and objectivity within the dataset, at a time when no defendants had yet gone to trial, and no written or verbal testimony in their defense had been made available to the public.

Because these documents are inconsistent in their form, tone, length, and scope, the numerical results we present here should be understood as representing trends within the data, rather than statistically meaningful measures that could be used to generalize about the crowd on that day. It is possible that those who chose to enter the Capitol are

among the more ideologically motivated of this group, while others chose to stay outside and be "witnesses" to this historical event.

Our Coding Process

We employed an iterative approach to coding the court documents. We began with a codebook containing seventeen non-mutually exclusive categories of "Stated Reasons" for storming the Capitol that we expected to be described within our dataset.

These categories (herein referred to as "motivations," "reasons" or "codes") were curated with assistance from the Technology and Social Change Project's January 6 working group, and based on our previous research pertaining to the rioters and their politics.

However, as the coders began to read through the documents, and became more familiar with the language the rioters use to describe their actions, we altered and added to the codebook as needed to better characterize the trends we were observing. We added new codes under two conditions: first, if we came across a distinct, stated reason for breaching the Capitol that we had not previously anticipated or encountered, and second, if we expected that reason to be mentioned again by other defendants. We also occasionally combined or removed codes that we felt were redundant, too vaguely labeled to use consistently, or that we determined did not capture a unique reason for participating in the attack.

Across the full dataset, we identified 15 recognizable stated reasons for "storming" the US Capitol, described either by the defendants themselves, or paraphrased by their defense lawyers and law enforcement officers. Complete quantitative results and excerpts for each of these categories can be seen in appendices 1 and 2.

In addition to coding for "stated reasons," researchers also tracked a number of other recurring themes (regret, pride, etc.), characters (Antifa, "communists," etc.) keywords and phrases ("Stop the steal," "patriots," etc.), and content types (social media posts, etc.) across the dataset. We will discuss the results of some of these other coding categories in the "Other Observations & Analysis" section.

The Excerpts

The passages we've extracted and tagged as containing some stated or implied reason(s) for attacking the US Capitol take many forms. A few "types" of excerpts include: social media posts made by the defendant(s); private messages sent by the defendant(s); direct quotes from the defendant(s), offered during press and law

enforcement interviews, or recorded by witnesses on the day of the attack; or descriptions of any of these, paraphrased or summarized by FBI agents or the defendant(s)'s attorney.

In this report, we will most often refer to social media posts and other direct quotes made by defendants recorded in the court documents because we find these excerpts to be most representative of the defendants' stated motivations.

MOTIVATIONS OF JANUARY 6TH DEFENDANTS

Support Trump	20.62%
2020 Election Rigged	20.62%
Revolution / Civil War / Secession	7.91%
Pursuit of "Historical" Significance	7.43%
Peaceful Protest	6.95%
General Interest in Violence	6.24%
Protect the country or "Take back the country"	5.76%
Distrust of Government	5.76%
Marxism, Socialism, Communism	5.76%
QAnon	4.08%
Resisting Tyranny	2.88%
Religiosity	2.40%
Coronavirus	2.16%
Exercise 1st Amendment Rights / Make Voice Heard	1.20%
Curiosity	0.48%

N = 417 Defendants. Percentages above represent the portion of defendants who cited this as a motivation for participating in the Jan. 6 attack.

DONALD TRUMP & THE BIG LIE

**"The call to action was put out…from the Don himself."**

   - Defendant Charles Bradford Smith

Our coding shows that the largest proportion of defendants—86 of the total 417—whose documents we analyzed were motivated, in part, to invade the US Capitol Building by Donald Trump. The "Donald Trump" code was applied to 128 excerpts, more than any other motivation code. Further analysis revealed that these excerpts typically fall into one of two sub-categories: an expression of Pro-Trump sentiment or a specific belief that Donald Trump personally requested their presence at the Capitol.

One defendant who falls squarely into the first sub-category would be defendant and former police officer Michael Shane Daughtry, who posted on Facebook three days before the attack on the Capitol:

"We're thinking about going to the protest in Washington DC on the 6th. We'll probably go to the Rally in Dalton tomorrow night then to Washington DC the next day to support Trump and put our two cents in."

(See image below. Note that all images in this report were taken from arrest documents and are already of degraded quality.)
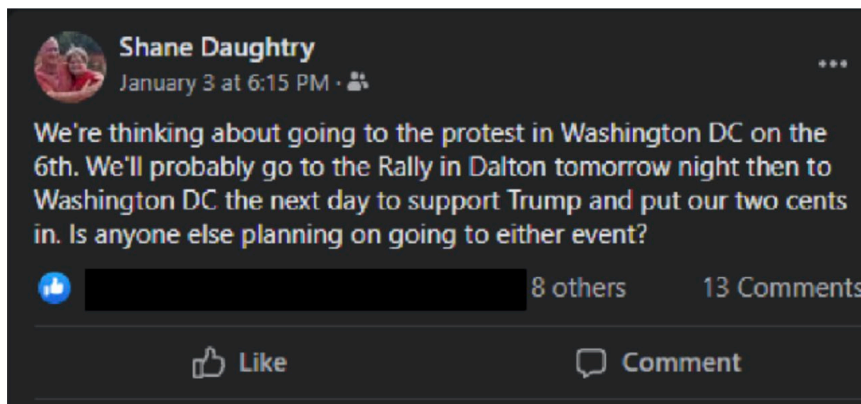
1-21-cr-00141-RDM_affidavit.pdf.

Mentioning a similar desire to "support" Trump at the Capitol, Mark Sahady wrote on Twitter on December 20, 2020: "It's important that millions of Americans show up in DC on January 6th to support the legitimate President, Donald Trump, and show Democrats what they will be facing if they continue to try to steal the Presidency."

1-21-cr-00134-CJN_facts.pdf

Also falling under the first subcode are verbal or visual signals of Trump support, such as the use of a pro-Trump hashtag online, or the wearing of pro-Trump merchandise.

1-21-mj-00521-ZMF_facts.pdf

Kristi Marie Munn, for example, used the hashtag #TrumpisMyPresident on Facebook before traveling to DC.

1-21-cr-00119-CJN_facts.pdf

This Facebook photo of Garrett A. Miller was also tagged with the "Donald Trump" code, because it shows Miller wearing one of the red, "Make America Great Again" caps that have become synonymous with pro-Trump sentiment.

However, the excerpts that fall into the second subcategory are much easier to identify. We recorded 35 instances of a defendant explicitly stating that they were planning to attend (or had already participated in) the attack on the Capitol because they were following explicit orders from the President.

On December 22, 2020, for example, Kelly Meggs wrote on Facebook:

> Trump said It's gonna be wild!!!!!!! It's gonna be wild!!!!!!! He wants us to make it WILD that's what he's saying. He called us all to the Capitol and wants us to make it wild!!! Sir Yes Sir!!! Gentlemen we are heading to DC pack your shit!!

This post is, of course, a reference to Donald Trump's now-infamous December 19, 2020 tweet, in which he promoted the rally that would later devolve into the deadly Capitol attack. Much haste has been made about this now infamous Trump tweet:

> Peter Navarro releases 36-page report alleging election fraud 'more than sufficient' to swing victory to Trump https://t.co/D8KrMHnFdK. A great report by Peter. Statistically impossible to have lost the 2020 Election. Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!

Across the entire dataset, there were five specific references to this particular tweet.

1-21-cr-00107-RDM_facts.pdf

These statements often accompanied reposts of Trump's other social media posts, like in the case of Bruno Joseph Cua, who wrote on Parler on New Years Eve, "President Trump is calling us to FIGHT…He knows this is the only way to save our great country, show up @January6th."

Cua followed this post two days later with another screenshot of yet another Trump tweet, adding, "This is the third time he's tweeted about it. This isn't a joke, this is where and when we make our stand. #January6th. #LIVEFREEORDIE #FIGHTFORTRUMP."

This sub-category also contains the words of a few defense lawyers, who in an effort to earn their client a merciful sentence, blame the former president for their client's actions. In a sentencing memorandum for Anthony Mariotto, for example, his lawyer wrote, "As the day unfolded, [Mariotto] never planned or envisioned entering into the US Capitol. That is, until Trump invited everyone to the March at the Capitol."

And while much has been written about Trump's Twitter use and the "be wild" tweet (Barry and Frenkel 2021), our work shows that Trump's Facebook use played an equally pivotal role in the lead up to January 6.

On December 22, 2020, three days after the "be wild" tweet, and when plans to storm the US Capitol were already underway, Donald Trump posted a video to Facebook, in which he delivered a speech directly into the camera from behind a presidential podium.

The video is titled, "Statement by Donald J. Trump, The President of the United States," giving it an air of Presidential formality and authority. The content of the speech, however, betrays both. For nearly 14 minutes straight, Trump rails against the Democrats and the results of the 2020 election, making baseless accusations of voter fraud and election tampering in excruciating detail.

"This year, using the virus as a pretext, Democratic officials in the key swing states illegally violated their own state laws, in order to enable, encourage, and facilitate fraud on a scale never before seen in the history of our country," he begins. "The truth is, we won the election by a landslide."

These are the same lies that ultimately inspired Facebook to ban Donald Trump from the platform, but the video still remains live and public on the website, and has been viewed 19 million times at the time of writing in June 2022.

Knowing that Trump's public messaging at the time was almost entirely committed to promoting unfounded theories of election tampering, it is then perhaps no surprise that concerns about the integrity of the election was the second-most popular stated reason for invading the US Capitol, by a razor-thin margin.

In fact, many defendants were quoted in the documents as expressing that they specifically became concerned about the integrity of the 2020 Election after hearing Donald Trump claim that the presidency had been stolen from him, possibly thanks to social media posts like the December 22 Facebook video, or the "be wild" tweet.

"President Trump has been right on just about everything he said," wrote gun store owner and defendant Matthew Eugene Loganbill on Facebook on January 4, two days before the attack. "So when he says the election was rigged I'll bet my life on him being right."

We recorded five instances of defendants saying they came to DC specifically to "protest" the *results* of the election, without necessarily suggesting those results were

fraudulent, but the vast majority of excerpts in this category contain expressions of concern about the accuracy of the results, and the future of American elections in general.

"Our election was stolen. The system is against us," Matthew Wood echoed on Facebook the day before the attack.

"We're here to take back our democratic republic," Defendant Kevin Cordon told Finnish newspaper *Ilta Sanomat* on January 6, 2021. "It's clear that this election is stolen, there's just so much overwhelming evidence and the establishment, the media, big tech are just completely ignoring all of it."

Interestingly, the majority of defendants who expressed concerns about election integrity were—seemingly—staunchly committed to the concept of a free and fair democracy. Whereas our own preconceived notions of the Capitol attackers may have suggested that they would have been interested in installing Trump as an autocratic leader, the documents reveal that a large proportion of the defendants are actually quite democratically-minded, and only believe that the election was rigged because Trump and his supporters said so.

This belief naturally inspires fear of the implications of a corrupt, un-democratic system of government in the US, and that fear comes through in the documents. Loganbill wrote on Facebook in December, "We have witnessed the destruction of the very fiber of our freedom, the election process."

These excerpts illustrate a fear of the uncertain future that is innate to both Great Replacement fears and the power devaluation model. In these passages, the defendants reveal that they believe a physical overthrow of the US government (and in some cases the murder of elected officials) is their *only* option for preserving America as they understand it. To allow any other outcome would mean allowing "the system" to disfigure the nation—and their way of life – beyond recognition.

OTHER MOTIVATIONS

After Donald Trump and concerns about election integrity, the four most popular reasons for attacking the Capitol Building were: (in descending order) 1. A desire for armed revolution or civil war, 2. Pursuit of historical significance, 3. A desire to "peacefully protest" at the US Capitol, and 4. A general interest in committing or witnessing acts of violence.

Interest in Armed Conflict

The 39 excerpts in this category reveal that many of the rioters were so dissatisfied with the state of the nation in general that they were willing to forcefully overthrow the government via armed revolution.

Defendant Corinne Lee Montoni demonstrated this willingness on Parler on December 29, 2020, writing, "January 6th in DC is going to be YUGEEEE! It's either going to be a Trump victory party or the first real day of the revolution. Who's going?!"

Others, like Defendant Marshall Neffe, expressed a desire to enter into a literal civil war with their fellow Americans. "This country needs to split up immediately…Why shouldn't we be the ones to kick it off?" Neefe texted a friend.

Some, like Defendant Lisa Marie Eisenhart, even expressed an interest in martyrdom. "This country was founded on revolution…I'd rather die a 57-year-old woman than live under oppression. I'd rather die and would rather fight," Eisenhart told *The Times* newspaper on January 10.

Defendant Gabriel Brown was recorded outside of the Capitol Building saying into a bullhorn on January 6, "You stole the Senate from us, you stole the House from us, and now you think you're going to steal the presidency from us? …Well, you better prepare for fucking violent revolution. I don't want violence. I believe in peaceful resolve. But you're making it goddamn impossible for us."

Again, references to nonspecific enemies and vaguely-defined "oppression" reveal a widespread resentment among Capitol attackers toward perceived outsiders (in this case Democrats), and a belief that their status as the politically privileged group is under threat.

We separately recorded 27 excerpts that demonstrate a similarly intense desire for radical, immediate political change, but frame this as a need to "take the country back" from some occupier, rather than create a new system of governance via armed revolution or civil war. Although this language is literally less violent and severe, it is also typical of those who subscribe to the white nationalist Great Replacement conspiracy, which falsely alleges that the white majority are being purposefully "overtaken" by people of color in the United States.

Defendant William Tryon, for instance, uploaded a YouTube video on January 6 in which he states, "All we want to do is enter, and tell our representatives we want our country back. We're not going to take this."

This language also echoes the rhetoric of Donald Trump and other far-right politicians who have added white supremacist dog whistles to their appeals to voters, promising to "take America back" to a bygone era.

Pursuit of Historical Significance

Another popular stated reason for invading the US Capitol, mentioned by roughly 31 defendants, was a desire to witness or take part in some event that they expected to be historically significant.

This desire is demonstrated in a variety of ways across the dataset. For example, Former Houston Police Officer and Defendant Tam Pham was quoted in court documents as telling law enforcement that "the only reason he went to the rally was to "see history."

Several other defendants specifically mentioned an interest in the bragging rights that would come with having been physically present in the Capitol on the day of Trump's speech. The most demonstrative example of this concept was provided by 23-year-old University of Kentucky Student Gracyn Dawn Courtright, who wrote on Instagram from the Capitol steps: "can't wait to tell my grandkids I was here !"

1:21-cr-00072-CRC

When confronted by a concerned friend via direct message, Courtright defended her actions by responding simply: "it's historic idc [I don't care]. I thought it was cool."

References to 1776 pervaded social media at this time, including tweets from soon-to-be Congress members, such as Majorie Taylor Green and Lauren Boebert. While we can not be absolutely sure which type of "historic" event that defendants like Pham and Courtright expected to unfold that day, other defendants were members of militias or other extremist groups that showed up with clearer intentions to overthrow Congress. As such, their excitement is most likely attributed to Trump's own vague promises that the rally which preceded the invasion would be "unprecedented" and "wild."
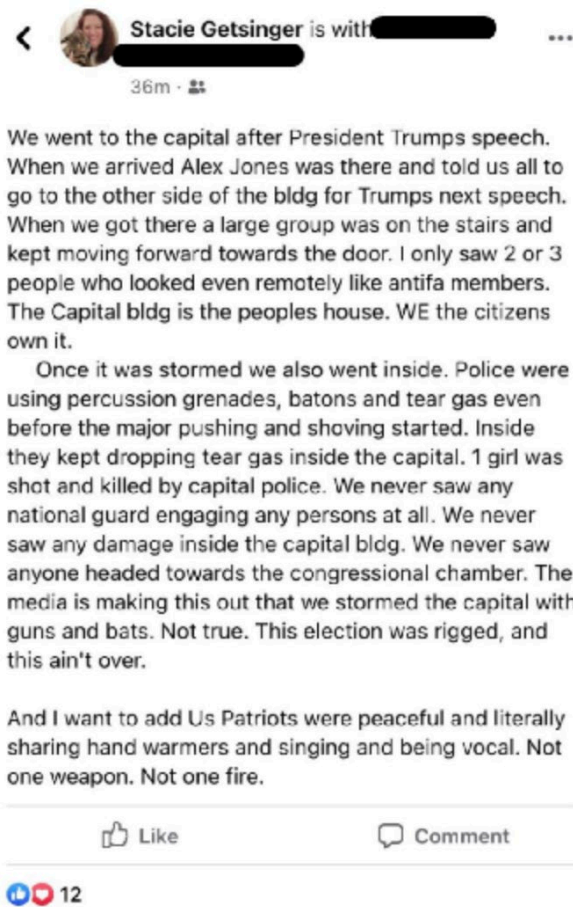
However, it is also notable that far-right influencers like Alex Jones and Tim Pool used similar language in their digital broadcasts in the weeks leading up to the attack. In a December 19, 2020 broadcast that was later cited by the January 6 Select Committee on July 12, 2022, Jones said to his viewers, "The time for games is over. The time for action is now. Where were you when history called? Where were you when you and your children's destiny and future was on the line?"

Others used this "historic" frame to justify their pursuit of personal achievement. Defendant Sean Watson, for example, sent a text message the day after the attack stating, "I was one of the people that helped storm the capitol building and smash out the windows . We made history today. Proudest day of my life!"

Notably, many of the passages coded in this category were largely devoid of politics or ideological value, and focussed almost completely on the novelty of being associated with a "historic" event, regardless of its political (or violent) nature.

A Desire to "Peacefully Protest"

Almost immediately after the attack began, when news media began to communicate the severity of the situation to the mass public, many January 6 participants turned to social media—some even from within the Capitol Building—to justify their actions. For many, this meant ensuring family, friends, and followers that they had breached the US Capitol as part of a "peaceful protest" against the outcome of the 2020 election.

Stacie Getsinger is with ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ...
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
36m · 👥

We went to the capital after President Trumps speech. When we arrived Alex Jones was there and told us all to go to the other side of the bldg for Trumps next speech. When we got there a large group was on the stairs and kept moving forward towards the door. I only saw 2 or 3 people who looked even remotely like antifa members. The Capital bldg is the peoples house. WE the citizens own it.

   Once it was stormed we also went inside. Police were using percussion grenades, batons and tear gas even before the major pushing and shoving started. Inside they kept dropping tear gas inside the capital. 1 girl was shot and killed by capital police. We never saw any national guard engaging any persons at all. We never saw any damage inside the capital bldg. We never saw anyone headed towards the congressional chamber. The media is making this out that we stormed the capital with guns and bats. Not true. This election was rigged, and this ain't over.

And I want to add Us Patriots were peaceful and literally sharing hand warmers and singing and being vocal. Not one weapon. Not one fire.

👍 Like   💬 Comment

👍❤️ 12

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"Us Patriots were peaceful and literally sharing hand warmers and singing and being vocal. Not one weapon. Not one fire," Defendant Stacie Detsinger wrote on Facebook on the evening after the riot.

This "misrepresented peaceful protestor" narrative was also the most common explanation provided by the defense lawyers, looking to earn their clients the judge's sympathy.

Attorney Joseph R. Conte, for example, explained in a sentencing memorandum that his client, Defendant Andrew Hatley, "decided to come to D.C. to peacefully protest the results of the election and the lack of attention to alleged voting irregularities. He did so with no intent to do anything but add his voice to the vocal protests over the injustice he perceived had happened in the election."

Other attackers in this category insisted their goals and actions were peaceful, even while admitting they had engaged in violent or destructive acts.

Defendant Corinne Montoni, for example, wrote on Facebook in the evening of January 6: "We broke a few windows, sure, but we were a peaceful protest occupying the people's property..."

Sandy Weyer echoed this sentiment, privately messaging a friend on Facebook, "We may have broken through the barricades and the doors to the Capitol...but I know that my group was not violent or rioting and I didn't see any other Patriots rioting or being violent."

This insistence that the cause was "peaceful" must be understood within the context of the progressive Black Lives Matter Movement of 2020, which was criticized at the time by members of the press and conservative politicians for inspiring supposedly raucous, destructive or violent behavior at protests (Chenoweth and Pressman 2020). The Capitol attackers' use of the word "peaceful" often served as a conscious attempt to differentiate this demonstration from the protests for racial justice that had been taking place all across the nation only a few months before the Capitol attack.

General Interest in Violence

In stark contrast to those who claimed to have been motivated only by a desire to peacefully protest at the Capitol, just over two dozen defendants indicated that they came to DC on January 6 with the express intention of committing or witnessing physical violence.

Unlike the "Revolution / Civil War" category, these passages point to no specific aims for this violence, just a desire to hurt, maim, or indeed, kill other people.

"Got a K-BAR knife today...it's the Military killin knife...Just needed a good one for DC," Defendant Charles Bradford Smith told a friend on Faceboook Messenger three days before the attack.

"We are going to kill every last communist who stands in Trump's way," wrote Defendant William McCall Calhoun, Jr.

In some instances, defendants directed their violent comments at specific members of Congress. Speaker of The House Nancy Pelosi was the most commonly-named target of these violent threats.

"Bring them out. We want them out here…You bring them out or we're coming in. Bring them out now. They're criminals. They need to hang," Defendant Pauline Bauer was recorded within the Capitol Building telling a Capitol police officer. "Bring her out.. Bring Nancy Pelosi out here now. We want to hang that fucking bitch. Bring her out. We're coming in if you don't bring her out."

Defendant Dawn Bancroft told a friend as she was leaving the Capitol, "We were looking for Nancy to shoot her in the friggin' brain but we didn't find her."

On some occasions, the desire for violence overrode partisan loyalty all together.

Couy Griffin, for example, said in a Facebook video that he planned to return to the Capitol on January 20 for a "2nd Amendment rally." He described his plans for that day, saying, "It's gonna be a sad day, because there's gonna be blood running out of that building. But at the end of the day, you mark my word, we will plant our flag on the desk of Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer and Donald J. Trump if it boils down to it."

OTHER OBSERVATIONS & ANALYSIS

The Targeting of Mike Pence

In addition to Nancy Pelosi, Vice President Mike Pence was also a common target of the Capitol attackers.

For example, Defendant Karl Dresch wrote on Facebook: "Mike Pence gave our country to the communist hordes, traitor scum like the rest of them."

This sentiment should be no surprise, given Trump's false assertions on January 6 that Pence had the power to "decertify" the electoral count. In the wee hours of the morning on January 6, 2021, Trump tweeted:

> If Vice President @Mike_Pence comes through for us, we will win the Presidency. Many States want to decertify the mistake they made in certifying incorrect & even fraudulent numbers in a process NOT approved by their State Legislatures (which it must be). Mike can send it back!

He repeated this claim just after 8:15 in the morning, this time speaking directly to Pence:

States want to correct their votes, which they now know were based on irregularities and fraud, plus corrupt process never received legislative approval. All Mike Pence has to do is send them back to the States, AND WE WIN. Do it Mike, this is a time for extreme courage!

And at 2:24 p.m., just as the mob was making its way to the Capitol Building, Trump signaled to the crowd that Pence had failed them:

Mike Pence didn't have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution, giving States a chance to certify a corrected set of facts, not the fraudulent or inaccurate ones which they were asked to previously certify. USA demands the truth!

At least two defendants characterized Pence's refusal to "decertify" as the final straw that motivated them to rush the Capitol Building.

Defendant Joshua Black, for example, explained in a YouTube video posted January 8, 2021: "Once we found out Pence turned on us and that they had stolen the election, like officially, the crowd went crazy. I mean, it became a mob. We crossed the gate."

What Makes A "Patriot?"

In addition to tracking the stated reasons for invading the US Capitol, we also tracked the use of specific keywords of interest. We quickly observed that the term "Patriot" (typically spelled with a capital P) carries an unstated, though understood meaning among the defendants. Although the term is known to be popular among Trump supporters (Zacek 2021), our coding suggests that the term has also become somewhat of a self-applied label for far-right values. Many defendants use the term to signify that they are a member of some united in-group of like-minded individuals, the same way they would use a partisan identifier.

"These are my people. PATRIOTS!" Defendant Tommy Allan exclaimed as he made his way through the Capitol, demonstrating this trend.

In another example, Defendant Troy Smocks posted the following message on Parler in the evening of January 6:

Today, January 6th, 2021, We Patriots by the millions have arrived in Washington, DC, carrying banners of support for the greatest President the World has ever known. But if we must… Many of us will return on January 19th, 2021, carrying our weapons in support of Our nation's resolve…All who will not

stand with the American Patriots…or cannot stand with us, then, that would be a
good time for you to take a few vacation days.

Smocks signed the post, "The American Patriot."

The common enemy who Patriots see themselves as opposing can take many names.
Audrey Ann Southard-Rumsey described the conflict as "Patriot's vs Traitors," while
Defendant Jordan Stotts brought a more historical framework, writing on Facebook:

"They call us terrorists, we are patriots. Each one a George Washington! Most of them
are Benedict Arnolds! Sold out to China and Satan!"

The use of "Patriot" as a self-identifier contributes to the "us versus them" mentality that
is, according to McVeigh, inherent to the power devaluation model. By providing a clear
label for the in-group, Patriots are able to better distinguish themselves rhetorically from
those who supposedly wish to take away their currently-held power over others.

The documents also make abundantly clear that this "us versus them" mentality is then
weaponized to justify political violence. Popular labels for members of the out-group
(political dissenters, Democrats, Biden supporters, people of color, etc.) include
"terrorists," "traitors," and "communists" (as we will see in a later section of this report).
These labels signify the intrinsic, irreparable differences between the two groups, and
the inherent value of one over the other.

The day after the attack, Smocks wrote to his fellow Patriots on Parler: "Prepare our
weapons, and then go get'em. Lets hunt these cowards down like the Traitors that each
of them are…[All] who resist US are enemies of Our Constitution, and must be treated
as such…It wasn't the building that We wanted. . . it was them!"

The Specter of Antifa

Beginning in the late hours of January 6, rumors began to swirl online that members of
Antifa, a controversial left-wing anti-fascist movement had either initiated or participated
in the attack on the Capitol, and had actually been the ones to blame for much of the
property destruction and violence (Klepper 2022). Although this claim was later
debunked by the FBI Director (Shinkman 2021), the rumor inspired an interesting
discrepancy between Patriots, some of which insisted that Antifa had been among their
ranks that day, and some of which denied those accusations vehemently.

We counted 17 defendants in the dataset who claimed to have seen Antifa members at
the Capitol. Defendant Stephen Ayres, for one, posted a video the night of the attack, in

which he and two associates claim that the violent clashes with police had been part of a "false flag" operation in which members of Antifa "dressed as Trump supporters" while assaulting police officers.

Others, like Defendant Ryan Nichols, refuted these assertions. Nichols wrote on Facebook the next day:

> I hear so many reports of 'Antifa' was storming the capital building. Know that every single person who believes that narrative have been DUPED AGAIN…The MSM wants you to believe that ONLY ANTIFA stormed the capital. That's not true, and if you believe that, you've taken the bait.

Across the dataset, we also counted six defendants who said they expected or planned to encounter Antifa members at the Capitol, and took some action to prepare for such an encounter. David Blair, for example, told police that he brought a knife with him to the Trump rally because he was "worried about Antifa and other people trying to jump me."

"Communism" as a threat

Roughly two dozen defendants indicated that they were motivated to invade the US Capitol by their desire to prevent a supposedly "communist" takeover of the federal government. In many of these instances, we believe that the term "communism" or "communist" is being used as a derogatory term for members of the political opposition, including Democrats and centrist Republicans.

"Mike Pence gave our country to the communist hordes," wrote Defendant Karl Dresch on Facebook in one example. "Traitor scum like the rest of them."

Although, we would be remiss not to mention that the term was sometimes used in the context of the Chinese Communist Party, a frequent target of Donald Trump's ire.

 "I'm vehemently against CCP influence in our government so that's why I showed up," Defendant Christopher W. Ortiz told a witness via Instagram instant message.

"Your country is sold to the CCP, and if you have no idea what I'm talking about then you're the biggest problem, not patriots who wanted to knock and talk to Congress," Defendant Samuel Christopher Fox posted to Facebook after the attack. "I'd do it again, fight me."

For at least one defendant, Felipe Marquez, the fear of "communism" was literal:

According to his lawyer, Marquez told FBI agents that "he felt motivated to attend the rally in D.C. because as the child of Cuban parents, he believed communism was a growing threat that needed to be guarded against."

QAnon's Relative Absence in the Documents

Mentions or allusions to the QAnon conspiracy movement were present in 17 defendant's files, making it a relatively—and surprisingly—a lesser reason for breaching the Capitol building.

Of course, this does not necessarily mean that the Capitol stormers did and do not, by and large, subscribe to the conspiratorial beliefs associated with QAnon, namely that members of the Democratic party were satanic pedophiles. This fact could simply be the result of most law enforcement officers deciding that the defendants' conspiratorial beliefs were not relevant to their crimes. Either way, despite QAnon supporters being especially visible in the photos and videos taken from inside the Capitol that day, their ties to the movement do not come across in the documents.

Most of the QAnon references that were recorded, however, were mere signals of the defendants' pro-Q sentiment—such as the wearing of Q t-shirts or the use of the #WWG1WGA [where we go one we go all] hashtag—rather than clear insight as to whether the movement helped inspire them to travel to DC.

Although, some defendants did make non-specific mentions of popular characters and themes from QAnon folklore. For example, Pauline Bauer commented on Facebook that "Democrats not only cheated and stole this election from the people but they have been trafficking children for years."

Pauline Bauer

you can thank me after you start researching that these Democrats not only cheated and stole this election from the people but they have been trafficking children for years

Like · 4w
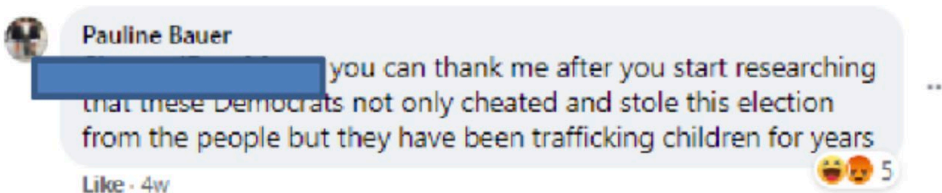
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The Importance of Performative Masculinity

We found the repetitive presences of various expressions of public masculinities throughout the dataset. These expressions took up spaces of leadership, demanding from onlookers their admiration and/or subservience. This included the single men who

stated that they went to the Capitol to smoke weed, proudly posting selfies online of their acts of insubordination. Based on their social media posts from the day of the attack, they seemed to have found great amusement in causing and participating in the chaos of the moment. For example, Defendant James Horning posted this photo to his Facebook account with the caption, "Wildn at the capitol"

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Also present were the "warriors:" men with police/military backgrounds or tactical interests, who in the prior months relished in preparing for the attack by physically training for armed conflict or gathering weapons and armor. While some of these men spoke openly of revolution, all of them exhibited enthusiasm to "gear up" for possible violent confrontation.

In one case, Defendant Fi Duong ran a Bible study that also included paramilitary activities like firearms training, training in physical fitness, hand-to-hand combat and driving skills. In another case, Defendant Eric Munchel entered the Capitol wearing full body camouflage and carried flex cuffs (plastic restraints), which are used by law enforcement to restrain subjects.

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Finally, various men were dressed and behaving as self-proclaimed "prophets," using religious imagery to uplift Trump and infusing the mob with righteous energy. The notable QAnon Shaman, aka Jacob Chansley, wore red, white and blue face paint, a fur pelt and a headdress to the Capitol. He walked around speaking "Shamanistic chants" and prayers to try to add a divine element to the attack. Defendant Nathan Wayne Entrekin dressed as Captain Moroni from the Book of Mormon, a historical figure who defended the liberties of his people from an oppressive group. In an interview on January 6th, Entrekin blended the causes of Captain Moroni and Trump, calling the attack on the Capitol an extension of the "freedom fight" of the Freemen in the Book of Mormon.

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DISCUSSION & AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

To answer the question posed at the top of this report, our research shows that many members of the crowd that stormed the US Capitol did, in fact, think of themselves as Trump's volunteer army, responding to what they saw as a direct order to take up arms as a last ditch effort to preserve Trump's (and by proxy, their own) power.

And over the next several years, as more January 6 defendants are brought to trial, we hope to see this analysis replicated using transcripts of the defendant testimonies given under oath and penalty of perjury.

However, even while acknowledging Trump's role as the central leader of this violent domestic attack, it is important to reiterate that our data also suggest that the Capitol attackers were motivated by a multiplicity of reasons, many of which stem from an insidious, unstated fear of losing political power and majority status.

Indeed, anxieties associated with the power devaluation model represented a consistent undercurrent across the entire dataset. Throughout many of the documents, defendants refer to their political enemies by many names—traitors, Communists, Democrats, Nancy Pelosi, etc.—but the knowledge that these enemies present an existential threat to their livelihoods and life in the United States as they understand it remains largely consistent. In sum, at the time of the attack, the defendants were clearly and deeply afraid of what the future holds for them, their families and communities, and for the country, because they believe that various enemies want to rob them of their currently-held privileges and way of life.

These narratives do not erupt from nowhere. On the contrary, they have been made readily available to the public on nearly every mainstream social media platform by a vast network of politically extremist influencers and personalities, including Alex Jones, Tim Pool, Nick Fuentes, and many others, as well as far-right political elites and elected officials, including Marjorie Taylor Greene, Matt Gaetz, Rudy Guiliani, etc. In fact, research has shown that racist and transgressive ideologies and conspiracy theories that would have otherwise been relegated to niche publications and private forums are regularly served to unsuspecting users on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and other massively popular platforms (Basu 2020; Darcy 2019; Zadrozny 2021).

And while the companies and developers behind these platforms obviously do not create the content that could (purposefully or otherwise) radicalize their users, their role in the path to political violence is crystallized in these documents. For so many of the Capitol attackers, these platforms provided an infrastructure for insurrection, where

participants could connect, coordinate and organize an attack on one of the most heavily protected and revered buildings in the country.

As such, while this study is clearly limited to analyzing the motivations that led to January 6, we believe that these facts beg the following questions: Do social media platforms give prominent users (political elites, influencers, etc.) the power to inspire or incite political violence on a scale heretofore unseen? What new sorts of political violence, if any, are made possible via social media platforms, which allow anyone to publish incendiary lies and potentially inciting rhetoric, and instantly reach a network of millions, if not billions? And lastly, does the possibility of "networked" incitement present future threats to the physical safety of elected officials, political opponents, or minority groups who are deemed villainous by sufficiently motivated extremist networks?

As researchers of the Internet, we have borne witness to the growing concerns by the public that social media has given rise to a new form of insurgency that propagates organized political violence through "networked incitement," a socio-technical infrastructure where insurgents use multi-platform communication to command and control mobilized social movements in the moment of action. An example of this command and control structure was used by Trump to call in his brigade to march to the Capitol and then again the riot was over when Trump finally tweeted:

> These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long. Go home with love & in peace. Remember this day forever!

It is our hope that by understanding the motivations that contributed to the networked incitement that led to the Capitol Riot that the research community can help identify technological or legislative solutions that could prevent similarly violent attacks in the future.

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APPENDIX 1: COMPLETE RESULTS: MOTIVATIONS, SORTED BY THEIR POPULARITY AMONG THE DEFENDANTS

Motivation Code*	# of Defendants	% of Defendants	Total Uses of The Code	Description
Support Trump	86	20.62%	128	Donald Trump or "the president/my president" explicitly mentioned as a specific reason for attending; "Trump told me to" or "at Trump's invitation."
2020 Election Rigged	86	20.62%	113	Any mention of a supposed lack of integrity in the 2020 presidential election.
Revolution / Civil War / Secession	33	7.91%	39	Any mention of a desire to take part in a literal revolution, (civil) war, secession from the union, or some other war-related breakdown of the United States.
Pursuit of "Historical" Significance	31	7.43%	35	Any mention of a desire to witness or participate in "history," a "historic" event, etc. including a mention of "telling" future generations about the event.
Peaceful Protest	29	6.95%	29	Any mention of a desire to peacefully (or nonviolently) protest at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.
General Interest in Violence	26	6.24%	44	Any mention of a desire to witness or commit acts of interpersonal violence. Different from specific,

				goal-oriented references to violent collective action, such as revolution, secession or civil war.
Protect the country or "Take back the country"	24	5.76%	27	Any mention of a desire to preserve or restore the US to a previous status; use of phrases to the effect of "protecting the country," "saving the country," "take back the country," etc.
Distrust of Government	24	5.76%	30	Any mention or implication of distrust in government officials, politicians, or other political elites; use of key phrases such as "the deep state," "criminal," "corrupt," "evil," in relation to elected officials.
Marxism, Socialism, Communism	24	5.76%	26	Any negative mention of "Marxist," "socialist," or "communist" politics or peoples.
QAnon	17	4.08%	20	Any mention of themes, characters or icons associated with the QAnon belief system. Ex. "the cabal," "pedophiles," "satanism," etc.
Resisting Tyranny	12	2.88%	12	Any mention of a desire to resist against "tyranny" or "tyrannical rule" in the United States.
Religiosity	10	2.40%	16	Any mention of God, Jesus, divine province, prayer, or other religious figures and symbols as having inspired their actions.
Coronavirus	9	2.16%	11	Any mention of dissatisfaction, frustration, anger, or opposition regarding COVID-19 pandemic restrictions or vaccine rollout.
Exercise 1st Amendment Rights / Make Voice Heard	5	1.20%	6	Any mention of a desire to exercise their "First Amendment rights" by invading the US Capitol.
Curiosity	2	0.48%	2	Any mention of "curiosity" as a reason for invading the US Capitol.

APPENDIX 2: COMPLETE ARCHIVE OF EXCERPTS FOR EACH CODE

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1D_Q05_DOKWsyXgFhwIb9yfQjNgqVv_Qfc3o3G1eLfdc/edit?usp=sharing