

Assessing the Threat from Accelerationists and Militia Extremists

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Introduction

Anti-government extremism is a loose-knit movement of right-wing groups including private paramilitary “militias,” Three Percenters, Oath Keepers, sovereign citizens, tax protesters, and “constitutional sheriffs.” It is often referred to as the Patriot Movement, but that label has faded in recent months as different factions have moved towards libertarian anarchy while other subgroups have adopted fascist themes and beliefs.

Over the years, sovereign citizen schemes have taken root in some left-wing groups including the Moorish Science Temple and prepper communities, and in the last two months, there has been a noticeable rise in left-wing private paramilitary groups. The right-wing/left-wing labels may not be as clear as they once were, but the overwhelming majority of anti-government extremists are still right-wing.

One of the most common misconceptions held by both the press and public is that anti-government extremism and white supremacy are the same movement. While there is some overlap in geographic areas where white supremacy is more common in the general population, the intersection is small elsewhere.

The FBI divides their counterterrorism priorities into four distinct categories: racially motivated violent extremism, anti-government/anti-authority extremism, animal rights/environmental extremism, and single-issue extremism¹. This distinction is important in understanding everything from choice of targets to which methods or techniques are used by those who chose to turn their beliefs into violent acts. For example, a racist who is primarily active in the white supremacy movement will likely chose victims who represent a threat to his white supremacist beliefs with the eventual goal of starting a race war. A person, even if he is a bigot or racist, whose primary extremist ideology is anti-government or anti-authoritarian will likely target government officials, law enforcement, government buildings, and the press in hopes of starting a violent revolution. Both movements want to tear the nation apart, to accelerate the downfall of society so that they can rebuild it to fit their idea of utopia, but they have different visions of what that utopia entails. Most of them think that war is inevitable; some of them are hoping to hasten its arrival by engaging in violence².

This report will be limited to recent trends in the Anti-Government Extremist movement but will include information on the White Supremacy Movement when the two groups intersect.

¹ [“The Evolving and Persistent Terrorism Threat to the Homeland,”](#) speech delivered by Matthew Alcoke, FBI Deputy Assistant Director, Counterterrorism Division, November 19, 2019.

² [“Order from Chaos: Riots, white supremacy, and accelerationism,”](#) by Daniel L. Byman, *Lawfare.com*, June 1, 2020.

The Participants

With the rise of the Alt-Right and the rapid growth of the white supremacy movement following the 2016 general election, many anti-government groups and organizations faded into the background until recent months. Some, sovereign citizen and tax protesters, for example, have stayed in the background.

Renewed conversations about gun control laws and restrictions, the COVID-19 pandemic, the recent mainstreaming of “deep state” and anti-vaccine conspiracy theories, high unemployment rates, civil unrest in major US cities, and the extreme divisiveness plaguing the upcoming general election have triggered a recent rebirth in the segment of the movement that focuses on firearms.

Oath Keepers

Once a vibrant organization that boasted tens of thousands of active supporters, the Oath Keepers have a smaller base today and their activities range from providing armed support to small businesses violating stay-at-home COVID-19 pandemic orders to organizing armed guards to protect neighborhoods from “leftist violence.”

In the past, the Oath Keepers participated in armed standoffs against Federal agents in Nevada, Oregon, and Montana. Recently, the Oath Keepers have been extremely active in building up the image of Antifa as a violent, organized, domestic terrorism group and their founder recently expressed frustration that President Trump did not retake the cordoned off protest area in Seattle (CHAZ/CHOP) with force.

Ironically, they are advocating the use of guns against law enforcement trying to enforce stay-at-home orders and federal land laws, but they consider themselves a pro-police organization. Their membership includes several police officers, active duty military, and military veterans.

The group was recently de-platformed on Discord but they still have a very active Facebook presence with 551,000 followers on their main page.

Three Percenters

This group believes that only three percent of colonists fought in and won the Revolutionary War against the British; therefore, they only need three percent of Americans today to band together to overthrow the current US Government. To become a participant, you only need to hold yourself out as one, usually by wearing a patch or a III% tattoo, so their social media presence is very large, and they network primarily on Facebook. Since each subgroup is independent of the others, there is no central leadership or structure, and infighting has kept them from becoming a significant force.

Three Percent groups participated in several standoffs against the government between 2014 and 2016, were present at the Charlottesville “Unite the Right” rally in 2017 and have recently provided armed support at Re-Open rallies and Confederate monuments sites.

There is significant overlap with the Oath Keepers, the Militia Movement, and with Boogaloo adherents.

The Militias

Scattered throughout the country, these private paramilitary groups engage in armed training, have a relatively organized structure within each group, and even though many states prohibit their activities, they operate with impunity.

In recent years, they have engaged in armed standoffs with federal agents, kidnapped and held immigrants on the border with Mexico, provided armed support at the Charlottesville Unite The Right rally in 2017, and have guarded Confederate and other monuments in several states.

Militias vary in their attitude towards race. Some openly welcome men and women of all races while others are tightly focused on white supremacist beliefs and goals.

Left-Wing Militias and Gun Clubs

The newest entry to the militant world is the left-wing militia and gun clubs. This includes small groups such as the John Brown Gun Club / Redneck Revolt and the Socialist Rifle Club to the newly formed Latino Rifle Association and the NFAC black militia that made its debut in Georgia on the 4th of July.

To date, armed left-wing militias and gun clubs have generally arisen in response to the perceived threat from armed right-wing militias, Three Percenters, and Oath Keepers, but some express strong anti-police and anti-government beliefs.

- On July 13, 2019, an Antifa activist and member of the Puget Sound John Brown Gun Club was shot and killed when he attempted to blow up an ICE detention facility in the state of Washington³.

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The Boogaloo

The idea of a second American revolution, where armed patriots gather, rise up, and overthrow the tyrannical government has been the dream of the anti-government extremist movement for decades. Most called it the second American Revolution, others “Revolution 2.0,” but the denizens of the weapons forums on the 4Chan /k/ board and on reddit renamed it “Civil War 2: Electric Boogaloo.”

A few years ago, there was an ongoing joke on social media to cast any mediocre sequel as an “electric boogaloo.” This was a hat tip to the 1980s sequel “Breakin’ 2: Electric Boogaloo.” The “Civil War 2: Electric Boogaloo” theme was spread using humor and memes which were carried over to other social media platforms.

³ [“Willem Van Spronsen aka Emma Durutti: 5 Fast Facts You Need to Know,”](#) by Tom Cleary, *Heavy.com*, September 24, 2019.

By the time the Boogaloo theme moved to Facebook and Instagram, it was picked up by other anti-government militants.

By early 2020, “Boogaloo” had morphed into “Big Luau,” and supporters started wearing Hawaiian shirts under their body armor and weapons, and then “Big Igloo.” They called themselves Boogaloo Bois, Boog Bois, the Boojahideen, and dozens of other names.

When several militants wearing Hawaiian shirts and sporting Boogaloo patches were seen at the January 20, 2020 gun rally in Richmond, VA, word spread on Facebook among gun and anti-government groups and pages. People started copying their look, patches, and jargon. For most, it was just an in-joke, an aesthetic that separated those in the know from those who weren’t.

But when a movement is no deeper than a special look or a shared set of memes, anyone can join. White supremacist and Neo Nazi groups on Discord and Telegram started calling themselves Boog Bois, and on Facebook, anti-government extremists from the Oath Keepers, Three Percent groups, and militias donned Hawaiian shirts and joined in on the joke, even though many of them didn’t share the Boogaloo movement’s extreme animosity towards law enforcement.

- On March 12, 2020, police raided a home in Potomac, MD, killing 21-year old Duncan Lemp, a Boogaloo adherent who participated in “Boog” Facebook groups and on militia websites. The movement had found both a martyr and a plan; they would take up arms to protest in the name of people who had been killed by law enforcement.

While the white supremacy side of the movement was relatively small but active on Discord and Telegram, the non-racist, libertarian, anti-government side grew rapidly on Facebook, seemingly unaware of that Neo-Nazi groups and hard-core racists were co-opting their look and jargon. When the racist side tried to post on the non-racist Facebook pages and groups, they were usually kicked out and mocked by the moderators.

Early press reports focused only on the white supremacy side of the movement, while ignoring the much larger, racially diverse libertarian side who had started to show up armed at protests and rallies, siding with Re-Open protesters and Black Lives Matter activists in cities around the country.

The primary motivation for this side of the movement is chaos; and their primary target is the police.

- On April 11, 2020, a 36-year old Texan started livestreaming on Facebook as he drove around town, looking for police officers to ambush and execute.

Since the majority of participants were radicalized elsewhere prior to donning a Hawaiian shirt—either in anti-government militant groups such as the Three Percenters or the militias, or in white supremacy groups—the Boogaloo shouldn’t be considered an independent movement at this time. This could change if they continue to recruit teenagers and young men for whom these Facebook pages and groups are their first taste of extremism.

Discord recently removed the largest Boogaloo server, reddit has closed down the main Boogaloo subreddit, and Facebook and Instagram both removed a sizable network of Boogaloo accounts, pages, and groups from their platform. This is likely a temporary fix, as these groups are very good at rebranding their efforts to avoid being banned, and some have moved to alternative social media such as MeWe, Parler, and Gab.

Potential Concerns

1. Gun Control legislation could trigger one or more significant violent events.

Last summer, a trio of high-profile shootings reinvigorated the national debate on gun control legislation.

- On July 28, 2019, a 19-year California man shot and killed three people, injured 17 others at a festival before committing suicide. He left his final statement on Instagram, advising those who wanted to understand his motive to read a text used by both White Supremacist group and the Church of Satan. He left behind a list of potential targets which has not yet been made public.
- On August 3, 2019, a 21-year old Texas man shot and killed 23 people at a Walmart, injuring 23 others. He posted a manifesto on the 8chan website citing white supremacist and anti-immigrant reasons for the mass killing. He is awaiting trial.
- On August 4, 2019, a 24-year old man killed nine and wounded 17 others at a bar in Ohio before police shot and killed him. His political leanings were left-wing and on Twitter he had expressed interest in the Texas shooting the night before. His motives are unknown.

As a result of these and earlier mass shootings, several states started discussing the introduction of red flag law legislation that would enable police and family members to remove firearms from dangerous people⁴.

At the Third Democratic Debate on September 12, 2019, then-Candidate Beto O'Rourke told moderator David Muir, "We're going to take your AR-15, your AK-47. We're not going to allow it to be used against our fellow Americans anymore."

Both the Red Flag discussions and the O'Rourke pledge enraged the militant side of the anti-government movement, many of whom believe that any form of gun confiscation will be the triggering event for the next Revolution.

- On November 24, 2020, a 28-year old military veteran began livestreaming a standoff with police on his Instagram account. He claimed that he had been "red flagged" by a coworker and that the police were there to confiscate his firearms. They had actually gone to his home to investigate a domestic violence claim, but that was not revealed until later. He told viewers that this was the beginning of the Boogaloo, the revolutionary war that they had all been anticipating. By the end of his six-hour standoff, 130,000 people

⁴ ["What Are 'Red Flag' Gun Laws, and How Do They Work?"](#) by Timothy Williams, *NY Times*, August 6, 2019.

were watching his feed, and rumors spread about militias and Three Percenters driving to his home to face the police by his side.

In the November 19, 2019 election, Virginia Democrats, running on a gun control platform, took control of the Virginia State Assembly and the State Senate. As soon as they were sworn into office, they introduced the legislation promised during their campaigns and gun activists held a rally on January 20, 2020 at the Virginia State Capitol to protest this legislation. While a typical, large protest or rally for the movement draws between 200 and 500 people, 22,000 firearm owners, many of them armed, showed up in Richmond for the event. A small number of left-wing gun groups showed up as well, but since they had a shared interest with the right-wing groups—protesting gun control measures—the event was peaceful. A handful of the rally participants wore Hawaiian shirts under their body armor which prompted significant interest in what had been relatively small Boogaloo groups on Facebook.

- Four days before rally, the FBI arrested three members of The Base, a Neo-Nazi paramilitary group, on their way to Richmond. Their plan was to shoot into the crowd to start a violent, chaotic melee.

2. *The COVID-19 pandemic is placing significant amount of strain on extremist groups. If states return to a lock-down status, I'm concerned that individuals and small groups will lash out violently against government, law enforcement, medical professionals, essential workers, contact tracers, and our medical infrastructure.*

Most Americans are anxious about the spread of the virus. We're worried about our health, the health of our families and friends, the country's economy, and the stress being put on our healthcare systems.

Anti-government groups, driven by anti-vaccine conspiracy theories and the belief that the virus is a hoax being used to exert control over Americans, have, in some cases, turned to armed resistance.

- On March 24, a Missouri man died in a shootout with police. He had been planning to use a car bomb to blow up a hospital treating coronavirus patients in hopes of triggering a violent revolution.
- In April and May, numerous "Re-Open" rallies took place at state capitols around the country. Three Percenters, Oath Keepers, and militia participants, some in Boogaloo attire, have provided armed support for these events. They demanded that their state governors rescind any stay-at-home orders and allow businesses to reopen immediately. Michigan was a hot spot for such activity and on May 14, 2020, the state had to cancel a legislative session because of the armed threat⁵.

⁵ "[Michigan Cancels Legislative Session to Avoid Armed Protesters](#)," by David Welch, *Bloomberg*, May 14, 2020.

- Also in April and May, a handful of hair salons, bars, and tattoo parlors violated stay-at-home orders and were protected from the police by armed militants, Oath Keepers, and Boogaloo participants.
- On June 11, 2020, a New York man, angry that he wasn't allowed to enter a hospital to see his friend because of COVID-19 restrictions, left and returned to the hospital with a backpack filled with three explosive devices, a hatchet, handcuffs, a BB gun, and ammunition.

Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are filled with extremist threats against healthcare professional who they believe are inflating COVID-19 numbers and hiding real cures. Contact tracers are another potential target as are essential workers who ask them to wear a mask before entering a store or restaurant. When a vaccine becomes available, a fairly large number of anti-government extremists will likely refuse. Many believe that the vaccine is part of nefarious plot to track them with embedded microchips or to weed out undesirables.

3. *The recent killing of George Floyd by police has brought together large groups of people protest police practices and abuses. A rapidly growing number of people at these events are armed.*

Guns are common denominator in most anti-government extremist groups. Racism is not. For that reason, you could find the Oath Keepers taking to the streets to protect police from Antifa while Boogaloo members join forces with Black Lives Matter against the police. Add in the National Guard, miscellaneous federal agencies, and white supremacist groups to the mix along with a growing number of left-wing activists and militant groups who have started carrying firearms, and there's a potential street war brewing.

Furthermore, there are groups and individuals willing to use the chaos inherent in civil unrest to accelerate their own plans for a revolution.

- On May 29, 2020, using the confusion of a Black Lives Matter protest as cover, two "Boogaloo" participants shot two federal security officers in California, killing one. A week later, one of the shooters, an active duty Air Force Sergeant, ambushed and shot two Sheriff deputies, again killing one. Before he was arrested, he scrawled a Boogaloo message in blood on the car he'd stolen to escape arrest. He is awaiting trial at this time.
- On May 30, 2020, two military veterans and one active duty military man plotted to attack police at a Black Lives Matter protest using guns, explosives, fireworks, and gasoline. All three were Boogaloo adherents who had met at a Re-Open rally in Las Vegas. Their plan, thwarted by their arrest, was to incite chaos in the crowd.

4. *Antifa as the Fictional Enemy*

Known for confronting racists and right-wing militant groups at protests, causing property damage, and engaging in street violence, the various subgroups that make up Antifa are not

without fault. They are not however, the hyper-violent army that anti-government extremists make them out to be.

Recently, there have been a number of hoaxes, fake social media accounts, that claim Antifa is plotting violence against average citizens. One such rumor claimed that there were “busloads of Antifa” heading to small towns and suburbs for the purpose of terrorizing those communities. Armed militants gathered to protect these towns and neighborhoods, unaware of that they had fallen for a hoax.

Such trolling is problematic because it heightens the anger of the anti-government extremists at a time when they are already extremely stressed and eager for confrontation.

5. The upcoming Presidential Election could spark one or more violent events.

In general, the anti-government movement is right-wing and most support President Trump. The non-racist side of the Boogaloo proponents are the exception in that consider themselves Libertarian and therefore prefer Jo Jorgensen. There is already significant chatter about the possibility for a Civil War and armed civil unrest in the event Trump loses his reelection bid, but single actor and small cell violent acts would be more likely.

Summary

Between gun control issues, civil unrest, the stresses placed on the country by a deadly pandemic, conspiracy theories, anti-press sentiments, and a highly divisive election cycle, the nation is one large event away from violence.

In the past, the Ruby Ridge and Waco standoffs were the catalysts that drove Timothy McVeigh to terrorism. Such catalysts today could include heavy handed use of the American military on civilians/protesters, a street war that turned lethal, or the government using excessive force against what turned out to be an imaginary or exaggerated enemy.

Anti-government extremists are aware that their plans for a revolution or “Civil War 2” require that catalyst. Most are waiting for that big event, but some will do what they have to force its occurrence.