

COVID-19, CONSPIRACY AND CONTAGIOUS SEDITION:

A Case Study on the Militia-Sphere

Joel Finkelstein, *Corresponding Author*

The Network Contagion Research Institute
The James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions, Princeton University
Miller Center for Community Protection and Resilience
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey
joel@ncri.io

John K. Donohue, *Author*

NYPD Chief of Strategic Initiatives (Ret.)

Alex Goldenberg, *Author*

The Network Contagion Research Institute
alex@ncri.io

Jason Baumgartner, *Author*

The Network Contagion Research Institute

John Farmer, *Author*

Former New Jersey State Attorney General and Chief Counsel, 9/11 Commission
Director, Miller Center for Community Protection and Resilience
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

Savvas Zannettou, *Author*

The Network Contagion Research Institute
Max Planck Institute for Informatics

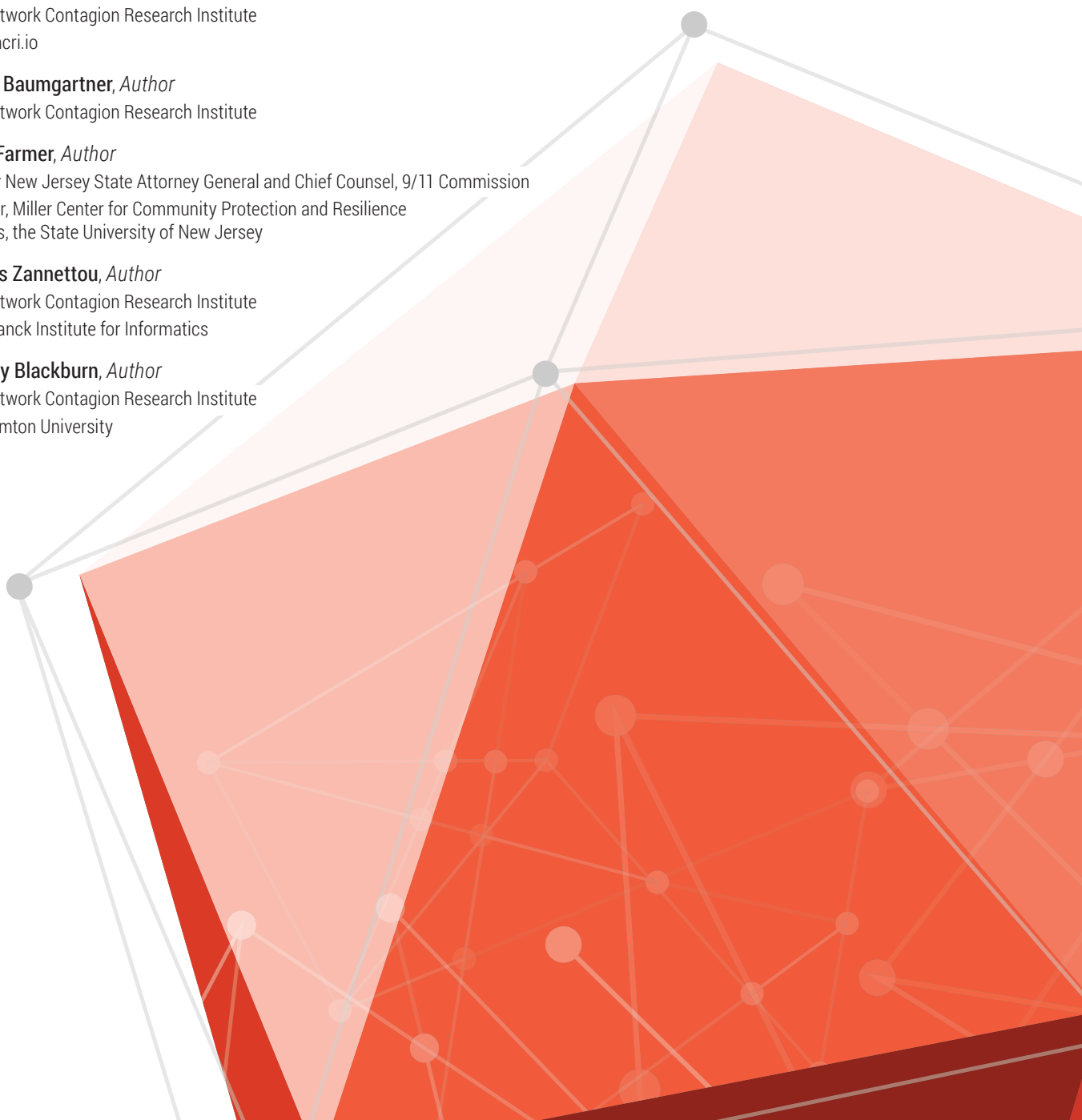
Jeremy Blackburn, *Author*

The Network Contagion Research Institute
Binghamton University

PRESENTED BY
RUTGERS

Miller Center for Community
Protection and Resilience

POWERED BY



FOREWORD

Following on the heels of a state-by-state lockdown of social and economic activity put in place to attempt to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus pandemic, we stand in the midst of historical nationwide violence and riots over the George Floyd incident. Together, these events cause social dislocation on a scale not seen since the Great Depression. Not surprisingly in such an environment, fear of disease, fear of law enforcement, and fear of violence are compounded by social isolation and widespread unemployment.

It is not surprising, in this season of discontent, that many Americans have grown frustrated with the restrictions on their freedoms, and angry at the repeated confrontations involving law enforcement. Many have exercised their constitutional rights to freedom of speech and assembly to express their anger in a peaceful manner.

Within the ranks of the discontented, however, certain extremist subgroups have been coalescing demonstrably over social media into what is best described as a “Militia-sphere,” in which the current discontent over stay-at-home restrictions or major confrontations with law enforcement serve as opportunities to incite violence against civil society, lawmakers and law enforcement itself everywhere. The Militia-sphere’s messaging has grown increasingly extreme as the pandemic lockdowns have continued, promoting theories that the pandemic is being exaggerated to justify a police state; exploiting recent protests regarding the George Floyd incident, and transforming peaceful protests into violent chaos. Though its followers by no means account for a majority of the violence, elements of the Militia-sphere now appear in demonstrations in Atlanta, Louisville, Minneapolis, Tampa, and several other major American cities; their conduct now ranges from shooting at Black Lives Matter protesters, to upturning police vehicles, to committing acts of arson on court buildings. In the midst of the pandemic and the rioting, concerns are growing that the Militia-sphere is acting as an agent of discontent and chaos.

This report details the rising intensity of the messaging associated with the various subgroups, the expanding platform for such messaging as it has spread from fringe web platforms to mainstream sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit. It demonstrates the deliberate efforts of the Militia-sphere’s exponents to hijack the national conversation from explosive memes about police brutality to calls for insurgency, state by state, against lockdown orders. Finally, the report shows how the largest online conspiracy group in the U.S., QAnon, exploits the opportunity presented by these events to draw populist support for increasingly violent and apocalyptic confrontations against the lockdown, law enforcement, and an ill-defined “elite.”

Law enforcement patrols the fault lines of our society. It is the first responder for ensuring that the rights of people to assemble and speak are safeguarded, while at the same time preserving public order and the ability for others to go about their lives peacefully. By their very nature, public rallies bring similarly minded ideologically motivated people to a central and symbolic location to amplify the unifying message of their cause. Given the highly charged nature of the current rallies, with heavily armed persons expressing grievances specifically related to the government-imposed restrictions on assemblage during these protests and the pandemic, the potential for violence is now palpable. As this report demonstrates, that potential is amplified by an emerging and uncharted network for opportunistic violence and propaganda.

John K. Donohue

NYPD Chief of Strategic Initiatives (Ret.)

John J. Farmer, Jr.

Former New Jersey State Attorney General and Chief Counsel, 9/11 Commission
Director, Miller Center for Community Protection and Resilience
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

INTRODUCTION

As unprecedented impediments on free movement and association grow under conditions of quarantine, reactive groups materialize across social media and the real world. In the United States, citizen militia as well as Second Amendment (2A) activists exhibit vocal concerns for their loss of civil liberty, and demonstrate in “reopen America” rallies across numerous states. While concerns for the suspension of civil liberty is always reasoned, a contagion of anti-scientific and anti-government revolutionary conspiracy groups, especially “boogaloo” and “QAnon” conspiracy groups, have begun to simultaneously co-opt the narrative around these protests. A Militia-sphere—a loose aggregate of politically militant, gun-centric, and conspiracy-enthusiast users and groups across both fringe and mainstream Web platforms—is now emerging as an element of concern. Sensational content and outbreaks of armed confrontation circulate in tandem and regularly across this network to instill fears of armed revolution in our national conversation.

In this briefing, we use a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches on fringe communities like 4chan and Gab, to mainstream platforms on Twitter, Reddit, and Facebook, to show how COVID-19 impacts the Militia-sphere and lays the ground for outbreaks of disinformation and violent incitement against law enforcement and law makers. We chart the growth of a shared narrative, complete with martyr myths growing across these Web communities. We show how COVID-19 inflames conspiracies with themes of an imminent civil war and revolt all-at-once against police in the “boogaloo,” or against the “elite” in QAnon’s “great awakening” myth. From preparing pipe bombs to live streaming lethal hunts against law enforcement, we show how these communities weaponize tools of social media and violence, by integrating COVID-19 and quarantine to hijack the media narrative. The groups and actors involved in the Militia-sphere may now pose imminent and lethal threats to law enforcement. Gaps in our strategic understanding of this phenomena also comprise significant danger to tense communities and law enforcement across the nation. Thus, there are several pressing questions we seek to address in this report:

1. Can we quantitatively describe boogaloo activity and how it changes in light of COVID-19 across several fringe and mainstream Web platforms and better map the online spread of the meme?
2. Can we use qualitative analysis to dissect major themes and memes surfacing at reopen rallies, describe criminal activity and assess new trends in radicalization for militia-related extremism more broadly?
3. Can we combine this qualitative analysis with quantitative methods to better parse and understand the shared narratives and communication network materializing in the Militia-sphere?
4. Can we examine if seditious and revolutionary themes are going mainstream among conspiracy-oriented users more broadly and quantify the growth of these conspiracies?

As tensions escalate, the current COVID-19 environment hotboxes a hostage, at-home audience of unemployed users with these sensational media narratives and conspiracy, which our analysis suggests are growing, and in some cases more than doubling across Web communities. Heralded by COVID-19, this report aims to illuminate in a timely fashion how, through social-media-driven conspiracy, a vocal minority of disaffected users are rapidly transforming into a distributed and politically reactive pool for collective, real-world, militant incitement: the Militia-sphere. Our hope is that this report can serve as an important and timely map for law enforcement and civil society to flag and intersect this pressing social issue.



Heavily armed individuals seen in the back of an old military vehicle at the April 20th anti-quarantine protest in Harrisburg, PA. While the individuals told CNN correspondent Miguel Marquez they were “all independent,” the Hawaiian shirts signify their hope for the “Big Luau,” or violent civil war.



Leader of the Three Percent of Washington Militia, Matt Marshall, donning Hawaiian a shirt at the April 22nd ReOpen rally in Olympia, Washington. This highlights the convergence of the boogaloo meme and well-known anti-government extremist movements.

BOOGALOO ENTHUSIASTS WEAPONIZE REOPEN PROTESTS TO MOBILIZE ENTHUSIASTS FOR ARMED CONFRONTATION WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT AND LAWMAKERS DURING COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS EN MASSE

On April 20th, a camo military vehicle carrying men dressed in colorful Hawaiian luau shirts, full body armor and heavy weapons appeared in the middle of a reopen protest in Harrisburg, PA. Paul Goldenberg, a senior fellow at Rutgers and the University of Ottawa and advisor to the Department of Homeland Security, told the NCRI that, “In 2020... seeing a surplus army vehicle pulling into the center of a Pennsylvania state capitol out of nowhere, filled with civilian militia armed with munitions customarily carried in a foreign war zone... was unprecedented.” Journalists were equally shocked and confounded but upon speaking to the group to ascertain their intentions, clarified in their reporting that the group identified as “all independent.”

However, these men didn’t come out of nowhere, and were certainly not politically “all independent.” The Hawaiian shirts, military symbols and behavior signifies that they are part of an explicitly political and apocalyptic ideology that poses direct threats to law enforcement and law makers across the United States: the boogaloo.

Since our [initial report](#), among organized militias such as Oath Keepers, and Three Percenters and others, many now share the same boogaloo meme both in the virtual and real world. On social media, the Tech Transparency Project (TTP) recently released a qualitative [report](#), showing that 125 Facebook groups now promote “the boogaloo,” and have grown to over 72,000 members collectively. However, qualitative investigations have substantial limitations given the scale and coded language of memes like the boogaloo and thus quantitative approaches are warranted.

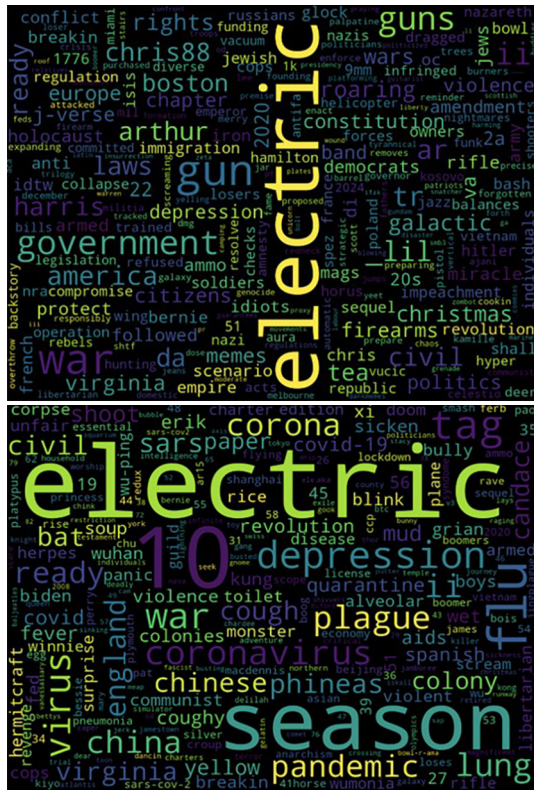


Fig 4. A boogaloo word cloud from Reddit for the months of November and December (top) vs March (bottom) show COVID-19 themes now surround boogaloo conversation on the platform.



Boogaloo memes show evidence of merging themes with COVID-19 as well as gamification for violence against law enforcement and lawmakers with hybridized terms like the “flugaloo.”

COVID-19-INSPIRED ITERATIONS OF THE BOOGALOO NOW MAINSTREAM ON REDDIT; SUBREDDITS GAMIFY AND PROPAGANDIZE INCITEMENT TO VIOLENCE AGAINST LAW ENFORCEMENT

We next sought to examine whether mainstream communities exhibit the same trends that we observe on Gab and 4chan boards by exploring if and how COVID-19 has altered boogaloo chatter and themes as they appear on Reddit. Since November of 2019, mentions of boogaloo/boog have more than doubled over the site and show sustained and increasing activity over the COVID-19 period (appendix figure 1). Furthermore, a simple word cloud analysis around the term “boogaloo,” comparing the months of November/December to the month of March, suggests that COVID-19 language now predominates boogaloo conversations on the platform (figure 4).

COVID-19-related boogaloo material now also seems to flourish on Reddit and other mainstream platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. A qualitative analysis across Reddit for instance shows several new subreddits, such as r/definitelyNOTboogaloo, and r/boogaloosidequests, dedicated to the creation of new propaganda and even gamification of these materials. Examples of these memes include images that promote stockpiling munitions for a now hybrid boogaloo/COVID-19 event termed the “flugaloo.” Boogaloo enthusiasts also now regularly promote memes that offer video-game-like “side quests” and “achievements,” in subreddits like r/boogaloosidequests, which popularizes memes with explicit instructions to murder, maim, or deliberately infect law enforcement. Since Reddit features upvoting of content by users, the best of these memes receive the most upvotes and visibility, thus exposing users to the most highly celebrated, seditious content of the day.

Next, we sought to understand the distribution of subreddits on the platform that converse on the topic. Our analysis in figure 5 (bottom) shows a mix of politics, memes, and gun/militia-oriented reddit posts suggesting that the topic attracts wide interest in various mainstream, as well as militia-oriented communities. Notably, our analysis of boogaloo chatter in militia/gun-enthusiast communities on Reddit shows a sustained rise in activity in conjunction with COVID-19 that parallels activity in fringe and radical communities (figure 5 (top)). While our data suggests activity in Reddit is up overall on the platform during quarantine (~20%), boogaloo chatter has nearly doubled overall (appendix figure 1).

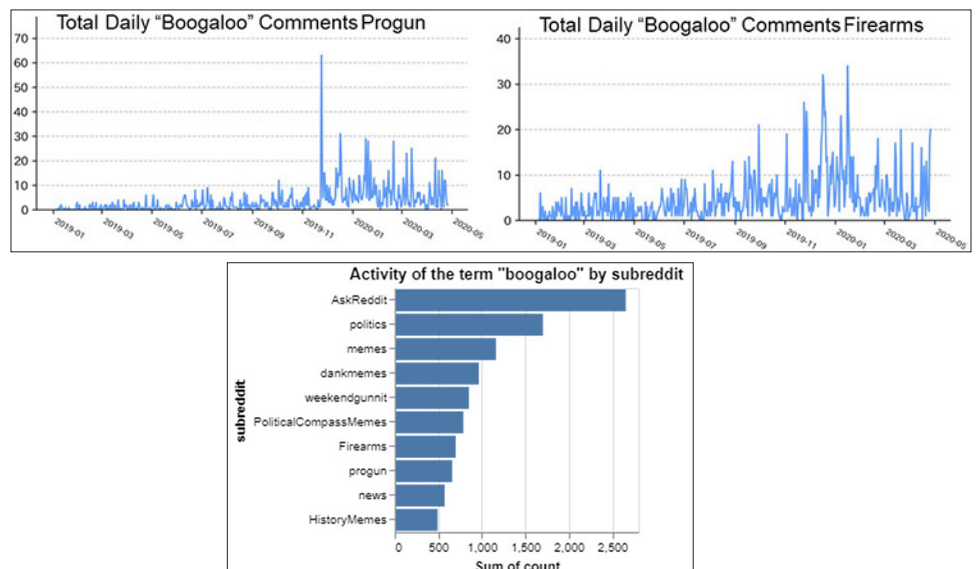


Fig 5. Top: Boogaloo chatter on gun/militia enthusiast subreddits shows similar increases in activity to Gab and 4chan with sustained activity during COVID-19. Bottom: A subreddit analysis of boogaloo chatter on Reddit from November to April shows expression across politics, meme culture, and gun enthusiast communities.

MARTYRDOM, MEMES AND MOTIVATION: AS SHARED NARRATIVE GROWS IN THE MILITIA-SPHERE, TRACES OF AN UNDERLYING SHARED-INFORMATION NETWORK EMERGES

Martyr myths, sensational and highly public revenge killings, hostage-taking training, and romanticizing terrorists signify the typical lore and appeal for violent movements. Of these, martyrdom is especially significant because it helps convince the public of the moral reasons which justify violent action, as well as summon civilian recruits and support. Could the disparate users and militias who support the boogaloo and similar conspiracies be converging on shared martyr narratives and shared celebration of violence?

Its first major martyrdom narrative erupted on March 12th when 21-year-old Duncan Lemp, a programmer, prolific member of boogaloo/militia related groups, and self-identified Three Percenter was killed at home during a SWAT team raid under nebulous circumstances. According to Law Enforcement officials, “Lemp refused to comply with the officer’s commands and proceeded towards the interior bedroom where other officers were located.” Authorities also found a device designed as a “booby trap” intended to fire a shotgun shell at anyone entering the door. While legal motions—both from NGOs and the Lemp family—to release details for warrant information and body camera footage are still in process and these details are in dispute, militia-oriented groups quickly latched on to the event. Martyrdom hashtags such as #hisnamewasduncanlemp, began to appear on Twitter along with memes on Reddit and other platforms inciting violent revenge fantasies against law enforcement and lawmakers. Simultaneously, real-world rallies with participation by Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, and others began signaling Lemp-martyr signs from Washington State to Pennsylvania to protest restrictions from COVID-19 quarantine.



Duncan Lemp martyr memes depicting fantasies of militant revenge against law enforcement appear on various Web platforms and correspond to the appearance of real world signage at protest rallies against quarantine restrictions. Duncan Lemp patches have been seen at reopen rallies across the country.



Aaron Swenson posts images of himself armed and in full-body armor over a boogaloo shirt with a duncan lemp martyr hashtag weeks before enacting a revenge fantasy to hunt and kill law enforcement in Texas.

Within just over a month, revenge fantasy spilled over into reality. Aaron Swenson, a boogaloo enthusiast posted #hisnamewasduncan over a selfie featuring weapons and body armor on Facebook after Lemp’s martyr episode on April 4th. On April 23rd, he live-streamed his revenge hunt on police in Texarkana. While Swenson was soon arrested after an hours-long chase, for inciting terror and possession of illegal firearms, these tactics portend a worrying evolution of real world/virtual violence in the Militia-sphere, akin to the live streaming of ISIS beheadings and other innovative uses of media by hybrid and distributed sporadic terror groups. Martyr narratives and revenge killings are likely to continue to shape a shared identity among users in these groups.

In addition to martyr myths and revenge killings, more familiar methods of terror for violent organizations include the use of bombs and explosives. On May 4th, Bradley Bunn, a militia enthusiast threatening militant violence against law enforcement for their role in enforcing quarantine restrictions, was arrested in his home in Colorado in possession of two one-pound



Top, an Ohio reopen protest on May 1st with convicted terrorists, martyr badges, and badges demonstrating tacit identification with other terror groups. Bottom, boogaloo groups now distribute literature to recruit as a movement. (Photo courtesy of @Granitepolitics)

containers with gunpowder for reloading .308 caliber cartridges and four pipe bombs. Bunn admitted outright that the murder of law enforcement was his goal; these materials were set to be used as a lethal trap for entry, just like the Lemp episode.

Subsequently to these acts by lone individuals, these actors now display symbols and behaviors as a group which portend stronger identity, such as recruitment literature and coordinated real-world displays. At a reopen rally at Ohio on May 1st, Hawaiian shirts appeared with atomwaffen-style masks, martyr badges, and badges broadcasting tacit identification with other terror groups (boojahadeen) on several boogaloo enthusiasts as they posed with convicted terrorist John Brockhoeft. Brockhoeft, a former postal worker, is still an active member of an organization that uses terrorist tactics known as the Army of God, and served a seven-year sentence for mailing pipe bombs and bombing clinics. As group coordination evolves, including armed resistance to quarantine restrictions by militants, it is essential that law enforcement take into account increasingly sophisticated group behaviors in risk assessments and track the spread of recruitment literature and efforts at radicalization.

The convergence of martyr episodes, revenge attacks, terror tactics, romanticizing terrorists and terrorist movements, and group-level coordinated behaviors now appear in highly visible real-world events. This suggests a shared identity and shared narrative in the Militia-sphere. But do these groups and individuals connect through these events in less-tangible networks on social media?

We thus examined activity on social media to investigate the Lemp-martyr episode, since martyr events tend to be formative and pivotal for violent movements. We began by running a timeline analysis over the term "Lemp" on Reddit, 4chan's /pol/ and Gab. In figure 4, we show a convergent "Lemp" comment spike and reactivity across these communities, both mainstream and fringe, around the day of the Lemp episode followed by slight low-level chatter.

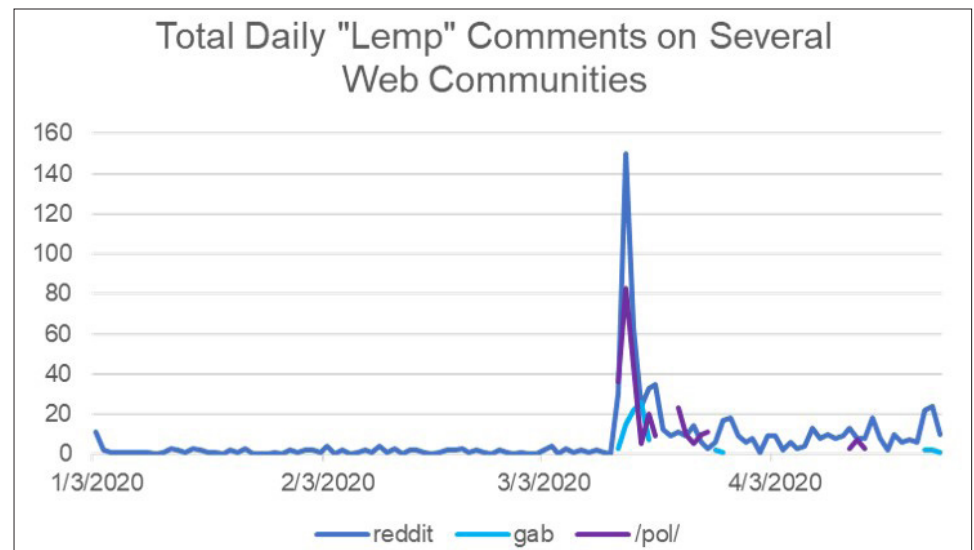


Fig 6. "Lemp" comments across Reddit, Gab and /pol/ show a cross-platform spike shared across distinct communities.



Private and public Lemp commemoration groups have appeared on Facebook including "His Name Was Duncan Lemp" which has seen over 2,000 new members in a 30-day span.

At least in fringe communities, reactive activity is more interpretable as reactive and antisocial. But mainstream communities like Reddit boast numerous sub-communities in news and politics where events pertaining to world affairs are discussed more generally. We therefore segregated "Lemp" comments on Reddit by subreddit to determine which sorts of communities reacted to the episode. Additionally, we analyzed Twitter hashtags associated with Lemp to examine themes on mainstream platforms. Our analysis in figure 5 shows that gun and militia-oriented communities comprise the bulk of chatter around the martyr episode on Reddit, while on Twitter, themes around boogaloo militarization and revolution associate with the "duncanlemp" hashtag as well. Further investigation is also merited on platforms like Facebook, because we discover resistance-themed groups for Lemp commemoration there. While still preliminary, this introduces concerns that shared narratives like martyrdom may connect distributed, militia-oriented users across mainstream and fringe networks.

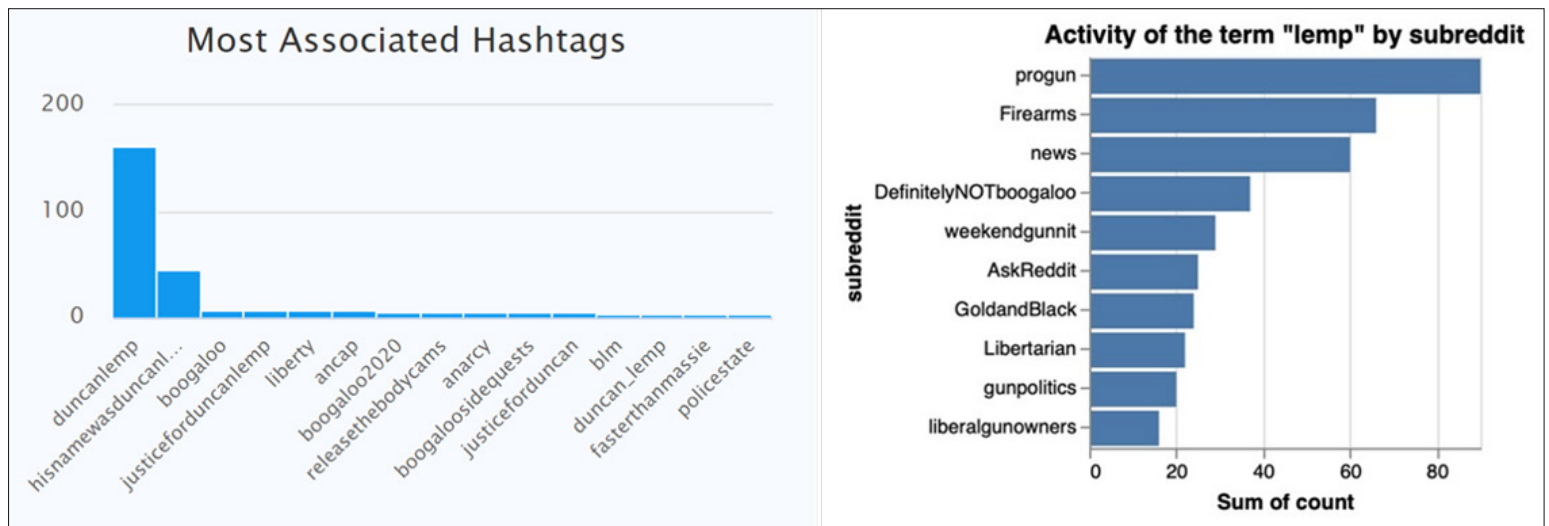


Figure 7. Left: Duncan Lemp martyrdom associated hashtags on Twitter over a 10-day period starting on April 24 showcase traces of fear of a police state, anarchy, the boogaloo and sidequests, which gamify violence against law enforcement. Right: Subreddit distribution of "Lemp" comments on Reddit shows participation by a select group of gun and militia oriented subreddits in particular concerning the martyr.



MILITARIZATION IN CONSPIRACY GROUPS: QANON CONSPIRACY EVOLVES MORE ARMY/MILITIA-LIKE THEMES, PROMOTES INSURGENT SENTIMENT ACROSS WEB PLATFORMS DURING QUARANTINE, AND SPREADS DISINFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19

QAnon conspiracies have been associated with lethal violence and the [FBI has identified](#) QAnon as a potential threat for violent terror. Numerous episodes of lone acts of violence, and violent incitement find their roots in the QAnon conspiracy. From kidnapping plots, plots to assassinate President Trump, a bizarre murder by sword and other murders related to crime conspiracy, to an armored vehicle and heavily armed actors appearing by the Hoover Dam, QAnon—started on 4chan—has frequently been associated with acts of violence perpetrated by individual, susceptible believers. The conspiracy narrative describes a benevolent cabal operating in secret from within the government, seeking to purge the government of pedophilic and satanic evil and it suggests that this cabal is communicating with the masses through secret coded hints dropped on social media. Over the past year however, QAnon has also found increasing participation with [both anti-government groups and militia members](#).

In the face of COVID-19, QAnon now witnesses massive growth and appears to militarize, like the boogaloo, with revolutionary and apocalyptic themes in a more militant and global mode of inciting revolt. QAnon conspiracies, such as “the Great Awakening” for instance, [refer to a moment in which elites will be defeated and the truth will be revealed](#), and are often featured at anti-quarantine rallies. Other conspiracies suggest that a “new world order” now prepares to emerge under the tyranny of Bill Gates and George Soros, the Rothschilds, and other elites, who—through their vaccination attempts—seek to establish mind control, world domination, genocide, financial gain, or some combination of these.

The result is that the QAnon conspiracy now invites two modes of disinformation which converge on COVID-19 in dangerous ways. The first is anti-vaccination and anti-science disinformation about the virus itself as a weaponized plot. The second is increasing militarization in the conspiracy group which combines disinformation on COVID-19 with seditious themes that parallel the boogaloo. WWGIWGA, for instance, comprises a key QAnon slogan expanding to “where we go 1 we go all” and features with Great Awakening material and at reopen rallies both as an in-group cheer, but also as an all-at-once go signal, reminiscent of the boogaloo. Indeed, evidence of militarization in the QAnon conspiracy now abounds with references to a “Q-army” complete with military-style badges.



Q-Army and militarization in patches (L) and flags (R) increasingly appear across social media and the real world along with ominous warnings of a “Great Awakening” (center) signified as a massive event coupled to a fused time bomb above. The event is apparently hosted by the ominous slogan “WWGIWGA” (“where we go 1 we go all”). In its entirety, Q conspiracies thus appear to be mainstreaming the notion of a massive “go-signal” for the crowd to incite a revolutionary moment that appears increasingly militarized in popular culture.

We next sought to analyze the prevalence of these trends on social media to determine quantitatively if QAnon conspiracies surface and spread online with recent protests and unrest, and determine what themes associated with them. Examining Twitter using the public API and 1% feed, we analyzed the frequency of new tweets from April 23rd to May 2nd, 2020, of elevated real-world protests and events. Worryingly, excluding even retweets and replies, our data suggests a doubling in QAnon chatter on Twitter and a more than threefold increase in the use of the WWG1WGA slogan.

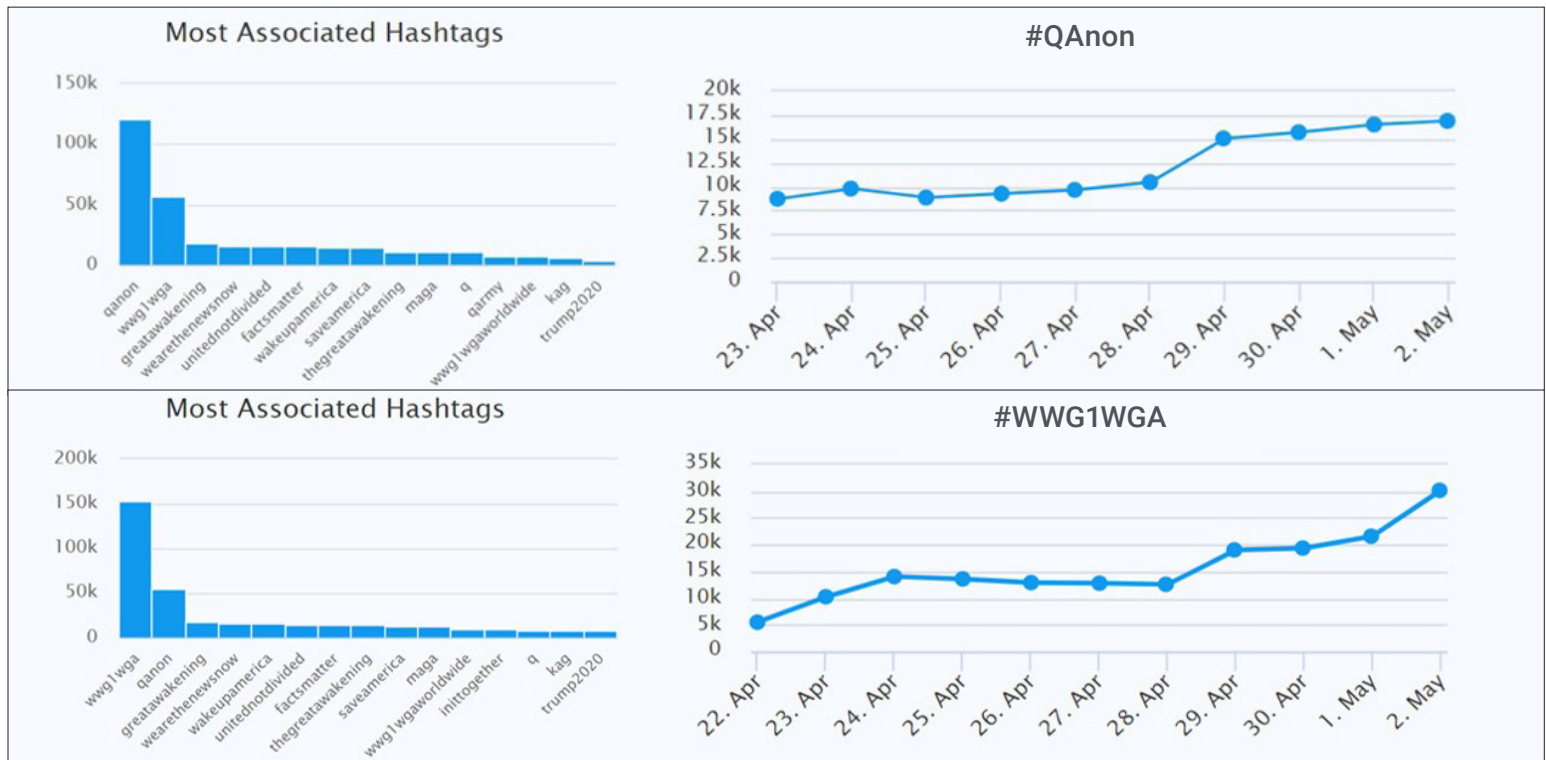


Fig 8. Top: Daily new “QAnon” tweets (top) and tweets which contain its ominous slogan “WWG1WGA” (“where we go 1 we go all”) show an over 2x increase (excluding even replies and retweets) on Twitter in a 11-day period from April 22nd to May 2nd, 2020. Both terms associate closely with the Q conspiracy: “the great awakening,” a momentous event signifying a sudden, all-at-once, revolt against a sinister “new world order” composed of “elites” like Gates, Soros, and Rothschild.

There are several possible explanations for this increase. Quarantine provides a perfect storm for the popularity of elements such as QAnon across the board, as users at home grow increasingly isolated, unemployed, and thus vulnerable to conspiratorial thinking. Indeed, we find that conspiracies such as NWO (“new world order”) and the slogan WWG1WGA appear to grow sharply with quarantine across several networks (appendix figure 3). In addition, reopen protests and a sense of imminent social disorder may incentivize “Q,” one or more individuals who are generating new conspiracy material, to prospect more actively, and Q-associated users may sense an opportunity to gain more media attention and influence in sharing the material (appendix figure 4). Finally, a possible source for the popularity of QAnon material may derive from coordinated inauthentic behavior by state actors, campaigns by trolls, or other groups seeking to foment unrest in the United States and elsewhere. Analysis we gathered on “Bot Sentinel,” and “Hoaxy,” publicly available resources for charting bot activity support this possibility. Remarkably, we find that both WWG1WGA and QAnon hashtags are often among the single the top most frequently tweeted hashtags by trollbot accounts on Twitter (appendix figure 5) and networks that promote these hashtags are high in bot-like participation (appendix figure 6). As Q conspiracy is becoming more explicitly militant (appendix figure 7) future research must seek to determine how these underlying causes differentially contribute to the popularization of seditious conspiracy.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

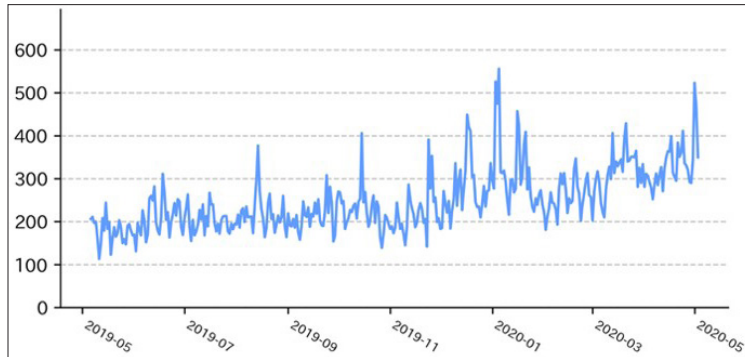
In this report, we detail several important findings:

1. Boogaloo ideology, an apocalyptic meme which promotes a civil war with diverse libertarian and ethnic themes, grows increasingly under conditions of quarantine with COVID-19 itself, and introduces the prospect of armed violence into real-world reopen rallies across the nation.
2. The boogaloo now increasingly spreads across fringe and mainstream Web communities through memes, coded language, gamification, and specific threats of violence against law enforcement.
3. Martyr events, revenge attacks, pipe bombs, group displays, and recruitment literature all point to shared narrative, identity and growth into a violent movement.
4. Though non-exhaustive, our analysis suggests an underlying information network and pool of shared reactive content and users/groups supporting this violent movement.
5. Individuals connected to these groups are being arrested on a weekly basis for planned attacks, weapons possession, and more.
6. QAnon conspiracies are increasing across Twitter, doubling from April 22nd to May 2nd, and operationalize similarly to the boogaloo, including themes of militarization, an all-at-once go signal, and an ominous, apocalyptic conflict. Trends of mass militarization denote a dangerous change in the conspiracy toward the potential realm of revolt.
7. In all cases, these groups actively seek to use sensationalism to hijack media narrative.

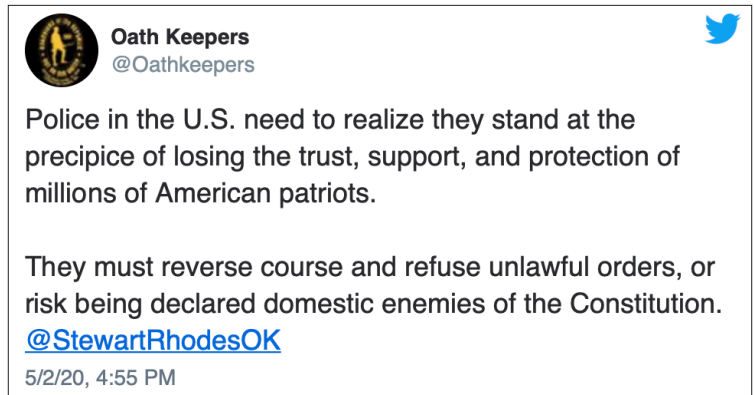
Several recommendations emerge, in our view, from these findings. First, there is inherent value in the use of methods we deploy in the above research to identify trends in hate and organization of hateful groups as they materialize and begin to gain traction on social media. To the extent that it illuminates threats and may help derive a more explicit map of potential sources of violence, our hope is that this report may help protect lives. We advise that civil society should seek to enfranchise an effort to create trusted, systematic reporting on these kinds of emerging threats at scale. In our view, moreover, this approach has the promise to prove more effective and more consistent with First Amendment values than the approach of either excessive censorship—which has limited effectiveness—and over-reach in government surveillance, both of which carry risks of feeding into the suspicion of totalitarianism that fuels the militia sphere itself.

This last point especially bears careful consideration because though the Milita-sphere increasingly deploys tactics reminiscent of ISIS or Al-Qaeda, it cannot be lost on law enforcement or law makers that these are our fellow American citizens. The transparent hope of the seditious brand of militant is to incite violence sufficient for society to betray the American civic tradition as the unthinkable trade off for protecting it. This fact carries significant moral, ethical, and legal concerns that may prove historical at such a highly volatile political moment—and may demand new, civic minded, scalable, and data-driven approaches to adequately solve. In order for this approach to be most effective, a mechanism for mobilizing civil society to amplify the conclusions and communications and respond strategically and collaboratively to reports like this one should be developed.

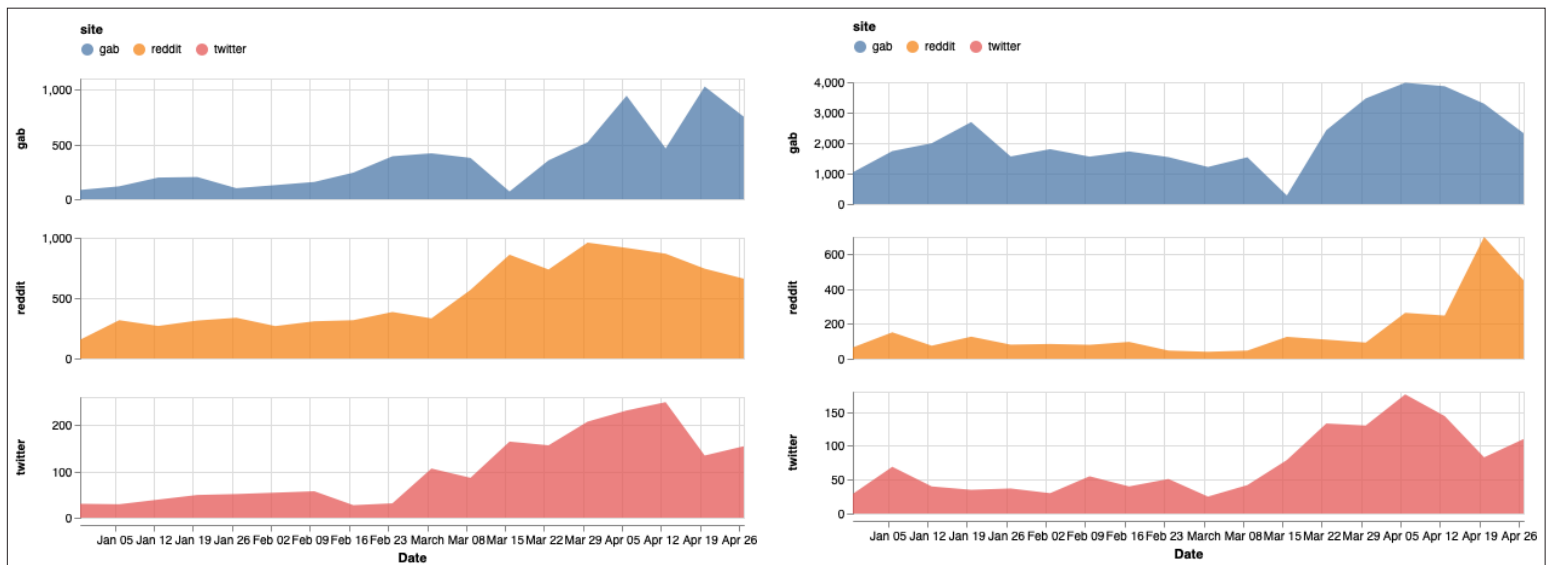
APPENDIX



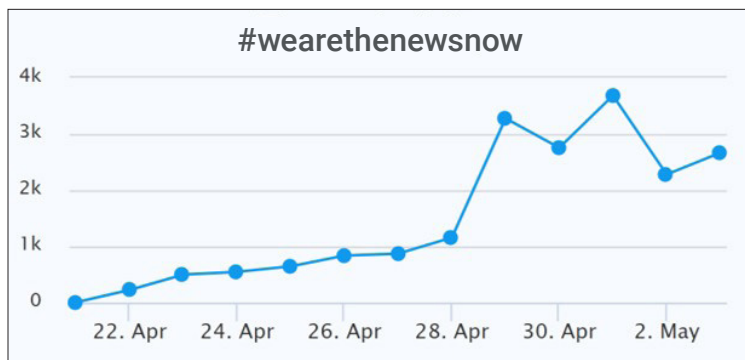
Appendix Fig 1. Boogaloo/boog daily comments on Reddit have nearly doubled from April 2019 to April 2020.



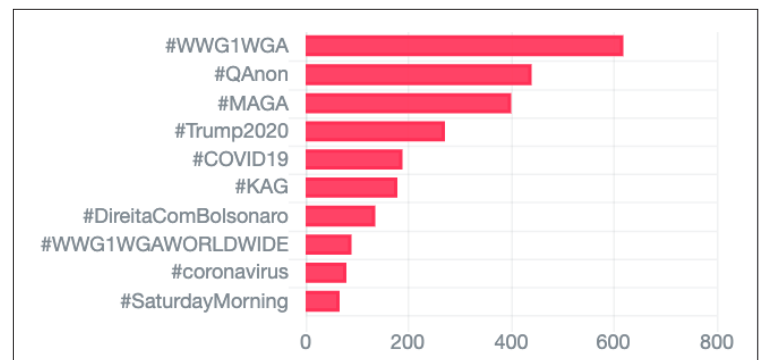
Appendix Fig 2. Oath Keeper's official Twitter feed threatening sedition.



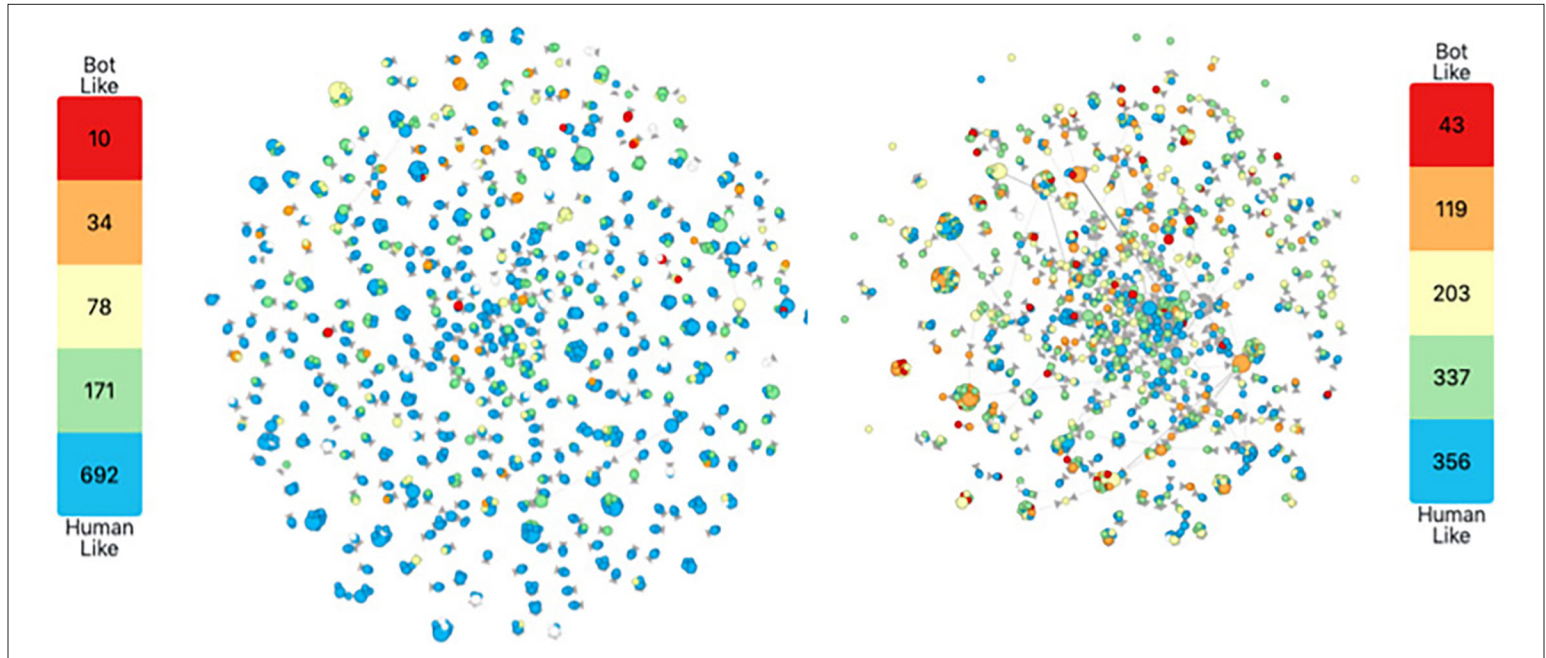
Appendix Fig 3. Left: Daily new "NWO" ("new world order") conspiracy comments on Gab (blue), Reddit (orange), and Twitter's verified stream (pink) show increases across platforms in conjunction with quarantine. NWO conspiracy theory is extraordinarily pertinent among Oathkeepers and Three Percenters. Right: Comments containing WWG1WGA on all three platforms demonstrate convergent activity with COVID-19 as well. (Graph generated from S.M.A.T., a publically available social media research tool.)



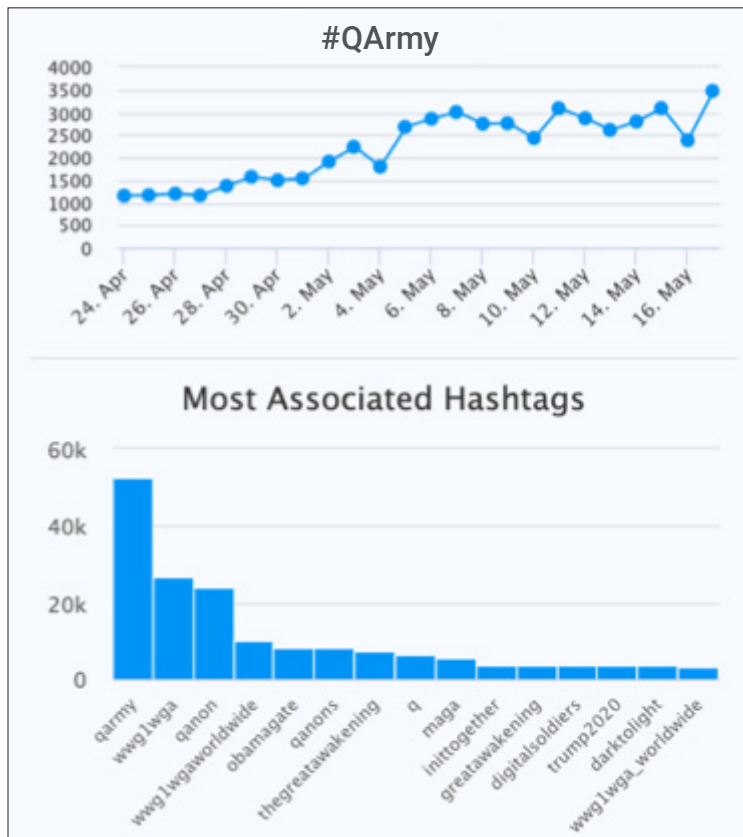
Appendix Fig 4. Daily new "wearethethenewsnow" tweets show increased volume (excluding even replies and retweets) on Twitter over a 10-day period from April 22nd to May 2nd. A tag most strongly associated with QAnon.



Appendix Fig 5. Top hashtags tweeted by trollbot accounts on May 9th, according to Bot Sentinel, a publically available resource for bot-detection on Twitter, show WWG1WGA and QAnon as the most frequent hashtags, a regular occurrence over the past several weeks on the platform. WWG1WGA has held the #1 spot most frequently for daily hashtags on these accounts for the first 10 days of the month of May.

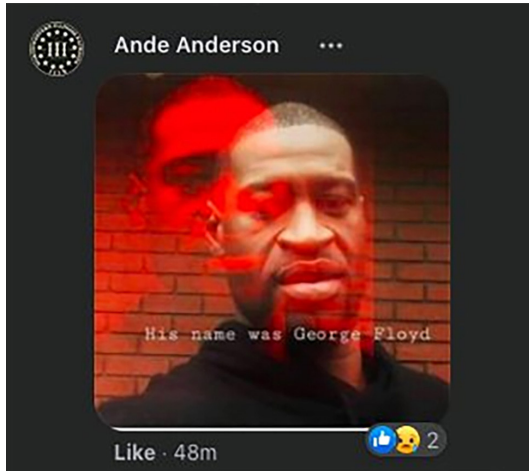


Appendix Fig 6. Tweet network analysis on the [University of Indiana's Social Media Observatory](#) social media tool, [Hoaxy](#) shows high bot-like activity among users who tweet the "WWG1WGA" (R) vs the term "viral" (L) as a comparison.



Appendix Fig 7. Analysis on the term "QArmy" shows a tripling in the use of the term on Twitter from April 24th to May 16th.





EPILOGUE

The boogaloo initially emerged as an anti-government and anti-law enforcement meme-based militia, demonstrating chilling new capacities, such as cyber swarming and viral incitement in response to concerns around the second amendment. They rapidly shifted their seditious focus in response to state and federal restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Complete with martyr myths, bomb making, and increasing evidence of shared narrative—we show the group obtaining an increasing resemblance to terror-like organizations.

As of May 26th, when four police officers in Minnesota were filmed allegedly suffocating an African American, George Floyd, the boogaloo swiftly capitalized on the event, which erupted into protests and teargas, adopting Floyd, like Duncan Lemp, as their new symbolic martyr in memes across the internet.

The boogaloo now converges on police brutality against minority populations, adopting resentment from Black Lives Matter and other groups when it provides the opportunity for political violence.

This is a new mode of organized opportunistic and militant violence that will quickly shift to the next politically volatile event to trigger the boogaloo, the civil war with law enforcement and government that these groups envision. The boogaloo won't present itself as either Trump-based, right wing, or white-supremacist ideology, with any one set of predictable political grievances. These events suggest that the boogaloo seeks to coopt several grievances, across several political and racial spectrums into a single, monolithic and anti-government mob with chilling new tactical and technological capacities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sponsorship by:

The Miller Center for Community Security at Rutgers University



Special thanks to:

Pushshift, for contributing data to this report



THE NETWORK CONTAGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE (NCRI) is a neutral and independent third party whose mission it is to track, expose, and combat misinformation, deception, manipulation, and hate across social media channels.

Acting as a public benefit corporation, NCRI is a not-for-profit organization that seeks to explore safe ways to audit, reveal challenges, devise solutions, and create transparency in partnerships with social media platforms, public safety organizations, and government agencies.