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THESIS

**TELL ME HOW THIS BEGINS:
INSURGENCY IN THE UNITED STATES**

by

Michael S. Brown Jr.

March 2023

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**TELL ME HOW THIS BEGINS:
INSURGENCY IN THE UNITED STATES**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the United States has exhibited sustained socio-political violence and extremism. This thesis investigates whether the United States is experiencing a pre-insurgency state in the insurgency life cycle. A comparative analysis, utilizing domestic insurgency markers provided by the Central Intelligence Agency's Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency, examines historical domestic insurgencies in Colombia, Northern Ireland, and North Carolina against the current socio-political environment in the United States. This analysis suggests that the United States is exhibiting characteristics of an open domestic insurgency, as demonstrated in the case studies. This thesis recommends enacting necessary political reforms and instating a national year of service, administered by the U.S. military and modeled after the Israeli Defense Forces.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FIDF	Friends of the Israeli Defense Forces
IDF	Israeli Defense Force
IRA	Irish Republican Army
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
LAPD	Los Angeles Police Department
NFAC	Not F***** Around Coalition
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2016, the United States has experienced extensive socio-political violence, as highlighted in law enforcement’s treatment of African Americans—resulting in violent protests and extensive damage in Portland, Oregon, and Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 2020—and on January 6, 2021, when President Donald Trump’s supporters attempted to stop the electoral certification process in Washington, DC—driven by baseless theories of rampant voter fraud and political tyranny.¹ This thesis sought to explore whether these were isolated events or part of a larger systemic issue within American society, asking to what degree if any was the United States in a pre-insurgency stage.

Following a review of the relevant literature, including historical and governmental documents relating to insurgency movements, this thesis presents a historical comparative case-study analysis, examining domestic insurgencies in Colombia and Northern Ireland and the 1898 Wilmington, North Carolina, insurrection. The Central Intelligence Agency’s *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, a qualitative resource for practitioners, provides a contextual framework to explore insurgency markers within American society. The guide outlines the following pre-existing conditions for the pre-insurgency stage:

- A recent history of internal conflict that has left lingering grievances . . .
- A strong warrior or conspiratorial culture . . .
- A polarized winner-takes-all political system . . .
- An inability of the government to provide basic services, such as security, justice, health care, education, utilities, or transportation infrastructure . . .
- Inept or corrupt security forces . . .
- An economic crisis . . . [or]

¹ Joshua Kaplan and Joaquin Sapien, “In Exclusive Jailhouse Letter, Capitol Riot Defendant Explains Motives, Remains Boastful,” ProPublica, May 11, 2021, <https://www.propublica.org/article/in-exclusive-jailhouse-letter-capital-riot-defendant-explains-motives-remains-boastful>; Joan Donovan, Kaylee Fagan, and Frances Lee, “‘President Trump Is Calling Us to Fight’: What the Court Documents Reveal about the Motivations behind January 6 and Networked Incitement” (Cambridge, MA: Technology and Social Change Project, Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy, 2022), https://media-manipulation.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/j6_motivations_working_paper.pdf; Josh Dawsey, “Trump Campaign Paid Researchers to Prove 2020 Fraud but Kept Findings Secret,” *Washington Post*, February 11, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/02/11/trump-campaign-report-electoral-fraud/>.

- A “window of vulnerability,” created by . . . hotly disputed elections.²

Based on the analysis in this thesis, the United States is exhibiting characteristics like those in other nations with sustained foreign domestic insurgencies, e.g., Colombia and Northern Ireland. Closer to home, the domestic environment in the United States arguably resembles the period of violent socio-political unrest in North Carolina before the Wilmington insurrection of 1898.

As shown in the case studies of Colombia, Northern Ireland, and North Carolina, structural factors such as infrastructure, economy, and political and social representation all contributed to the sustained violence over many decades, but identity lay at the core of these insurgent movements. In Colombia, one was either a Liberal or Conservative; in Northern Ireland, a Unionist or Nationalist; and in North Carolina, racial identity was paramount. The United States of the 2020s resembles the Northern Irish example because comparable questions of American identity have arisen.³ Directly tied to this identity crisis in the United States is political polarization, at a level not seen since the Civil War—or more specifically, the Reconstruction era.⁴

Regarding economic mobility, the United States has seen a correlation between surges in politically motivated violence with an increasing unemployment rate. Looking abroad for an analog, as Spain experienced with Basque separatists, growth in the labor

² Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2012), 5–6, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=713599>.

³ “New Survey Reveals Americans Believe Country Has ‘Lost Its Identity,’” Voice of America News, April 6, 2016, <https://www.voanews.com/a/mht-quinnipiac-survey-reveals-americans-believe-country-has-lost-identity/3273301.html>; Isaac Chotiner, “The Collapse of American Identity,” *New Yorker*, June 29, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/the-collapse-of-american-identity>.

⁴ Laura Paisley, “Political Polarization at Its Worst since the Civil War,” University of Southern California News, November 8, 2016, <https://news.usc.edu/110124/political-polarization-at-its-worst-since-the-civil-war-2/>.

market absorbed potential insurgents into the workforce.⁵ Conversely, the United States of the 1990s saw growth in primarily right-wing militias as the labor market contracted.⁶

Pre-insurgency states usually, but not always, exhibit signs of security dilemmas within society. Alarmingly, as of this writing in the United States, a security dilemma is well underway. In recent years, as fears of a Democratic presidential candidate's win in 2016 took hold in voters' minds, gun sales soared to record levels.⁷ More strikingly, as Barbara Walter highlights, "in 2019, only 8 percent of terrorist incidents were perpetrated by left-wing groups; in 2020, it was 20 percent."⁸ Moreover, a rise in leftist extremist groups—Antifa, Not F***** Around Coalition, and Socialist Rifle Association, to name a few—seem to be a response to the right-wing extremist movement.⁹

Lingering grievances such as the historical mistreatment of African Americans may contribute to an urban insurgent movement, as postulated by Temitope Oriola of the University of Alberta.¹⁰ Much needed political reforms, such as the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, have not been successfully enacted by elected leaders in Washington, DC, likely contributing to a continued distrust of law enforcement by African American citizens. Every high-profile unjustified killing continues to put the United States at risk of extreme violence, such as that seen in Portland and Minneapolis.¹¹ Nevertheless, in Colombia and Northern Ireland, political reforms successfully addressed socio-political violence.

⁵ Jake Shatzer, "Before and After Terrorism: Economic and Political Development in the Basque Country" (undergraduate thesis, Texas A&M University, 2021), 59.

⁶ Thomas Nardone et al., "1992: Job Market in the Doldrums," *Monthly Labor Review* (February 1993), <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1993/02/art1full.pdf>; Department of Homeland Security, Office of Intelligence and Analysis, *Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment* (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, 2009), <https://irp.fas.org/eprint/rightwing.pdf>.

⁷ Barbara Walter, *How Civil Wars Start and How to Stop Them* (New York: Crown, 2022).

⁸ Walter, 190.

⁹ Walter, 190.

¹⁰ Temitope Oriola, "The United States Is at Risk of an Armed Anti-Police Insurgency," Conversation, April 15, 2021, <http://theconversation.com/the-united-states-is-at-risk-of-an-armed-anti-police-insurgency-159003>.

¹¹ Oriola.

While conspiracy theories are a constant in American society, this thesis finds that QAnon was not a driver of the attempted insurrection on January 6, 2021, nor of other extremist violence in the United States. The data show that only a fraction of QAnon extremist violence has been directed toward the U.S. government.¹²

This thesis concludes with two primary recommendations. The first involves enacting political reforms. To address lingering grievances felt by African Americans, the U.S. Congress should move to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act to reduce the perceived or real threat to African American communities by law enforcement agencies. By securing the civil rights of all Americans, the country can reduce the chances of sustained socio-political violence at home. Additionally, highly controversial policies, such as affirmative action, should be pursued to guarantee minority participation and visibility within American society until the creation of a national year of service for all Americans.

The second recommendation, following from the first, aims to build and maintain a more coherent national identity. A national year of service, modeled after Israel's requirement that all citizens serve the nation, should be implemented to stave off future socio-political violence in the United States. Israeli's model is relevant to the United States as Israel has to mold one national identity from the many cultures and races that compose its citizenry. This proposed national year of service should be overseen by the U.S. military, which has historically enjoyed trust from the American population and has an established Selective Service System.¹³ This national year of service should utilize an essential services track that addresses minority representation in government, offers economic mobility for all, and secures the national and homeland security enterprises of the United States by guaranteeing training and jobs in cyber, critical infrastructure, and emergency services (e.g., police, fire, emergency medical services, and emergency management).

¹² James Suber, "Examining Extremism: QAnon," *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (blog), June 10, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/examining-extremism/examining-extremism-qanon>.

¹³ Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, "Reagan National Defense Survey Conducted November 2022" (Washington, DC: Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, 2022), <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/media/359970/2022-survey-summary.pdf>.

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I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

—Ephesians 1:16

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I. INTRODUCTION

For fear is a primary source of evil. And when the question “Who am I?” recurs and is unanswered, then fear and frustration project a negative attitude. The bewildered soul can answer only: “Since I do not understand ‘Who I am,’ I only know what I am not.”

—Carson McCullers¹

A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

“It should happen here . . . no reason,” said Michael Flynn, retired U.S. Army lieutenant general and former national security advisor, to a crowd in Dallas, Texas, appearing to endorse a Myanmar-style coup in the United States.² Flynn’s words at one time might have been passed over as a one-off—someone playing to the hysterics of a crowd—but this language might have signaled a more sinister undercurrent in American society, as exposed on January 6, 2021, when various right-wing groups such as the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers interrupted the electoral vote count affirming President-Elect Joe Biden’s victory over then-President Trump at the U.S. Capitol.³ The latter event followed a violent summer of civil unrest in 2020, causing millions of dollars in economic damage from protests in Minneapolis and Portland in response to perceived and actual civil rights violations, e.g., George Floyd’s murder. Such outbursts might foreshadow a stage of pre-insurgency within the United States. A pre-insurgency state is characterized by fairly benign symptoms that can take the form of political groups engaging in “non-violent political activity. . . . [Leaders] emerge, [while] the insurgents are establishing a grievance and a group identity.”⁴ Therefore, it is important to explore groups that have the

¹ Carson McCullers, *The Mortgaged Heart*, ed. Margarita G. Smith (Boston: Mariner, 2005), 260.

² Aaron Blake, “Michael Flynn’s Ridiculous Defense of His Coup Comments, in Context,” *Washington Post*, June 1, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/06/01/michael-flynns-ridiculous-defense-his-coup-comments-context/>.

³ Laura Blasey, “5 Things to Know about Congress, Electoral Votes and the GOP’s Last Stand,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-12-30/jan-6-electoral-college-vote-count-5-things-to-know>.

⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2012), 5, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=713599>.

motivation, backing, and will to conduct sustained politically inspired violence before open violence occurs.

Insurgencies share characteristics even though they may take different forms. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)'s 2012 *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* defines an insurgency as a “protracted political–military struggle directed toward subverting or displacing the legitimacy of a constituted government or occupying power.”⁵ Examples of insurgencies vary, from violence applied to a foreign occupying power, e.g., the United States in Iraq, to homegrown insurgencies that seek to change the domestic political environment, e.g., Basque Euskadi Ta Askatasuna in Spain. However, before open violence occurs, the CIA contends that insurgencies usually advance through a cycle of four stages: pre-insurgency, incipient conflict, open insurgency, and resolution.⁶ Thus, no matter the form, the progression is common.

Although the United States is not in an open stage of insurgency, certain markers noted by the CIA suggest that the United States is in the early stages of a pre-insurgency, typified by

- a recent history of internal conflict that has left lingering grievances . . .
- a strong warrior or conspiratorial culture . . .
- a polarized winner-takes-all political system . . .
- an inability of the government to provide basic services, such as security, justice, health care, education, utilities, or transportation infrastructure . . .
- inept or corrupt security forces . . .
- an economic crisis . . . [or]
- a “window of vulnerability” created by . . . hotly disputed elections.⁷

It is arguable whether all these markers are currently present in American society, as evidenced by “a quarter [of Americans] believ [ing] that our previous president [Barack

⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, 1.

⁶ Central Intelligence Agency.

⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, 5–6.

Obama] may be or definitely was the anti-Christ.”⁸ Polls indicate that the confidence of the American people in the police is at an all-time low, and nearly eight million Americans reside in poverty.⁹ However, just as important to note is that these historic lows in confidence in police usually occur after controversial killings and then revert back to historical averages—as a whole.¹⁰ Notably, when focusing on African Americans, the polling data since 1994 reflect a 40 percent decrease in African American confidence in police.¹¹ Meanwhile, 27 percent of Democrats and 36 percent of Republicans view each other as a “threat to the nation’s well-being.”¹² If these present trends continue, the United States may progress from the pre-insurgency stage to an open insurgency. For these reasons, policymakers need to recognize these insurgency markers within the United States to help formulate policies that will deescalate tensions within society. These structural divisions are longstanding and only seem to be worsening. In the United States, the system may be “blinking red.”

B. RESEARCH QUESTION

To what degree, if any, is the United States in a pre-insurgency phase?

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

As of this writing, two conflicting trends may suggest insurgency within the United States. Although both perspectives agree that the conditions for a low-intensity conflict are

⁸ Kurt Andersen, “How the U.S. Lost Its Mind,” *Atlantic*, September 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/how-america-lost-its-mind/534231/>; “Poll: 13 Percent Say Obama the Antichrist,” United Press International, April 3, 2013, https://www.upi.com/Odd_News/2013/04/03/Poll-13-percent-say-Obama-the-Antichrist/49791364969760/.

⁹ Megan Brenan, “Amid Pandemic, Confidence in Key U.S. Institutions Surges,” Gallup, August 12, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/317135/amid-pandemic-confidence-key-institutions-surges.aspx>; Heather Long, “Nearly 8 Million Americans Have Fallen into Poverty since the Summer,” *Washington Post*, December 16, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/12/16/poverty-rising/>.

¹⁰ Nathan James et al., *Public Trust and Law Enforcement—A Discussion for Policymakers*, CRS Report No. R43904, version 17 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), 35.

¹¹ “Policing by the Numbers,” Council of Criminal Justice, Task Force on Policing, accessed January 22, 2022, <https://counciloncj.foleon.com/policing/assessing-the-evidence/policing-by-the-numbers/>.

¹² Pew Research Center, *Political Polarization in the American Public* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2014), 36, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>.

present in the United States, the literature diverges on which side of the political-sociological spectrum the violence will erupt. For this review, the author presents the options posited by researchers in this field: the United States faces either a leftist revolutionary insurgency or a radical right insurgency.

Scholars foresee the possibility of a U.S. insurgency but not its nature. Notable expert in the field of insurgency David Kilcullen postulated in June and September 2020—roughly six months before the events of January 6 at the Capitol—that a possible incipient insurgency was underway in the United States; however, at the time, Kilcullen was uncertain about whether the most direct threat was from leftist revolutionaries or the radical right.¹³ Some scholars such as Vasabjit Banerjee of the University of Mississippi firmly assert that the incipient insurgency will be of a far-right phenomenon with a rural origin.¹⁴ At the same time, others such as Temitope Oriola of the University of Alberta believe that this insurgency will sprout from leftist groups such as Antifa and certain elements of the Black Lives Matter scene in response to high-profile police killings of African Americans, e.g., George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.¹⁵ Substantial areas within the current insurgency discussion overlap, even if the literature does not agree on the side from which this insurgency will emerge. For example, Kilcullen and Banerjee both reference the CIA’s aforementioned guide as a valuable tool for understanding the insurgency life cycle and recognizing the analytical markers at each stage.¹⁶ In this way, although scholars disagree about the nature of the threat, they concur on its urgency.

As to the extent of the violence, scholars point out that having some insurgents, motivated malcontents, available firearms, and foreign actors increases the likelihood of

¹³ David Kilcullen, “America in 2020: ‘Insurrection’ or ‘Incipient Insurgency?’,” Foundation for Defense of Democracies, June 23, 2020, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/06/23/us-insurrection-or-incipient-insurgency/>.

¹⁴ Vasabjit Banerjee, “Is the United States Heading for a Rural Insurgency?,” Just Security, October 5, 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/72681/is-the-united-states-heading-for-a-rural-insurgency/>.

¹⁵ Temitope Oriola, “The United States Is at Risk of an Armed Anti-police Insurgency,” Conversation, April 15, 2021, <http://theconversation.com/the-united-states-is-at-risk-of-an-armed-anti-police-insurgency-159003>.

¹⁶ Kilcullen, “America in 2020”; Banerjee, “Rural Insurgency”; Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*.

an insurgency. For example, Kilcullen and Oriola agree that the actual number of malcontents on both sides with a propensity for violence is minimal; however, Kilcullen argues the number of violent individuals is irrelevant:

Only a tiny minority—2 to 5 percent—of individuals in insurgencies, civil wars, or criminal gangs actually commit violence. In Iraq during the “Surge,” my team assumed that 20 percent of insurgents would prove so irreconcilably violent that they would never negotiate. . . . The true number was not 20, but 2 percent.¹⁷

Oriola goes even further, arguing that while 93 percent of all police protests have been peaceful, African American males who “believe they have nothing to lose” are prime candidates for involvement in an urban insurgency.¹⁸ Numerous scholars support the likelihood that an American insurgency would not need the involvement of foreign interlopers to sustain either a rural or urban insurgency as there are almost 400 million privately owned firearms in the United States.¹⁹ Thus, movements have the means, and a portion of the population may have the will to commit violence. However, although potential insurgents within the United States can sustain themselves, foreign interference, e.g., Russia, is not only likely in the face of sustained politically inspired violence but, according to National Intelligence Council, already “exacerbating sociopolitical divisions [within the United States].”²⁰

One side predicts an urban insurgency sparked by racial injustice. In this camp, Oriola suggests that broad-spectrum government and societal “transgenerational oppression” of African Americans and “significant moments” such as controversial police killings, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which inordinately affected the African

¹⁷ Kilcullen, “America in 2020.”

¹⁸ Oriola, “At Risk of an Armed Anti-police Insurgency.”

¹⁹ Christopher Ingraham, “There Are More Guns than People in the United States, According to a New Study of Global Firearm Ownership,” *Washington Post*, June 19, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/19/there-are-more-guns-than-people-in-the-united-states-according-to-a-new-study-of-global-firearm-ownership/>; Oriola, “At Risk of an Armed Anti-police Insurgency”; Banerjee, “Rural Insurgency.”

²⁰ National Intelligence Council, *Foreign Threats to the 2020 U.S. Federal Elections* (Washington, DC: National Intelligence Council, 2021), i, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ICA-declass-16MAR21.pdf>.

American community, have created a powder keg in American cities for a potential insurgency.²¹ Oriola believes that if high-profile police killings of unarmed African American civilians continue, within five years, an urban insurgency primarily targeting law enforcement might develop in the United States.²² In this scenario, more targeted killings of police seem likely.

Another camp sees a rural response as more likely. Banerjee contends that the militia movement that arose in rural areas after the election of President Obama in 2008 found a bully pulpit with the election of President Donald Trump in 2016. Banerjee describes these militia members as well armed and integrated into local security forces, i.e., police. Furthermore, according to Banerjee, geography helps to provide cover for these militia groups to train and arm themselves.²³ If these observations are correct, these militias may be able to recruit, train, and organize themselves without substantial interference or surveillance from law enforcement or the federal government.

In conclusion, while the literature largely concurs that an open insurgency is brewing in the United States, the scholars diverge on its origin. Will it begin with the left or the right?

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

First, I researched official publications from the U.S. government that defined insurgency and its foundational stages, e.g., pre-insurgency or incipient. I chose the 2012 CIA's *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* as a resource because it provided not only an insurgency life cycle but also analytical markers within each stage. I systematically reviewed the CIA's description of the pre-insurgency/incipient stage of the insurgency life cycle to determine the analytical markers. Such markers allowed me to examine whether the U.S. domestic environment resembles the early stages of an insurgency.

²¹ Oriola, "At Risk of an Armed Anti-police Insurgency."

²² Oriola.

²³ Banerjee, "Rural Insurgency."

The research then considered insurgencies in Colombia and Northern Ireland to reveal the points at which internal political and societal grievances and pressures might erupt into an open insurgency. An exploration of the 1898 Wilmington, North Carolina, insurrection provided additional insight into insurrectionary violence within the United States and highlighted the only successful coup d'état in the country. For example, the research considered the conditions of an incipient stage insurgency found in the CIA's guide that preceded the 1948 assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan in Colombia; the 1969 Northern Ireland riots; and the 1898 Wilmington, North Carolina, insurrection. The research used these two international examples because—unlike insurgencies in Vietnam, Iraq, or Algeria, where insurgents fought a foreign military occupier—they were homegrown insurgencies against an established government. Second, using the events in Colombia and Northern Ireland as reference points, I could trace and identify specific societal and political conditions in those two nations, as outlined in the CIA's guide, that align with trends in 21st century America.²⁴

Third, I examined whether the analytical markers were present in Colombia, Northern Ireland, and North Carolina, before the events of 1948, 1969, and 1898, respectively. Then, I cross-referenced the analytical markers with U.S. data, such as confidence in the police and government, economic malaise, and gun ownership. The data from the United States juxtaposed against those of Colombia and Northern Ireland provided reference points to indicate positively or negatively whether the United States has been in an incipient stage of insurgency. For example, a nation-state in the early stages of pre-insurgency usually but not always has a “strong warrior or conspiratorial culture . . . a polarized winner-takes-all political system . . . [or] inept or corrupt security forces [e.g., police].”²⁵ I then compared these markers to the current situation in the United States, where “divisions between Republicans, and Democrats on fundamental political values . . . reached record levels during Barack Obama's presidency. In Donald Trump's first year

²⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, 5–6.

²⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, 5–6.

as president, these gaps [grew] even larger.”²⁶ Moreover, as of this writing, 31 percent of Americans question the legitimacy of Joe Biden’s election, and confidence in American policing is at an all-time low.²⁷ These data signal that the United States may be advancing through the insurgency life cycle, from a pre-insurgency/incipient stage to a future open insurgency.

Additionally, to illustrate Banerjee’s argument vis-à-vis an urban insurgency, I examined states or cities with the greatest number of law enforcement deaths, coupled with metropolitan areas that reported a statistical anomaly, i.e., a large statistical departure from the low level of confidence in law enforcement, as reported in a recent Gallup poll. I used this method because, as David Kilcullen has theorized, “[insurgent] strength follows [civilian] support.”²⁸ If Kilcullen’s statement is true, then areas in which law enforcement deaths or assaults coincide with a low level of confidence in police may predict the epicenters of American insurgency.

E. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter II examines domestic insurgencies in Colombia, Northern Ireland, and post-Reconstruction North Carolina against the CIA’s insurgency markers in the *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, identifying similarities or patterns vis-à-vis the modern-day United States. Chapter III further explores five of the analytical markers—internal conflict, conspiratorial culture, inept or corrupt security forces, economic crisis, and hotly disputed elections—against contemporary events in the United States, culminating in the January 6 attack on the Capitol. Chapter IV summarizes the symptoms of insurgency that the United States has exhibited and offers solutions to stave off future socio-political violence.

²⁶ Pew Research Center, *The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2017), 1, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2017/10/05/the-partisan-divide-on-political-values-grows-even-wider/>.

²⁷ Daniel A. Cox, “After the Ballots Are Counted: Conspiracies, Political Violence, and American Exceptionalism,” Survey Center on American Life, February 11, 2021, <https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/after-the-ballots-are-counted-conspiracies-political-violence-and-american-exceptionalism/>; Brenan, “Amid Pandemic, Confidence in Key U.S. Institutions Surges.”

²⁸ David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 151.

II. CASE STUDIES

This chapter explores domestic insurgencies in Colombia, Northern Ireland, and post-Reconstruction North Carolina, with an emphasis on the Wilmington insurrection of 1898. The insurgency markers provided in the CIA’s *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* are explored in the case studies of these historical insurgencies to identify similarities or patterns vis-à-vis the modern-day United States. These case studies were specifically chosen because they were home grown and not in response to a foreign military occupation.

A. COLOMBIAN INSURGENCY

Colombia is an important case study in relation to the present-day United States. The most striking similarity between the historical pre-insurgency/open insurgency in Colombia and that of the United States is the intensity of polarization between the Republican and Democratic Parties. Although historians often mark the official start of the Colombian insurgency as 1964, the roots of this multi-generational conflict extend all the way to the post-colonial period of Colombian independence from Spain in 1810. The mass migration of Colombians, “out of the Highlands in the temperate middle altitudes and the hot lowlands” in pursuit of economic opportunities in the coffee and cattle industries, soon became the target of unscrupulous “land speculators.”²⁹ The latter, armed with considerable financial resources and “fabricated property titles,” soon began seizing these valuable properties from the Highland migrants.³⁰ This land grab contributed to unresolved intergenerational differences that helped drive later violence between Conservatives and Liberals.

A special consideration of the Colombian insurgency, and a key difference between Colombia and the present-day United States, was disconnectedness—primarily of infrastructure. Physical barriers such as the mountainous terrain and the resulting “transport

²⁹ Catherine C. LeGrand, “The Colombian Crisis in Historical Perspective,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 28, no. 55–56 (2003): 165–209.

³⁰ LeGrand, 169.

and communications difficulties” contributed to further fragmentation in the country.³¹ This geographic isolation prevented the government from implementing a coherent, comprehensive economic program that would benefit all Colombian citizens. Terrain differences and the accompanying lack of infrastructure combined with a cultural and national identity absent in Colombia’s rural citizens sowed the seeds of a sustained domestic rural insurgency.³²

Thus, the roots of the Colombian insurgency were classist, as poor rural Colombians engaged in violent conflict with wealthy property owners. The Colombian insurgency was not “simply a variant of war . . . but . . . part of a systemic failure” of multiple organizations, people, and processes that could only be remedied by “systemic reengineering” of government services and policies of a failing state.³³ This episode saw the Colombian government attempting to repair and reengineer the Colombian political landscape, e.g., through the constitutional reforms of 1936, but failed to fully address transgenerational grievances of rural and poor Colombians.³⁴

However, between 1830 and 1840, the Colombia insurgency evolved into something resembling present-day American hyperpolarization.³⁵ This period’s focus on political party affiliation fueled decades-long conflicts in Colombia until approximately 1900.³⁶ While political violence erupted in other Central and South American countries, e.g., Costa Rica and Chile, it paled in comparison to the scenes in Uruguay and Colombia.³⁷ Notably, both Costa Rica and Chile had many viable political parties while Colombia had just two:

³¹ LeGrand.

³² LeGrand.

³³ Steven Metz, *Rethinking Insurgency* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007), 7, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11642>.

³⁴ Richard Stoller, “Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo and Liberal Radicalism in 1930s Colombia,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27, no. 2 (1995): 367–97.

³⁵ LeGrand, “The Colombian Crisis in Historical Perspective”; Pew Research Center, *Political Polarization in the American Public*.

³⁶ LeGrand, “The Colombian Crisis in Historical Perspective.”

³⁷ Nicolás M. Somma, “How Do Party Systems Shape Insurgency Levels? A Comparison of Four Nineteenth-Century Latin American Republics,” *Social Science History* 40, no. 2 (2016): 219–45.

the Liberals and Conservatives.³⁸ Nicola Somma illustrates the frequency of domestic insurgencies in two-party Uruguay and Colombia vis-à-vis the multi-party states of Costa Rica and Chile (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. High- and Low-Insurgency Cases in 19th Century Latin America.³⁹

Somma argues that insurgency, particularly in Latin America, corresponds with hyperpolarization in the state and society usually fueled by two-party systems, reflecting the intensity and propensity of the state experiencing an insurgency.⁴⁰ Arguably, such two-party intensity in the United States could fuel sustained socio-political violence as well.

1. The Pumarejo Administration

After the War of a Thousand Days (1895–1902) in which 100,000 Colombians perished in politically fueled sectarian violence, Colombia entered a relative state of

³⁸ LeGrand, “The Colombian Crisis in Historical Perspective”; Somma, “How Do Party Systems Shape Insurgency Levels?”

³⁹ Source: Somma, “How Do Party Systems Shape Insurgency Levels?,” 221.

⁴⁰ Somma, 221.

tranquility, interspersed with only sporadic violence until the 1940s.⁴¹ Rural citizens, disenfranchised by decades of land theft and economic segregation, allied with leftist urbanites to elect President Alfonso López Pumarejo in 1934, who rose to power on the wings of Liberal idealism. According to Somma, Pumarejo's presidency "represented a significant threat to the status quo because it provided for agrarian reform, labor legislation, state intervention in economic matters, and state secularization."⁴² The threat looming from Pumarejo's political ascension further alienated the Conservative and Liberal Parties in Colombia. With Pumarejo's election and the rise of the rural class threatening the power structure of the wealthy in Colombia, the country entered a period of zero-sum politics.

Pumarejo's administration soon made substantial economic structural changes to Colombia's society through a series of reform efforts:

the 1935 tax reform; the 1936 constitutional reform, which defined property as a 'social function' and Ley 200 of 1936, an *ersatz* agrarian reform which pressured large landowners to exploit their properties or face expropriation. Industrial production rose at an impressive rate (as much as 12 per cent annually), as did the state's fiscal capacity.⁴³

These reforms allowed the government greater involvement in private business and simultaneously "diminished the constitutionally granted influence of the Catholic Church over public institutions."⁴⁴ With Pumarejo's win in 1934 and the subsequent economic reforms of the mid-1930s, the Liberal Party proved popular and ensured the election of successive Liberal administrations until the mid-1940s. However, the Liberal Party abandoned further economic reforms, angering "Colombia's large rural population."⁴⁵ This resentment simmered below the surface of Colombian society and politics and may have never erupted into unrest if not for the elections of 1946, in which a minority

⁴¹ Somma, 221.

⁴² Somma, 221.

⁴³ Stoller, "Liberal Radicalism in 1930s Colombia," 367.

⁴⁴ Donald T. Fox, Gustavo Gallón-Giraldo, and Anne Stetson, "Lessons of the Colombian Constitutional Reform of 1991," in *Framing the State in Times of Transition: Case Studies in Constitution Making*, ed. Laurel E. Miller (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2010), 468.

⁴⁵ Arlene B. Tickner, "Colombia: Chronicle of a Crisis Foretold," *Current History* 97, no. 616 (February 1998), 61, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45317778>.

Conservative government headed by Mariano Ospina took power, followed by the 1948 assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan. Gaitan was a “fiery exponent of the masses and of radical social and economic reform—an anathema to the moderates of the [Liberal] party, to say nothing of the Conservatives.”⁴⁶

2. The Opsina Administration

Even more agitating to the Colombian political environment was the election of a Conservative minority government. Opsina’s government took power as a minority government with 42 percent of the vote, as the two Liberal candidates, firebrand Jorge Eliecer Gaitan and the moderate Gabriel Turbay, garnered 26 and 32 percent, respectively, thereby splitting the Liberal vote.⁴⁷ Shortly thereafter, in the election of 1946, Opsina formed a coalition government with the Liberal Party to stave off political violence. While this strategy successfully averted large-scale violence for approximately two years, the tenuous peace was immediately threatened after the creation of the Colombia coalition government by Opsina, who “began to use the police and army to reestablish [political] control of the system.”⁴⁸ However, this strategy further destabilized Colombia by destroying the legitimacy of the Colombian police and armed forces in the eyes of Liberal voters.

The use of the Colombian state security apparatuses by the Conservative government motivated Gaitan to escalate resistance to the excesses of the Opsina government by “mobilizing the urban laborers . . . and Liberal peasants in his [Gaitan’s] support for the 1950 election.”⁴⁹ However, Eliecer Gaitan was assassinated in 1948 while meeting with an American delegation.⁵⁰ The period following Gaitan’s death in 1948 became known as *Bogotazo*, a large-scale riot that lasted approximately a week, rocking

⁴⁶ John M. Hunter, “Colombia: A Tarnished Showcase,” *Current History* 51, no. 303 (1966): 277.

⁴⁷ Hunter.

⁴⁸ John A. Booth, “Rural Violence in Colombia: 1948–1963,” *Western Political Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1974): 658, <https://doi.org/10.2307/447686>.

⁴⁹ Booth.

⁵⁰ Hunter, “Colombia: A Tarnished Showcase,” 277.

the Colombian capital with large-scale partisan violence and destruction.⁵¹ The Bogotazo violence also spread across Colombia, with 16 Colombian departments (i.e., states) engulfed in partisan violence like the violence experienced in American cities and states from 2019 to 2021.⁵²

3. La Violencia

The modern Colombia insurgency can be traced to Gaitan's death, which set off the first period (1948–1953) of *La Violencia* (the violence). Leftist organizations began arming rural peasants, thereby creating La Violencia's first insurgents.⁵³ However, although this nascent insurgency was largely rural, high-profile violence occurred in Cali, Colombia. In Cali, urban insurgents held the entire city as the police completely abdicated their positions in favor of the Liberal insurgents, thereby leaving the army in charge of quelling the violence in both Cali and Bogota.⁵⁴ This desertion and purging of Liberal party-affiliated police officers also had the longer-term effect of alienating the Liberal citizens of Colombia as Conservatives filled nearly every position in the security forces, thus contributing further to the destabilization of the Colombian state.⁵⁵ This moment was crucial as corrupt security forces are a notable marker in the insurgency life cycle. As noted in the *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, perceived and real “[ineptitude] or corrupt security forces” signal a transition from pre-insurgency to an open one.⁵⁶

Opsina's government responded by “[redoubling] the use of arms against Liberals in rural areas.”⁵⁷ The Opsina government's 1948 action would backfire, but with the growing desire to quell revolutionary violence, the Colombian Army used harsher tactics of suppression. In response to this escalation, leftist guerilla bands grew in size and strength

⁵¹ Norman A. Bailey, “La Violencia in Colombia,” *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 9, no. 4 (1967): 561–75, <https://doi.org/10.2307/164860>.

⁵² Bailey.

⁵³ Booth, “Rural Violence in Colombia.”

⁵⁴ Bailey, “La Violencia in Colombia.”

⁵⁵ Bailey.

⁵⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, 5–6.

⁵⁷ Booth, “Rural Violence in Colombia,” 658.

in the coffee belts of the southwestern Andes and the country's *llanos orientales*, the rural plains to the east.⁵⁸ This escalation represented a true security dilemma for Colombian society—as Conservatives' abuse of power grew, so did the numbers of Liberal/leftist militant groups in response to the Conservative government's threat. A similar security dilemma developed in the United States, most notably in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election, where when Americans bought guns in record numbers in anticipation of a Hillary Clinton election win. Regarding leftists, African American groups, such as the Not F***** Around Coalition (NFAC), have grown in response to the threat posed by militant right-wing groups.⁵⁹

By 1949, the Liberals refused to participate in the national elections, thereby further delegitimizing Opsina's Conservative successor, Laureano Gomez, described as an “arch-conservative, neo-fascist.”⁶⁰ Gomez's tenure as Colombian president did not last long as he continued and intensified the persecution of Liberals and further degraded the civil liberties of Colombians.⁶¹ Gomez's tenure ended in a 1953 coup by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla after the former “attacked [Pinilla] on a personal basis, leaving [Pinilla] no alternative but to . . . take over the government.”⁶² At first, many Colombians welcomed this take over, as Pinilla offered general amnesty to those who had waged violence against the Conservative governments after the excesses and violence of the Opsina and Gomez administrations.⁶³ Although this amnesty did provide a period of respite for the large urban areas of the Colombian state, “soviet republics” formed in Sumapaz and Marquetalia.⁶⁴ These soviet republics fashioned leftist revolutionary staging areas with little to no oversight or influence from the Pinilla government. Notably, later in Colombia's history, these soviet republics become vectors of entry for Castro-backed Communists to rally

⁵⁸ Booth, 659.

⁵⁹ Barbara Walter, *How Civil Wars Start and How to Stop Them* (New York: Crown, 2022), 189–90.

⁶⁰ Hunter, “Colombia: A Tarnished Showcase,” 279.

⁶¹ Hunter, 277.

⁶² Hunter, 279.

⁶³ Bailey, “La Violencia in Colombia.”

⁶⁴ Bailey, 567.

liberation armies in Colombia.⁶⁵ Wholesale amnesty might not be the best solution for quelling sustained political violence, as it gives insurgents another opportunity to engage in politically motivated violence. This lesson is crucial, especially as the United States begins the judicial process against the perpetrators of the January 6 attack.

Although the initial La Violencia (1948–1953) began as a conflict between the Liberal and Conservative Parties, in its second period (1953–1958), Colombians returned to the initial class-based violence (1830–1900), and a new organized crime element inserted itself into the class and political wars of Colombian society.⁶⁶ In the second period of La Violencia, rural banditos and criminal urban organizations emerged to extort both wealthy rural and urban citizens, often with the assistance of Colombian government officials.⁶⁷ According to Norman Bailey, “Most commonly [the banditos] demanded a portion of the crops, refusing access to the owners, and selling the crops to urban accomplices.”⁶⁸ During this time, violence was mostly seasonal, as it coincided with the harvesting of Colombian staples such as coffee, cocoa, sugar, and cotton.⁶⁹

La Violencia and the political turmoil caused by Gaitan’s assassination largely ended by 1958 with the political amnesty offered by Pinilla. Although this “peace” was short-lived and Pinilla was eventually overthrown in a coup, the seeds of the initial insurgency movement in Colombia began as a class-motivated struggle against wealthy landowners and never ceased in the rural areas. However, this rural violence soon spread to the urban areas of Colombia via hyperpolarization of political parties prevalent throughout Colombian society.

4. Comparative Analysis

One of the lessons for the United States from the Colombian insurgency is that “national violence tends to be most intense where the strength of the contending parties is

⁶⁵ Bailey.

⁶⁶ Tickner, “Colombia: Chronicle of a Crisis Foretold,” 61–65.

⁶⁷ Bailey, “La Violencia in Colombia.”

⁶⁸ Bailey, 568.

⁶⁹ Bailey.

almost equal.”⁷⁰ As of this writing, in the U.S. House of Representatives, Democrats control 213 seats, and Republicans control 222, with one vacancy.⁷¹ In the Senate, Democrats control 48 seats, Republicans control 49, and Independents aligned with the Democratic Party control 3.⁷² No viable mechanism, e.g., a robust third party, provides a relief valve for the intensity of modern American politics. Therefore, as hyper-polarity increases, so does the potential of widespread politically motivated violence in the United States. In Colombian society, one was either a Liberal or Conservative, not a Colombian, and political polarization in American society is at a level not seen since the years following the American Civil War.⁷³

A further similarity between Colombia and the United States is the distrust of security forces. That distrust in the United States is most notable among the African American population due to white supremacists’ historical use of law enforcement to terrorize black communities.⁷⁴ A glaring security dilemma presented itself in Colombian society: the strength of leftist militants grew proportional to the Conservatives’ abuse of power. During Colombia’s insurgency, violence mounted because Liberals refused to serve as government employees in essential service areas such as law enforcement. This trend of disproportional representation recurs in the other case studies, too.⁷⁵ Colombian society distrusted law enforcement after the Liberals left the police force en masse due to controversial abuses of power by the Conservative governments of Opsina and Gomez.

⁷⁰ Bailey, 666.

⁷¹ James M. Lindsay, “The 118th Congress by the Numbers,” *Council on Foreign Relations* (blog), January 9, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/118th-congress-numbers>.

⁷² Lindsay.

⁷³ Laura Paisley, “Political Polarization at Its Worst since the Civil War,” *University of Southern California News*, November 8, 2016, <https://news.usc.edu/110124/political-polarization-at-its-worst-since-the-civil-war-2/>.

⁷⁴ “Slave Patrols: An Early Form of American Policing,” National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, accessed March 9, 2023, <https://nleomf.org/slave-patrols-an-early-form-of-american-policing/>; Jill Lepore, “The Invention of the Police,” *New Yorker*, July 20, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/07/20/the-invention-of-the-police>.

⁷⁵ Gary Potter, “The History of Policing in the United States, Part 1,” *Eastern Kentucky University Online* (blog), June 25, 2013, <https://ekuonline.eku.edu/blog/police-studies/the-history-of-policing-in-the-united-states-part-1/>.

While political reforms may successfully quell sustained political violence, e.g., Northern Ireland, in many insurgencies, they do nothing to end insurgency activities once violence is underway. In Malaya, Dhofar, and El Salvador, for example, a “calculated brute force against civilians” was necessary to defeat the insurgencies there.⁷⁶ On the other hand, in Colombia, violence ceased for approximately two years under Opsina’s coalition Conservative–Liberal government. However, Colombia’s infrastructure and law enforcement apparatus could not provide essential services in the rural Highlands, thereby providing havens for anti-government elements to incubate and then export violence to the urban areas. As explored later in this thesis, the George Floyd Reform in Policing Act seeks to address the political grievances of Americans concerned with controversial police-involved fatalities; however, even if this bill passed, it might not remedy generational distrust of the law enforcement enterprise in the United States. This bill might be too little, too late.

However, there is a stark difference between insurgent Colombia and the modern United States. The interconnectedness of the United States, e.g., highways, the internet, and other infrastructure, and the relative robustness of the American security apparatuses and social service elements decreases the likelihood that the intensity seen in Colombia’s insurgency could sustain itself in the United States. There is little if any area within the continental United States where insurgent elements could successfully deny a sustained, concerted effort by American law enforcement or military units. As shown in the Colombian insurgency, a key element of the violence was the ability of rural peasants and, later, Marxist guerillas to operate relatively untouched in the Highlands of Colombia. In areas with relatively little infrastructure in the United States, the federal government has quickly subdued localized support and a determined, armed subgroup, led by the likes of Randy Weaver, David Koresh, and Cliven Bundy. Nevertheless, the fallout from the government’s responses in Waco and Ruby Ridge inspired a new level of resistance

⁷⁶ Jacqueline L. Hazelton, “Why Good Governance Does Not Defeat Insurgencies,” Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, August 7, 2017, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/why-good-governance-does-not-defeat-insurgencies>.

through the growth of militias and politically inspired extremism that resulted in the Oklahoma City bombing.⁷⁷

B. NORTHERN IRELAND

The Northern Ireland insurgency presents an anomaly among insurgency case studies because unrest and violence took place in a highly developed, interconnected Western society. In Colombia, a largely rural insurgency dominated, but the Northern Ireland insurgency—from its onset in 1969 to its conclusion in 1998 with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement—happened in the cities.⁷⁸ However, violence in Northern Ireland never truly disappeared: the 2019 bombing of the Derry/Londonderry Courthouse by a group calling itself the New Irish Republican Army and the murder of journalist Lyra McKee reportedly at the hands of “dissident Republicans” during riots that followed police searches in the area.⁷⁹

1. The Troubles

The Troubles in Northern Ireland originated in 1921 and lasted until approximately 1998 with the partition of Ireland into two entities by the Government of Ireland Act, whereby

Great Britain granted Ireland a large degree of independence as the Free State of Ireland, while retaining six counties in the North that were to compose the more closely politically and economically integrated territory of Northern Ireland. The Government of Ireland Act granted a separate Parliament from the Free State, while allowing continued participation at Westminster.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ “A ‘Patriot’ Timeline,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed December 20, 2022, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2001/patriot-timeline>.

⁷⁸ Douglas Woodwell, “The ‘Troubles’ of Northern Ireland: Civil Conflict in an Economically Well-Developed State,” in *Understanding Civil War: Evidence and Analysis*, ed. Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2005), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep02484.10>.

⁷⁹ Aaron Edwards, “The Fragility of the Good Friday Peace: The Persistence of Terrorism in Northern Ireland,” *CTC Sentinel* 12, no. 4 (April 2019), 1, <https://ctc.usma.edu/fragility-good-friday-peace-persistence-terrorism-northern-ireland/>.

⁸⁰ Woodwell, “The ‘Troubles’ of Northern Ireland,” 63.

The social identity of Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland formed the crux of the insurgency. Even before the partition of 1921, Protestants in Northern Ireland and the subsequent Irish Free State “segregated” themselves from each other voluntarily.⁸¹ Following the partition in 1921, Northern Ireland’s governmental structure facilitated the Protestants’ voluntary segregation in the legislature. The partition of Northern Ireland following World War I reflected the demand of many native populations for their own nation-states out of the collapse of the German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian empires.⁸² Northern Ireland might have been following suit.

King George V of England, however, sought not to assuage the Nationalist and mostly Roman Catholic majority of Northern Ireland’s determination for self-governance but to “neutralize” nationalist sentiment and political self-determination there.⁸³ He empowered the minority Protestant government, seeking to strengthen its socio-political status to the detriment of the substantial Catholic-Nationalist population. Violence was constant in the Northern Ireland state after the partition, with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) operating out of bases in the Irish Free State and beginning cross-border attacks; records indicate that 428 people were killed between June 1920 and June 1922.⁸⁴ These attacks, conducted by Irish Nationalists, allowed the Stormont government to enact the Special Powers Act of 1921 (discussed in subsequent pages), which in conjunction with the 1367 Statutes of Kilkenny, aimed to eradicate the Irish language and culture—the proximate cause of The Troubles. Lingering Nationalist tension from this attack on Irish culture was never addressed by the British or the Unionist government in Belfast. It was not until 1998 with the Belfast Accords, which successfully co-opted the Sinn Féin party into the political framework of Northern Ireland, that large-scale violence abated.

⁸¹ Kathleen Peroff and Christopher Hewitt, “Rioting in Northern Ireland: The Effects of Different Policies,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24, no. 4 (1980): 594.

⁸² Chauncy D. Harris, “New European Countries and Their Minorities,” *Geographical Review* 83, no. 3 (1993): 301–20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/215732>.

⁸³ Thomas E. Hachey, “One People or Two? The Origins of Partition and the Prospects for Unification in Ireland,” *Journal of International Affairs* 27, no. 2 (1973): 235, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24356559>.

⁸⁴ David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles: The Story of the Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: New Amsterdam Books, 2002), 2.

The Protestant-Unionist government began to discourage Catholic-Nationalist involvement in the government by gradually eroding or transforming voting rights laws in Northern Ireland. Gerrymandering combined with the elimination of “proportional representation” and the right to vote granted only to landowners and their families transformed traditionally Nationalist-held political offices into Protestant political strongholds.⁸⁵ Woodwell in his article on The Troubles states that with these changes, “Nationalists lost in more than half the electoral districts in which they had previously won office. . . . Unopposed elections became the norm and political change in government was almost non-existent.”⁸⁶

Undoubtedly, this intentional disenfranchisement of the Catholic population in Northern Ireland by the Protestant government in Stormont and Westminster contributed to a deep resentment among would-be Catholic insurgents and their supporters. As stated in the CIA’s *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, “internal lingering [political] grievances,” can be a primer for progression into an open stage of insurgency.⁸⁷

Another strong pre-insurgency indicator outlined by the CIA and present in Northern Ireland was an economic crisis.⁸⁸ In Northern Ireland, this economic crisis plainly affected the Catholic majority in most cases. For example, in 1939, the unemployment rate in the region hovered around 20 percent while it was only 7.5 percent for British citizens.⁸⁹ Moreover, at times, the Catholic unemployment rate was more than twice that of Protestant unemployment, highlighting the staggering economic inequality surrounding The Troubles.⁹⁰ Catholics were largely excluded from higher-paying jobs in industry, e.g., military hardware production for the United Kingdom and shipbuilding, and relegated to lower-paying service and non-skilled labor positions. Thus, mounting

⁸⁵ Woodwell, “The ‘Troubles’ of Northern Ireland,” 163.

⁸⁶ Woodwell, 163.

⁸⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, 5–6.

⁸⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, 5–6.

⁸⁹ Bob Rowthorn, “Northern Ireland: An Economy in Crisis,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 5, no. 1 (1981): 4.

⁹⁰ Woodwell, “The ‘Troubles’ of Northern Ireland,” 163.

unemployment and job discrimination created a highly stratified classist society within Northern Ireland—such as that seen in the Colombia case study and the present-day United States.

Unpopular programs by the occupation government further alienated the local population. For example, the Protestant government required “loyalty oaths” from public servants, which precluded Catholics from joining the civil service, thereby contributing to socio-economic stagnation.⁹¹ These loyalty oaths, and the aforementioned economic deprivation suffered by the Catholics helped to cement their status as a lower caste in Northern Ireland, even though Catholics were a majority population.

More importantly, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) was approximately 90 percent Protestant; the lack of buy-in and representation of Catholics in the local security forces contributed to future political violence. The passage of the Special Powers Act in 1922 strengthened this over-representation of Protestants within the security forces, fueling the violence and insurgency of the 1960s, according to some scholars.⁹² The Special Powers Act notably empowered the Stormont government to “impose curfews, prohibit public meetings and processions, [and] close licensed premises.”⁹³ However, the Protestant security forces further strained their relationship with the Catholic community by engaging in discriminatory security operations. Acting under the direction of the minister of Home Affairs, security forces could “seize contraband and detain those suspected of subversive activities” without restraint.⁹⁴ The government severely curtailed the right of the press since the Home Affairs office could order the shutdown of any newspaper deemed subversive to the Stormont government or anything that caused “disaffection” toward King George V or the Westminster government.⁹⁵ By not allowing peaceful political discourse, and engaging in discriminatory measures against Catholic

⁹¹ Woodwell, 163.

⁹² Laura K. Donohue, “Regulating Northern Ireland: The Special Powers Acts, 1922–1972,” *Historical Journal* 41, no. 4 (1998): 1089–120.

⁹³ Donohue, 1090.

⁹⁴ Donohue, 1091.

⁹⁵ Donohue, 1091.

citizens, Westminster supported the occupation government and sowed the seeds for future violent political conflict.

These measures successfully kept the peace in Northern Ireland over many decades; however, by the 1960s, with civil rights demonstrations in the United States, many Catholic Northern Irishers felt it time for wholesale socio-economic political change. By 1967, Northern Ireland civil rights proponents began organizing primarily in favor of electoral reforms, specifically to reverse electoral gerrymandering and the requirement of land ownership to vote.⁹⁶ This chapter in Northern Ireland history noticeably parallels the United States: a concerted effort by the Republican Party to engage in gerrymandering that further diminishes predominantly minority involvement in the political arena.

A cultural revolution began to take shape, with Catholics beginning to demand societal representation in public life—as landmarks and cultural symbols had not represented the contributions of the substantial Catholic minority in Northern Ireland.⁹⁷ This movement was not unlike the wishes of large segments of the American population, predominantly African Americans, who feel that statues and monuments of mostly Confederate military and political leaders have no place in the modern United States, beyond museums. Nationalist supporters viewed these demands as “attacks on the state,” leading to further clashes between Catholics and Protestants.⁹⁸ This demand for greater social recognition invokes the “culture battles” in 21st century America over the appropriateness of memorials to slave-holders, from the founders, e.g., Thomas Jefferson, to Confederates.⁹⁹ This cultural struggle creates a zero-sum honor-challenge between the sociological groups, whereby one removed statue means an honor loss for the Confederate

⁹⁶ Woodwell, “The ‘Troubles’ of Northern Ireland.”

⁹⁷ Woodwell, 165.

⁹⁸ Peroff and Hewitt, “Rioting in Northern Ireland,” 594.

⁹⁹ Sara Smart, “A Thomas Jefferson Statue Is Removed from New York City Hall after 187 Years,” CNN, November 24, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/24/us/thomas-jefferson-statue-removed/index.html>; Whitney Evans and David Streever, “Virginia’s Massive Robert E. Lee Statue Has Been Removed,” NPR, September 8, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/09/08/1035004639/virginia-ready-to-remove-massive-robert-e-lee-statue-following-a-year-of-lawsuit>.

monument supporters while every monument that survives destruction means an honor loss for the anti-Confederate monument bloc.

The cumulative angst from cultural, economic, and sociological discrimination against the Catholics-Nationalists soon reached its zenith in 1969, only two short years after the initial reformist movements of 1967. The Troubles eventually claimed nearly 3,500 lives, half of whom were civilians, and injured 47,500 between 1969 and 1998.¹⁰⁰

In sustained domestic political insurgencies, only one action at the right time is needed to ignite a decades-long conflict. The initial violence that heralded the approximately three-decades-long conflict began somewhat benignly, over a proposed Catholic-Nationalist parade by the Apprentice Boys of Derry in Londonderry. In the end, the Northern Ireland government in Stormont granted the Nationalists permission to hold their parade.¹⁰¹ Violence immediately broke out between Nationalist and Unionist supporters at the parade. Eventually, the Nationalists relegated themselves to an area known as the Bogside close to Londonderry and constructed barricades to repel Unionist crowds and the RUC. Even with the deployment of a “large proportion of the entire RUC, [the RUC] lost control of a substantial part of Londonderry City.”¹⁰² A large-scale deployment of security forces was not enough to stave off intense violence, a scene not unlike events in Portland, Oregon, where contingents of both federal, state, and local law enforcement could not quell the violence. Widespread civil unrest and violence soon encroached on other cities in Northern Ireland as community leaders in cities such as Belfast “called for diversionary activities outside Londonderry to ‘take the heat’ off the Bogside.”¹⁰³ Notably, Bogside remained an inhospitable area for Unionist forces and the

¹⁰⁰ Lorenzo Bosi and Gianluca De Fazio, “Contextualizing the Troubles: Investigating Societies through Social Movements Research,” in *The Troubles in Northern Ireland and Theories of Social Movements*, ed. Lorenzo Bosi and Gianluca De Fazio (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv56fgn2.4>.

¹⁰¹ McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*.

¹⁰² McKittrick and McVea, 54.

¹⁰³ McKittrick and McVea, 54.

RUC until 1972.¹⁰⁴ Approximately eight people were killed and 750 injured, with 180 buildings either destroyed in the rioting or demolished thereafter due to damage.¹⁰⁵

A key goal of an insurgent or terroristic movement is to force the established power to engage in disproportionate aggression against the insurgency to dispel the legitimacy of the occupying power in eyes of the local population. Under the “good governance” theory of insurgency, insurgency is a “hearts and minds” campaign. In Northern Ireland, the Belfast government committed the disproportional strategic error of appealing to London to send troops to help quell the violence; however, as McKittrick and McVea explain, London would only send troops with the understanding that the soldiers deployed were under the authority of London, not Belfast; ultimately, the Northern Ireland government approved this arrangement.¹⁰⁶ Arguably, however, the short-term peace created by the deployment of the British military into Northern Ireland made long-term stability impossible. The Belfast government became spectators in its own country, lorded over by an occupying force controlled from London.

An uneasy peace developed as British soldiers deployed on the streets of Londonderry and Belfast, and strangely, the large Catholic population of Londonderry welcomed the respite from British military forces vis-à-vis the listless RUC. The Belfast government agreed to some Nationalist demands, most notably anti-discrimination measures in housing and employment and a redrawing of “electoral boundaries” that better reflected the communities.¹⁰⁷ However, violence continued to escalate throughout the 1970s as both sides committed numerous atrocities, culminating in the events of Bloody Sunday on January 30, 1972, when the British Army shot and killed 13 people who had been participating in a peaceful civil rights march in a Catholic stronghold of Derry.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ McKittrick and McVea.

¹⁰⁵ McKittrick and McVea.

¹⁰⁶ McKittrick and McVea.

¹⁰⁷ Jeff Wallenfeldt, “The Troubles: Northern Ireland History,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, August 24, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/The-Troubles-Northern-Ireland-history>.

¹⁰⁸ Brian Conway, “Active Remembering, Selective Forgetting, and Collective Identity: The Case of Bloody Sunday,” *Identity* 3, no. 4 (2003): 305–23, https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532706XID0304_01.

The Londonderry Riots of 1969 damaged the perceived legitimacy of the Belfast government and RUC among the Catholic population. Before 1969, the RUC had blocked Catholic progress and equality; after 1969, the RUC was a full-fledged enemy of the Catholic-Nationalist insurgents. As noted in the *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, inept or corrupt security forces usually accompany a declining socio-political environment. Whether security forces are actually corrupt is not important if the prevailing public perception creates an identity of corruption.

The abuses and heavy-handedness of the RUC and its para-security partners in suppressing the riots brought about the militant Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). The *conventional* IRA “had shifted away from militarism [after 1962] in favor of a more gradualist approach to encourage political change.”¹⁰⁹ PIRA grew out of a disagreement between moderates in the IRA and Sinn Féin regarding the latter’s continued involvement in the Northern Ireland government. Thus, PIRA remained the driver of non-state violence for the three-decades-long conflict—until the general consensus to end hostilities through the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

The insurgency in Northern Ireland came to an end—for the most part—when Sinn Féin took on an official political capacity in Northern Ireland’s government, and the British Army withdrew from Northern Ireland. However, sporadic political violence continues to this day.

2. Comparative Analysis

The Northern Ireland case study relates to the United States in that the British government co-opted the Catholic-Nationalist movement by integrating the Sinn Féin party into the Northern Ireland political system. Although the level of violence within the United States has not reached the levels of Northern Ireland, the passage of the George Floyd Reform in Policing Act might remedy some of the distrust of law enforcement among the African American community. As shown in Colombia, political reforms prevented violence for approximately two years; however, the failure of the Liberal government in

¹⁰⁹ Woodwell, “The ‘Troubles’ of Northern Ireland,” 167.

Colombia to make good on promised economic reforms resulted in longstanding unaddressed grievances.

In Northern Ireland, going as far back as the 1300s, there was a concerted effort by the British to destroy the Irish language and culture. However, in its historical failure to create a single Irish identity, political violence was unavoidable. Like the Colombian experience, a lack of representation of Catholic Nationalists in the security and political apparatuses of the Northern Ireland state contributed to further feelings of alienation within Catholic-Nationalist society. Moreover, the disproportionate appeal for British military assistance by the Belfast government in quelling the violence only furthered fueled Nationalist resolve. Similarly, in the United States, the disproportionate violence of the federal government in Waco and Ruby Ridge directly led to the rise of right-wing militias and the 1996 Oklahoma City bombing.¹¹⁰

C. THE WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA, INSURRECTION OF 1898

The demand for Southern cotton declined in the 1890s, and its collapse threatened the fortunes of the largely agrarian Southern farmers.¹¹¹ Although the United States was in a transformative economy (agrarian-industrial) before and during the Civil War, by the 1890s, an influx of European immigrants and new technologies, e.g., electricity and combustion engines, rapidly shifted the nation toward industrialization.¹¹² The years preceding the 1898 insurrection in Wilmington, North Carolina, resembled some aspects of the present-day United States, particularly economic malaise and a culture of fear.¹¹³ Southern agrarian Democratic voters, especially in North Carolina, began to feel their once dominant hold on Southern politics ebb as Democratic politicians more closely aligned

¹¹⁰ Southern Poverty Law Center, “A ‘Patriot’ Timeline.”

¹¹¹ Gavin Wright, “Cotton Competition and the Post-Bellum Recovery of the American South,” *Journal of Economic History* 34, no. 3 (1974): 610–35.

¹¹² “Rise of Industrial America, 1876–1900,” Library of Congress, accessed January 9, 2022, <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/rise-of-industrial-america-1876-1900/overview/>.

¹¹³ Daniel M. Harrison, “Twenty Years in a Culture of Fear,” *Contexts* 18, no. 4 (2019): 46–48, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504219883856>; Lauren Bauer et al., *Ten Facts about COVID-19 and the U.S. Economy* (Washington, DC: Hamilton Project, 2020), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/ten-facts-about-covid-19-and-the-u-s-economy/>.

with industrialists became the new power brokers.¹¹⁴ Then, relations between the once dominant Democratic Party and its formerly loyal base reached a low point.

In the early 1890s, an organization called the National Farmer’s Alliance formed to gain power on a platform of

farmers advocating for cooperatives and economic reform, [which] spawned smaller organizations throughout the country, with an active branch in North Carolina. The “alliancemen” were active supporters of the new . . . Populist Party, led nationally by North Carolinian Leonidas LaFayette Polk.¹¹⁵

Although the 1892 election did not flip the North Carolina state legislature to minority-party control, the combined votes of the Republicans and the Populist Party outnumbered those of their Democratic counterparts.¹¹⁶ Recognizing their combined numerical superiority, the Republicans and Populist Party agreed to combine their efforts to elect the state legislature of 1894. Running on combined tickets as “Fusionists,” this combination successfully seized control of not only the state legislature in 1894 but also the Governor’s Office of North Carolina in 1896 and North Carolina’s two seats in the U.S. Senate.¹¹⁷ This melding of the Republican and Populist Party constituted a direct threat to the ruling Democratic power structure of the state.

This threat to the Democratic Party was realized once the Fusionists assumed control of the North Carolina state government. The Fusionists began modifying North Carolina state election laws, which, according to LeRae Umfleet with the North Carolina Office of Archives and History, “favor [ed] African Americans and middle class whites.”¹¹⁸ North Carolina Democrats advanced “a restoration of ‘home rule,’ allowing

¹¹⁴ Rachel Marie-Crane Williams, “A War in Black and White: The Cartoons of Norman Ethre Jennett & the North Carolina Election of 1898,” *Southern Cultures* 19, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 7–31.

¹¹⁵ “The Election of 1898 in North Carolina: An Introduction,” University of North Carolina Libraries, accessed January 9, 2022, <https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/1898/history>.

¹¹⁶ University of North Carolina Libraries.

¹¹⁷ Allen W. Trelease, “The Fusion Legislatures of 1895 and 1897: A Roll-Call Analysis of the North Carolina House of Representatives,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 57, no. 3 (1980): 280–309.

¹¹⁸ LeRae Umfleet, “Wilmington Coup—1898,” NCpedia, August 2022, <https://www.ncpedia.org/history/cw-1900/wilmington-massacre-1898>.

elections of local officials in several eastern North Carolina counties where they had previously been appointed by the state.”¹¹⁹ The fear coursing through the veins of the Democratic Party in response to this populist uprising and takeover of government seats helped set the wheels of insurrectionist violence in motion in Wilmington, North Carolina.

1. Three Conspirators

Three key players with distinct but comingled roles led this popular uprising to make the Democratic Party dominant in North Carolina. Furnifold Simmons headed the state Democratic Party. His strategy was simple: weaponize the fear of African Americans to bring white voters back into the Democratic fold. He did this by conspiring with Josephus Daniels, editor of the *News and Editor*, “a newspaper with a large circulation in eastern North Carolina.”¹²⁰ Daniels’s charge as the editor was to publish stories and images that played on white fear among the upper echelons of postbellum white Southern society of a return to Reconstruction-era politics and reinforce the idea and fear that a sub-level out-group would dominate whites. A key player in this undertaking was Norman Jennings, whose drawings “provided a visual element to the prevailing propaganda.”¹²¹ One of Jennings’s drawings, for example, depicts an African American man as a vampire bat, clutching white women in his claws (see Figure 2).

¹¹⁹ University of North Carolina Libraries, “The Election of 1898 in North Carolina.”

¹²⁰ Williams, “A War in Black and White,” 8.

¹²¹ Williams, 9.



Figure 2. Illustration by Jennings for the *News and Editor*.¹²²

The third actor in this conspiracy was Charles B. Aycock, a future North Carolina governor who sought to send white voters into a frenzy with impassioned speeches denigrating African Americans and their white allies at various speaking engagements around the state. These individuals used fear as a political weapon to return North Carolina to Democratic rule in 1898. However, just as important as this mis/disinformation campaign was, the rise of Democratic-aligned North Carolina militias helped to ensure a successful election for the Democratic Party.¹²³ As disinformation rose in North Carolina, so did the fear of losing control within the white Democratic establishment. This fear gave rise to militias across the state of North Carolina that engaged in politically motivated violence targeting African Americans and white Republicans.

¹²² Source: Williams, 9.

¹²³ James M. Beeby, "Red Shirt Violence, Election Fraud, and the Demise of the Populist Party in North Carolina's Third Congressional District, 1900," *North Carolina Historical Review* 85, no. 1 (2008): 1–28.

Militias in North Carolina effectively suppressed votes across the state using various tactics. Political opponents almost lynched the Republican governor of North Carolina twice, but he “avoided death by hiding in a mail car.”¹²⁴ Illustrating the success of this voter-suppression campaign, “[in] Wilmington’s heavily Black Fourth Precinct, more than three hundred Republicans were registered, but just ninety-seven votes were tallied.”¹²⁵ Such a dearth of Republican votes exemplify the effectiveness of intimidation to suppress voter turnout.

A tragic central figure in this maelstrom, Alexander Manly, was the editor of the *Daily Record*, a black owned and operated newspaper in Wilmington. Manly had the audacity to publish a piece by an unnamed author who postulated that African American men and white women could engage in consensual (sexual) relationships, which of course was strictly taboo at the time.¹²⁶ Although the pursuit of free speech is a constitutionally protected action, this protection exists only where the rule of law is respected and enforced. Due to the withdrawal of federal troops from North Carolina, Democratic-aligned, white supremacist militias filled the security void. Subsequently, Manly’s decision to publish this piece at such a critical moment in the pre-insurgency stage in eastern North Carolina delivered more propaganda to the three aforementioned conspirators. The publication drew Manly into the crosshairs of the North Carolina white supremacist movement that had, using fear as a weapon, returned the state to Democratic control. In the city of Wilmington, the Democratic militias targeted Manly’s newspaper and the elected government of Wilmington due to its thriving black community. Since African Americans served in official civil service capacities, from magistrates to police officers, Wilmington became a focal point for white supremacist wrath.

White supremacists successfully drove black citizens from positions of power. Immediately after the fraudulent election wins across the state and in Wilmington

¹²⁴ Alexandria Neason, “On Atonement,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, January 28, 2021, https://www.cjr.org/special_report/apologies-news-racism-atonement.php/.

¹²⁵ Neason.

¹²⁶ “Alexander Manly,” *University of North Carolina Libraries*, accessed January 9, 2022, <https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/1898/bios/manly>.

specifically, “a group of [Democratic] Wilmington whites passed a series of resolutions requiring . . . Manly to leave the city, and close his paper, and [called] for the resignations of the mayor and chief of police.”¹²⁷ The demand for the police chief’s resignation came after “white supremacists had bullied the white police chief into firing the city’s 10 black policemen.”¹²⁸ Both the history of Wilmington and the post-Trump era in the United States demonstrate the repercussions of attacks on America’s electoral processes. The Wilmington case goes further, however, in showing the outcome of a successful election subversion campaign.

Once the North Carolina state and local election results were successfully tampered with and voters suppressed, white supremacists in the Wilmington area became more emboldened. On November 10, 1898, the local Democratic community and political leaders assembled a force of approximately 2,000 white citizens, who destroyed the *Daily Editor* building (see Figure 5) and forced the resignations of dutifully elected political leaders of Wilmington, both black and white.¹²⁹ Just as alarming, a forced exile of African Americans and their white Republican counterparts ensued in the days afterward, resulting in a “black majority city [turned] into a white supremacist citadel.”¹³⁰ In this way, the Democratic Party re-established white dominance.

¹²⁷ Umfleet, “Wilmington Coup.”

¹²⁸ David Zucchini, “The 1898 Wilmington Massacre Is an Essential Lesson in How State Violence Has Targeted Black Americans,” *Time*, July 1, 2020, <https://time.com/5861644/1898-wilmington-massacre-essential-lesson-state-violence/>.

¹²⁹ Umfleet, “Wilmington Coup.”

¹³⁰ Zucchini, “How State Violence Has Targeted Black Americans.”

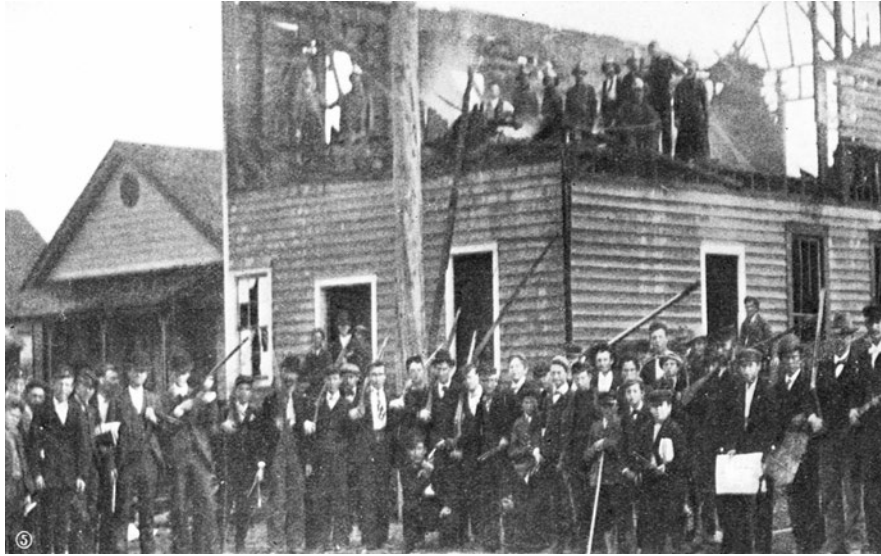


Figure 3. *Daily Record* Building after November 10, 1898.¹³¹

2. Comparative Analysis

A pre-insurgency phase had effectively gripped North Carolina, as described by the CIA's *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*. Simmons, Daniel, and Aycock used previous grievances, such as citizens' fears of a Reconstruction government and minority rule, to instigate a nascent insurgency within eastern North Carolina. These forces capitalized on the fear and conspiratorial racial propaganda in the wake of zero-sum political contests in the 1890s. Based on the CIA's framework, the insurrection in Wilmington was not an aberration but a logical end to a concerted, protracted goal of decapitating a legitimately elected municipal government in the United States.

Wilmington, North Carolina, illustrates how weaponized media can leverage its socio-political environment and constituents' socially constructed reality to foment civil disorder. Fear pushed the citizens of Wilmington, North Carolina, over the edge. The United States of the 21st century is awash with populism, hyperpolarization, disputed elections, economic turmoil, and a media enterprise that consistently conflates fact and fiction, preying on the fears of American society—not unlike North Carolina in 1898.

¹³¹ Source: Zucchini.

Two striking similarities link the socio-political conditions of North Carolina in the 1880s with contemporary America. First, a culture of fear descended upon North Carolina as primarily white Democratic actors feared losing their power in the postbellum world that in some cases favored African Americans, Republicans, and other scalawags from the North. This culture of fear contributed to hotly disputed elections not only in North Carolina but also across most of the American South. Republicans preyed on such fear. In their zeal to seize power, Republicans collaborated with the Populists to swing elections in their favor throughout the early to mid-1870s. After Democratic insurgents waged a comprehensive civil-paramilitary campaign to usurp Fusionist/Republican election victories across the state of North Carolina, tensions culminated in the Wilmington coup.

The second similarity involves replacement theory, made manifest in the propaganda of white supremacists. The Counter Extremism Project defines replacement theory as “an ethno-nationalist theory warning that an indigenous European—e.g., white—population is being replaced by non-European immigrants.”¹³² Some have argued that replacement theory is a modern phenomenon, its origins in comments made by Frenchman Renaud Camus.¹³³ Nevertheless, the events in North Carolina circa 1875 demonstrate that this fear-based tactic is neither modern nor inherently European. Furthermore, the events in the Wilmington case constitute the most successful, comprehensive political-media campaign waged from the postbellum to the modern era. Conspirators Furnifold, Daniels, and Simmons were the first to effectively weaponize replacement theory in the United States, resulting in insurrectionary violence and, ultimately, the only decapitation of an elected civilian government in the United States.

Simmons and Daniels successfully used replacement theory in the North Carolina media to stoke the fires of insurgency and insurrection. This weaponization of replacement theory through mainstream media echoes language that some prominent media personalities employ today. For instance, Fox News personality Tucker Carlson postulated that “the Democratic Party is trying to *replace* the current electorate—the voters now

¹³² “Great Replacement Theory,” Counter Extremism Project, accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.counterextremism.com/content/great-replacement-theory>.

¹³³ Counter Extremism Project.

casting ballots—with new people, more obedient voters from the Third World” (emphasis added).¹³⁴ Carlson’s bully pulpit on *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, which airs on Fox News, is the nation’s second-most watched cable news show, thus influencing a significant segment of the nation.¹³⁵ Juxtaposing Tucker’s reach and prominent Republican politicians’ language and ideological bent with North Carolina of the 1870s reveals alarming similarities.¹³⁶

The undermining and, in some cases, outright assault on modern-day election results that one party deems questionable evokes the events of pre-insurrection Wilmington. In North Carolina, the Democratic-aligned militias used voter intimidation to successfully suppress the African American voting bloc in Wilmington after the insurrection. Although the United States since 1975 has not experienced this type of far-reaching intimidation, large paramilitary organizations do exist in the country, e.g., the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters. Nevertheless, the relatively recent evolution of vote suppression tactics of those primarily in the Trump-dominated Republican Party appears unmistakably familiar.

Former President Trump successfully mobilized a crowd comprising rioters; accused insurrectionists, such as the Oath Keepers; and others to storm the U.S. Capitol to interrupt the Electoral College certification of Joseph Biden’s win over Trump in the 2020 election. Oath Keepers within the crowd had planned to employ a quick reaction force armed with weapons to take the Capitol. Some had aimed not only to interrupt the democratic political process but also to arrest, i.e., kidnap, politicians such as House

¹³⁴ Kieran Press-Reynolds, “A Former Leader of the KKK Celebrated Tucker Carlson ‘Finally’ Sharing the White-Supremacist ‘Great Replacement’ Conspiracy Theory,” *Insider*, October 22, 2021, <https://www.insider.com/tucker-carlson-replacement-theory-david-duke-kkk-trump-2021-10>.

¹³⁵ Mark Joyella, “Fox News Channel’s ‘The Five’ Dominates Cable News Ratings with 3.7 Million Viewers,” *Forbes*, January 25, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markjoyella/2022/01/25/fox-news-channels-the-five-dominates-cable-news-ratings-with-37-million-viewers/>.

¹³⁶ Ryan Bort, “Quiz: Can You Tell the Difference between Tucker Carlson and an Admitted White Supremacist?,” *Rolling Stone*, September 23, 2021, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/tucker-carlson-great-replacement-white-supremacy-1231248/>; Philip Bump, “Don’t Ignore the Normalization of Tucker Carlson’s Poisonous Rhetoric on Race,” *Washington Post*, September 23, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/09/23/dont-ignore-normalization-tucker-carlsons-poisonous-rhetoric-race/>.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who the Oath Keepers regarded as enemies.¹³⁷ The Center for Strategic and International Studies defines the Oath Keepers as a “right wing political organization committed to supporting and defending their interpretation of the U.S. Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic.”¹³⁸ Even more directly tied to the spirit of the Wilmington case study, the Oath Keepers actively planned to engage in insurrectionary violence well before January 6, 2021. This plan resembled the insurgency in North Carolina, where Democratic militants subverted the political process through attacks on their foes—Republicans and African Americans.

D. CONCLUSION

The domestic insurgencies in Colombia; Northern Ireland; and Wilmington, North Carolina provide historical insight into the political, social, and economic dynamics of decades-long politically motivated violence. The subsequent chapter further investigates the analytical markers of insurgency, as proposed by the CIA in its *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*. It builds on the historical examinations by providing a framework to examine the state of possible insurgency in the United States. This apolitical framework permits an equal exploration of violent domestic groups on both the left and right that may have the means, motivation, and capability to sustain politically motivated violence.

¹³⁷ Mike Giglio, “The Lonely Revolutionary: Oath Keepers Leader Stewart Rhodes Has Made His Worst Fears Come True,” *Intercept*, March 8, 2022, <https://theintercept.com/2022/03/08/oath-keepers-january-6-stewart-rhodes-trump/>.

¹³⁸ Eric McQueen, “Examining Extremism: The Oath Keepers,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, June 17, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/examining-extremism/examining-extremism-oath-keepers>.

III. ANALYTICAL MARKERS OF PRE-INSURGENCY IN THE UNITED STATES

Although the United States is not in an open insurgency, certain markers noted by the CIA suggest that the United States is in its early stages. This incipient phase is usually typified by the following:

- A recent history of internal conflict that has left lingering grievances . . .
- A strong warrior or conspiratorial culture . . .
- A polarized winner-takes-all political system . . .
- An inability of the government to provide basic services, such as security, justice, health care, education, utilities, or transportation infrastructure . . .
- Inept or corrupt security forces . . .
- An economic crisis . . . [or]
- A “window of vulnerability” created by . . . hotly disputed elections.¹³⁹

This chapter identifies instances of sustained socio-political conflict within the United States, applying the most salient characteristics of the pre-insurgency phase to recent civil unrest, juxtaposed with historical insurgencies both foreign and domestic, as explored in Chapter II. Such comparisons reveal sustained conflicts that have the potential to evolve into an open insurgency in the United States.

A. INTERNAL CONFLICT

A pattern manifest in the cases of Colombia and Northern Ireland was that these countries experienced long periods of lingering internal conflict before open insurgency erupted. In Colombia, the “rub” between rural Highland migrants and land speculators fomented the division into Liberal and Conservative Parties. These parties pitted the poor against the rich, and both regarded each other’s political victories as threats to the other’s standing within the nation.

¹³⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, 5–6.

In Northern Ireland, a colonial government had attempted to erase the identity of the Irish people with draconian measures such as banning the Irish language and favoring Unionists in Northern Ireland through segregative measures in the Stormont government. When Britain's attempt to destroy the Irish national identity failed, it used the legislature to create a second-class caste within Irish society. Before The Troubles began, the government never addressed the grievances of the Nationalists nor included them in the political process.

In postbellum North Carolina, the upending of the power structure across most of the state by Reconstruction left large swathes of the white population fearing for their place in the new South. Therefore, some whites reacted with political violence to regain their honor and restore what they perceived to be their rightful place in the world. This same attempt to recoup honor was echoed in 2017 by white nationalists in Charlottesville, Virginia, where in violent demonstrations they chanted slogans such as "You will not replace us."¹⁴⁰ Some have argued that the 2017 language is an obvious reference to replacement theory, put forth in 2012 by Renaud Camus, who warned of a European invasion by mostly Muslim migrants, yet proved a recurring theme in the postbellum South, as discussed in Chapter II.¹⁴¹

These patterns assist in examining the shape of the United States since 2019 and exploring some of the lingering grievances yet to be addressed. Racial grievances, such as the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, contributed to large-scale leftist insurrectionist violence in many cities across the United States. Notably, far-right groups like the Proud Boys took advantage of the civil unrest to engage in mutual physical violence against Black Lives Matter protestors and rioters.¹⁴² From the far right, myths of voter fraud and other conspiracy theories resulted in images of mostly white crowds holding torches in

¹⁴⁰ SPLC Hatewatch, "White Nationalists Chant in Charlottesville Again: 'You Will Not Replace Us,'" October 10, 2017, YouTube, video, 4:55, <https://www.splcenter.org/file/15770>.

¹⁴¹ "You Will Not Replace Us," Anti-Defamation League, accessed November 16, 2022, <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/you-will-not-replace-us>.

¹⁴² Andrew Hay, "Right-Wing Groups Clash with Counter Protesters in Several U.S. States," Reuters, August 15, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-global-race-protests-stone-mountain-idUSKCN25B115>.

Charlottesville, Virginia, and from the Capitol Building on January 6, 2021, when a mob interrupted the Electoral College certification of Joseph Biden’s presidential election.

Regarding left-originating conflict since 2020, certain parts of the United States—Minneapolis and Portland, for example—have experienced large-scale economic destruction in response to high-profile police killings. In Minneapolis, insurance payouts are expected to reach \$1 billion, making it the costliest civil disorder in U.S history.¹⁴³ According to the Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Inspector General, the federal cost for deployment to Portland as of August 31, 2021, tallied \$12.3 million.¹⁴⁴ According Portland authorities, the economic damage from riots and subsequent losses cost local businesses approximately \$23 million.¹⁴⁵

Such violence does not need large crowds to fuel intensity. According to Deputy Chief Chris Davis of the Portland Police Department, “Quite frankly, this [violence] is not sustainable.” He explains,

There’s a very big difference between protests and the kind of mayhem that we’ve seen every night. . . . The Black Lives Matter movement is not violent. The story that we’re going to talk about today is about a small group of agitators that is attempting to hijack that message and use it as a cover for criminal activity.¹⁴⁶

Although some may feel relieved that this violence involved only a small group of malcontents, a few actors can sustain a low-intensity urban conflict and inflict this kind of damage. As Kilcullen notes, “Only a tiny minority—2 to 5 percent—of individuals in

¹⁴³ Andrea DeField, Rachel E. Hudgins, and Latosha M. Ellis, “Most Businessowners Policies Cover Riot-Related Damage, Income Losses,” ALM Global, June 30, 2020, <https://www.law.com/insurance-coverage-law-center/2020/06/30/riot-related-damage-income-losses-covered-under-most-business-owners-policies-423-111302/?slreturn=20230124094837>.

¹⁴⁴ Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, *DHS Had Authority to Deploy Federal Law Enforcement Officers to Protect Federal Facilities in Portland, Oregon, but Should Ensure Better Planning and Execution in Future Cross-Component Activities*, OIG-21-31 (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, 2021), <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2021-04/OIG-21-31-Mar21.pdf>.

¹⁴⁵ Associated Press, “\$23 Million Lost Due to Ongoing Portland Protests,” *Oregonian*, July 10, 2020, <https://www.oregonlive.com/news/2020/07/23-million-lost-due-to-ongoing-portland-protests.html>.

¹⁴⁶ Associated Press.

insurgencies, civil wars, or criminal gangs actually commit violence.”¹⁴⁷ Even more interesting is that Democratic Congresswoman Maxine Waters described the leftist/Black Lives Matter violence in the wake of George Floyd’s murder not as rioting but evidence of an insurrection.¹⁴⁸ A close examination of such prolonged civil unrest reveals that the violence in Portland and Minneapolis is insurrectionary and not confined solely to elements of the far right.

Insurrection is a term that since January 6 has been reserved for those on the right of the political spectrum who were present at the Capitol. However, insurrection is codified in the United States as follows:

Whoever incites, sets on foot, assists, or engages in any rebellion or insurrection against the authority of the United States or the laws thereof, or gives aid or comfort thereto, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than ten years, or both; and shall be incapable of holding any office under the United States.¹⁴⁹

Using this definition, certain leftist agitators and extremist movements were actively engaged in insurrection—for example, the attacks on the Federal Courthouse in Portland and the arson of a police station in Minneapolis by a frenzied crowd—before right-wing extremists at the Capitol. However, in the Minneapolis event, a member of the Boogaloo Bois, a “group often incorrectly associated with the far right,” bragged “that he helped the community set the police station on fire.”¹⁵⁰ Perhaps the Boogaloo Bois have been incorrectly labeled as far right because their beliefs span the ideological spectrum, but more likely, they fall under an anarcho-libertarian ideology.

¹⁴⁷ Kilcullen, “America in 2020.”

¹⁴⁸ Rebecca Traister, “Don’t Call It Rioting,” *Cut*, June 3, 2020, <https://www.thecut.com/2020/06/maxine-waters-on-police-violence.html>.

¹⁴⁹ Rebellion or Insurrection, 18 U.S.C § 2383 (2011), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2011-title18/pdf/USCODE-2011-title18-partI-chap115-sec2383.pdf>.

¹⁵⁰ Liz Sawyer, “Man Sentenced to 4 Years for Minneapolis Police Station Fire,” *Police 1*, April 30, 2021, <https://www.police1.com/george-floyd-protest/articles/man-sentenced-to-4-years-for-minneapolis-police-station-fire-nKd5RboPPFKRy53f/>; Martin Smith, “Attacks and Unrest Continues outside Federal Courthouse,” *STL News*, July 23, 2020, <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/news/read.cfm?id=251022>.

The United States has experienced widespread internal conflict since at least 2020. As shown in Figure 4, violence and protests associated with Black Lives Matter in the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder erupted in May 2021, with an obvious parallel to the Bogotazo event in Colombia, in which large-scale rioting spread to major cities across the nation. Figure 5 illustrates the deployment of 17,000 National Guardsmen in response to the widespread civil unrest in 140 cities.

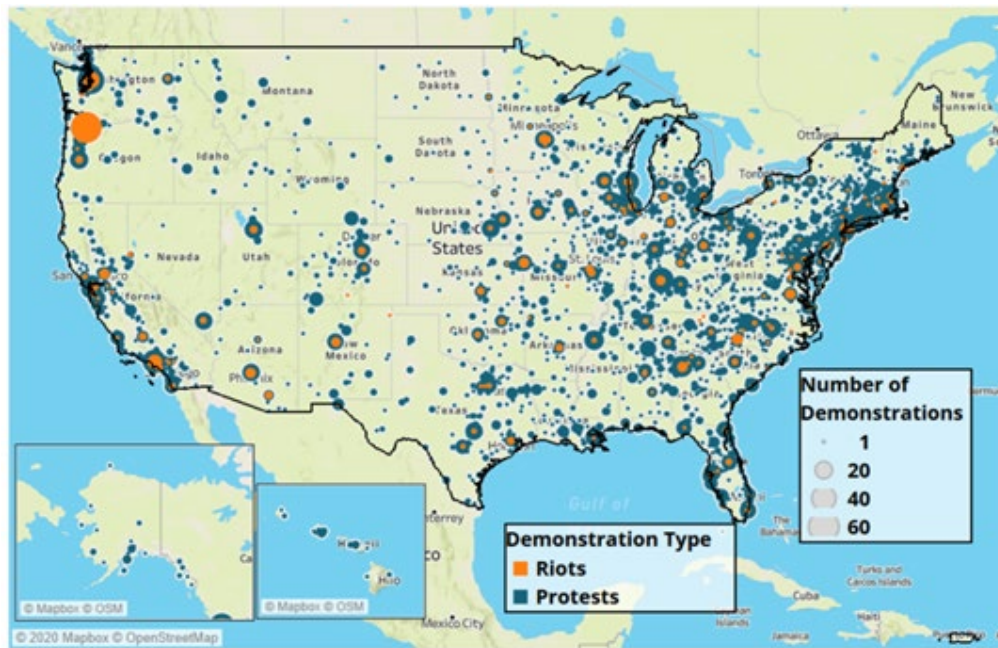


Figure 4. Riots and Demonstrations after George Floyd’s Death.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Source: “Demonstrations and Political Violence in America: New Data for Summer 2020,” Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, September 3, 2020, <https://acleddata.com/2020/09/03/demonstrations-political-violence-in-america-new-data-for-summer-2020/>.



Figure 5. U.S. Curfews and National Guard Deployments.¹⁵²

Right-wing political violence usually falls under one of three categories in the United States, according to Seth Jones with the Center for Strategic and International Studies:

white supremacists, anti-government extremists, and incels. There are numerous differences between (and even within) these types, such as ideology, capabilities, tactics, and level of threat. Adherents also tend to blend elements from each category. But there are some commonalities. First, terrorists in all of these categories operate under a decentralized model. The threats from these networks comes from individuals, not groups.¹⁵³

Nevertheless, some right-wing groups, e.g., the Atomwaffen Division, have adopted methods or tactics often employed by jihadi terrorist groups, e.g., Al-Qaeda. For example, the Atomwaffen Division has stated,

The culture of martyrdom and insurgency within groups like the Taliban and ISIS is something to admire and reproduce in the neo-Nazi terror movement. . . . Domestic extremists glorify Anders Breivik, Dylann Roof, and Brenton Tarrant in online forums. . . . Al-Qa'ida has memorialized

¹⁵² Source: Jack Arnholz, Ivan Pereira, and Christina Carrega, “US Protests Map Shows Where Curfews and National Guard Are Active,” ABC News, June 4, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/locations-george-floyd-protests-curfews-national-guard-deployments/story?id=70997568>.

¹⁵³ Seth G. Jones, Catrina Doxsee, and Nicholas Harrington, *The Escalating Terrorism Problem in the United States* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020), 4.

martyred leaders such as Usama bin Ladin and Anwar al-Aulaqi to encourage future acts of violence.¹⁵⁴

Most alarmingly, violence associated with the far right has dramatically increased since 2020. That year, between January and May, approximately 90 percent of all attacks and planned attacks were associated with right-wing groups.¹⁵⁵ Figure 6, from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, highlights the spate of right-wing attacks in the United States from 2014 to 2020.

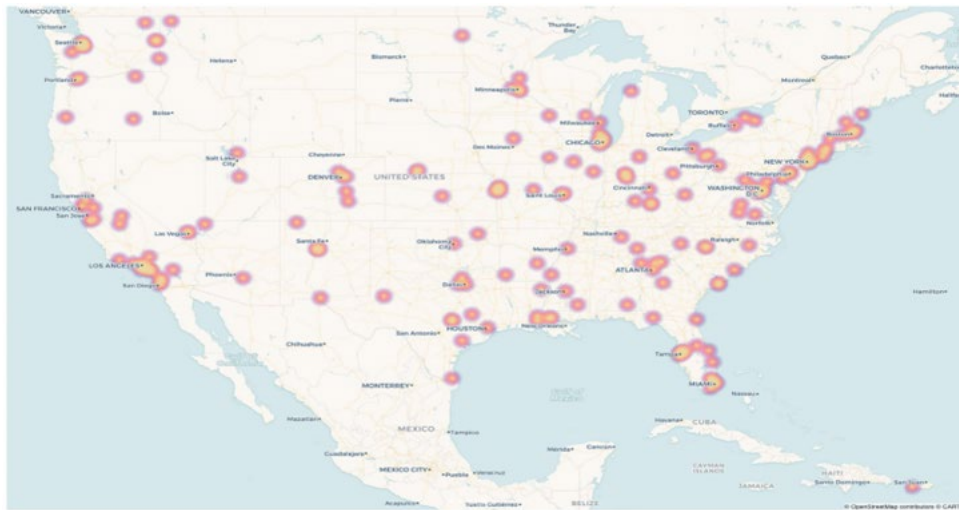


Figure 6. Right-Wing Attacks and Plots in the United States, 2014–2020.¹⁵⁶

The events of January 6, 2021, merit elaboration here. Supporters of President Donald Trump broke the law and “engage [d] in . . . insurrection against the authority of the United States or its laws thereof.”¹⁵⁷ On January 6, 2021, Trump supporters alongside right-wing extremist groups, including the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters, interrupted

¹⁵⁴ New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, *2020 Terrorism Threat Assessment* (Hamilton Township: New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, 2020), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54d79f88e4b0db3478a04405/t/5e9f332ff92d080928b942f9/1587491645834/2020+Terrorism+Threat+Assessment.pdf>.

¹⁵⁵ Jones, Doxsee, and Harrington, *The Escalating Terrorism Problem in the United States*, 2.

¹⁵⁶ Source: Jones, Doxsee, and Harrington, 5.

¹⁵⁷ Rebellion or Insurrection, 18 U.S.C § 2383.

the certification of the 2020 presidential election results, which would acknowledge Joseph Biden’s win against the incumbent Donald Trump. When President Trump’s supporters forcefully entered the Capitol Building, they temporarily interrupted the Electoral College certification process. Before January 6, President Trump had falsely stated via Twitter that “[Vice President Mike Pence] ha [d] the power to reject fraudulently chosen electors.”¹⁵⁸ Arguably, this weaponized political language by the president incited the crowds *before* they were present at the Capitol and was the proximate cause of the insurrection there. As demonstrated in the Wilmington case, incendiary political discourse can contribute to widespread socio-political violence that results in the overthrowing of an elected U.S. governing body.

While January 6, 2021, may be the most notable instance of far-right insurrectionary violence yet, other notable events signaled insurgent violence to come. Well before the attack on the Capitol, in April 2020, far-right demonstrators, some of whom were armed and masked, demonstrated and occupied the Michigan State Capitol Building.¹⁵⁹ Another notable event was a plot to blow up a hospital in reaction to the U.S. government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁶⁰ In yet another, accused right-wing domestic extremists hatched a failed plot to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer and summarily try Whitmer in a kangaroo court.¹⁶¹ A total of 13 individuals were charged at the federal and state levels for their involvement in the Whitmer plot. At the federal level, “two pleaded guilty, two were acquitted at trial, and two were convicted.”¹⁶² The

¹⁵⁸ Brian Naylor, “Fact Check: What Pence and Congress Can and Can’t Do about the Election,” NPR, January 5, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/22/949134479/congress-role-in-election-results-heres-what-happens-jan-6>.

¹⁵⁹ Kathleen Gray, “In Michigan, a Dress Rehearsal for the Chaos at the Capitol on Wednesday,” *New York Times*, January 9, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/09/us/politics/michigan-state-capitol.html>.

¹⁶⁰ Michael Kosnar and Phil Helsel, “FBI Says Man Killed in Missouri Wanted to Bomb Hospital amid Coronavirus Epidemic,” NBC News, March 25, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/fbi-says-man-killed-missouri-wanted-bomb-hospital-amid-coronavirus-n1169166>.

¹⁶¹ “Several Charged in Plot to Kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer,” WGN Chicago, October 8, 2020, <https://wgntv.com/news/fbi-thwarts-apparent-plan-to-kidnap-michigan-gov-gretchen-whitmer/>.

¹⁶² Mitch Smith, “Two Men Convicted in Plot to Kidnap Michigan’s Governor,” *New York Times*, August 23, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/23/us/verdict-trial-gretchen-whitmer-kidnap.html>.

other seven accused face trials at the state level.¹⁶³ This attempted leadership decapitation was not unlike the political violence that roiled North Carolina before the Wilmington insurrection, where the governor was targeted at least twice in failed assassination attempts.

The evidence suggests that since at least May 2020, the United States has been roiled by sporadic low- to mid-intensity conflict—by forces on the left and right—that fulfills the criteria of insurrection. The high-profile police killings of African Americans that fueled leftist violence have not been resolved. As of this writing, the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act has stalled in Congress; this American policing reform bill could be a way to deescalate left-wing insurrectionary violence—even though political reforms come with no guarantees.¹⁶⁴ The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act as three primary aims:

- lowers the criminal intent standard—from willful to knowing or reckless—to convict a law enforcement officer for misconduct in a federal prosecution,
- limits qualified immunity as a defense to liability in a private civil action against a law enforcement officer, and
- grants administrative subpoena power to the Department of Justice (DOJ) in pattern-or-practice investigations.¹⁶⁵

Regarding extremism on the right, former President Trump continues to fan the flames of domestic unrest by perpetuating baseless election fraud mantras that began well before his election loss to Joe Biden in November 2020.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, on October 6, 2021, Trump defended his supporters' actions:

The Unselect Committee of partisan Democrats, and two very weak and pathetic RINOs [Republicans in name only], should come to the conclusion after spending many millions of dollars, that the real insurrection happened

¹⁶³ “AG Nessel Prevails in Continued Prosecution of Wolverine Watchmen,” Michigan Department of Attorney General, August 10, 2022, <https://www.michigan.gov/ag/news/press-releases/2022/08/10/ag-nessel-prevails-in-continued-prosecution-of-wolverine-watchmen>.

¹⁶⁴ Hazelton, “Why Good Governance Does Not Defeat Insurgencies.”

¹⁶⁵ George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020, H.J. Res. 7120, 116th Cong. (2020), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/7120>.

¹⁶⁶ Amy Fried and Douglas B. Harris, “In Suspense: Donald Trump’s Efforts to Undermine Public Trust in Democracy,” *Society* 57, no. 5 (October 2020): 527–33, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-020-00526-y>.

on November 3rd, the Presidential Election, not on January 6th—which was a day of protesting the Fake Election results.¹⁶⁷

Trump, according to various reports, has unofficially begun to set in motion his plan to run again for president in 2024.¹⁶⁸ If Trump and certain members of the Republican Party perpetuate questionable election fraud complaints before the run-up, the events of January 6, 2021, might pale in comparison to a Trump loss in a conspiratorial heavy, hyper-polarized, disinformation-laden political environment in 2024.¹⁶⁹

B. CONSPIRATORIAL CULTURE

Conspiracy culture in the United States is a longstanding phenomenon, and modern conspiracy theories are no more dangerous than previous iterations, e.g., the Salem Witch Trials, the Bavarian Illuminati, and the Red Scare and McCarthyism of post–World War II America.¹⁷⁰ However, although these earlier iterations certainly plagued their communities and to some degree the nation’s collective sense of security, the information pipeline flowed through “old media”—television and radio. In 1950, at the beginning of McCarthy’s Red Scare, approximately 9 percent of Americans owned a television.¹⁷¹ Just as important, 95 percent of Americans owned a radio, but these numbers have meaning; Americans by and large consumed but did not create or spread misinformation. This structural barrier limited the amount of consumption and virality of conspiracies by the

¹⁶⁷ Alana Wise, “Trump Continues to Lie, Says ‘Real Insurrection’ Happened When He Lost Election,” NPR, October 6, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/06/1043746455/trump-continues-to-lie-says-real-insurrection-happened-when-he-lost-election>.

¹⁶⁸ Michael Scherer and Josh Dawsey, “Trump, Talked Out of Announcing a 2024 Bid for Now, Settles on a Wink-and-Nod Unofficial Candidacy,” *Washington Post*, October 4, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-2024-campaign-candidacy/2021/10/03/73af3b12-21f8-11ec-b3d6-8cdebe60d3e2_story.html.

¹⁶⁹ Hope Yen, “No. 2 House Republican Refuses to Say Election Wasn’t Stolen,” AP News, October 10, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-donald-trump-joe-biden-business-health-c1645564f5ced76356e8423b5e12f103>.

¹⁷⁰ John Fea, “An Illuminati Conspiracy Theory Captured American Imaginations in the Nation’s Earliest Days—And Offers a Lesson for Now,” *Time*, September 24, 2020, <https://time.com/5892376/early-american-conspiracy-theory/>.

¹⁷¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Television in the United States: The Late Golden Age,” accessed January 10, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/art/television-in-the-United-States/The-late-Golden-Age>.

American populace. Conspiracism was no less prevalent then, but the narrow channels limited availability, accessibility, and the potential of virality.

Even though conspiracy theories abound in the United States, given the January 6, 2021, insurrection, QAnon deserves a special focus in the conversation of pre-insurgency in the United States. Regarding insurgency, the United States should know to what degree QAnon has accelerated the potential for violence via conspiracies and how dangerous the QAnon movement is to U.S. security. The 1898 Wilmington case study demonstrated how a concerted media-conspiracist campaign could fan the flames of politically motivated violence in a technologically impaired agrarian society, but what lessons from this case shed light on QAnon in the age of new media?

For this discussion, a conspiracy occurs “when a small group of powerful people combine together in secret to plan or carry out an illegal or improper action.”¹⁷² Thus, a conspiracy theory is “a way of looking at the world and historical events that sees conspiracies as the motor of history.”¹⁷³ Based on these definitions, the QAnon conspiracy is a belief in a secret network of socio-political, primarily leftist elites who conspired to undermine the presidency of Donald Trump. President Trump, in the minds of QAnon adherents, took power to interfere with globalist, pedophilic agendas. A significant portion of QAnon’s ecosystem revolves around the idea that these elites engage in child sex-trafficking.

The QAnon conspiracy deserves further examination as a possible motivator of future insurgent violence. Flags emblazoned with the letter “Q” festooned the grounds of the Capitol and the Capitol Building itself, and even a self-proclaimed QAnon shaman stood at the speaker of the House’s podium, wielding the House’s actual and metaphorical symbol of power, the gavel, and filling the screens of American televisions, phones, and laptops. New polling data indicate the extent of QAnon’s infiltration into the American psyche. According to Giovanni Russonello of the *New York Times*, approximately 14

¹⁷² Peter Knight, “Making Sense of Conspiracy Theories,” in *Conspiracy Theories in American History*, ed. Peter Knight (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 15.

¹⁷³ Knight, 16.

percent of Americans “fall into a category of QAnon believers. . . . Among Republicans only, that rises to roughly one in four . . . [or] twelve percent and seven percent of Democrats were categorized as QAnon believers.”¹⁷⁴ Belief in QAnon spans the political spectrum, providing political amplification of its message.

1. Origins of QAnon

Q entered the conspiracy ecosystem of the United States on October 28, 2017, via 4chan: “In a thread called ‘Calm Before the Storm,’ . . . an anonymous user signing off as ‘Q’ stated that ‘Hillary Clinton will be arrested between 7:45 AM–8:30 AM EST on Monday—the morning on Oct 30, 2017.’”¹⁷⁵ Q’s username was a nod to the Q-level security clearance issued by the U.S. Department of Energy.¹⁷⁶

Q’s method of communication involves “drops,” semi-coded language of purportedly classified and insider knowledge, which enabled Q’s followers to gain insight into Donald Trump’s war against a secret “cabal.”¹⁷⁷ Although Q originally began posting on 4chan, posts subsequently migrated to other broader, more “accepted” social media avenues such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. From there, the conspiracy gained traction as more followers/believers interjected their interpretations of and predictions for the next steps President Donald Trump and his allies would take in their fight against the secret cabal.

In 2020, according to research by Julia Wong with the *Guardian*, “170 QAnon groups, pages and accounts [appeared] across Facebook and Instagram with more than 4.5

¹⁷⁴ Giovanni Russonello, “QAnon Now as Popular in U.S. as Some Major Religions, Poll Suggests,” *New York Times*, May 27, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/27/us/politics/qanon-republicans-trump.html>.

¹⁷⁵ Amarnath Amarasingham and Marc-André Argentino, “The QAnon Conspiracy Theory: A Security Threat in the Making?,” *CTC Sentinel* 13, no. 7 (July 2020), 37, <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-qanon-conspiracy-theory-a-security-threat-in-the-making/>.

¹⁷⁶ Amarasingham and Argentino, 37.

¹⁷⁷ Amarasingham and Argentino, 37.

million aggregate followers.”¹⁷⁸ Some argue that the QAnon conspiracy would never have risen to this level if not for the actions of Coleman Rogers and Paul Furber—4chan moderators who approached a YouTube vlogger by the name of Tracy Diaz to “leverage her large YouTube following to promote the first ‘Q’ posts.”¹⁷⁹ Without Diaz’s assistance, QAnon might not have attained the notoriety it has in 21st century America.

This exponential rise in popularity came as a double-edged sword, as QAnon drew more attention to the role of social media companies in policing misinformation—and the degree to which Russian misinformation affected the presidential election of Donald Trump. A leaked Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) memo from 2019 listed QAnon among a host of conspiracies that might constitute a domestic terrorism threat. This memo surfaced in the wake of two notable QAnon-inspired incidents: one in which a man blocked traffic on the Hoover Dam with an armored truck and one in which a band of QAnon supporters accused city administrators of child exploitation and abuse.¹⁸⁰ The memo also details an incident in Washington, DC, at the Comet Ping Pong pizza parlor and its connection to the unfounded child sex-trafficking conspiracy of Pizzagate perpetuated by QAnon. However, the perpetrator, Edgar Welch, never mentioned Q in his reasoning for storming the pizza parlor.¹⁸¹ These incidents accelerated the deplatforming of QAnon-affiliated accounts from social media services beginning in 2020. Pinterest and Reddit had successfully deplatformed QAnon-related accounts in 2018, approximately three years

¹⁷⁸ Julia Carrie Wong, “Revealed: QAnon Facebook Groups Are Growing at a Rapid Pace around the World,” *Guardian*, August 11, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/aug/11/qanon-facebook-groups-growing-conspiracy-theory>.

¹⁷⁹ James Suber, “Examining Extremism: QAnon,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (blog), June 10, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/examining-extremism/examining-extremism-qanon>.

¹⁸⁰ Zack Budryk, “FBI Memo Warns QAnon Poses Potential Terror Threat: Report,” *Hill*, August 1, 2019, <https://thehill.com/policy/national-security/fbi/455770-fbi-memo-warns-qanon-poses-a-potential-terror-threat-report/>; Jana Winter, “Exclusive: FBI Document Warns Conspiracy Theories Are a New Domestic Terrorism Threat,” *Yahoo! News*, August 1, 2019, <https://news.yahoo.com/fbi-documents-conspiracy-theories-terrorism-160000507.html>.

¹⁸¹ Suber, “Examining Extremism.”

before the January 6 attacks.¹⁸² Meanwhile, Q migrated across messaging board services—from 4chan to 8chan in 2017 and to 8kun by 2019.¹⁸³

Although the deplatforming and attempts to eliminate QAnon-associated users were commendable efforts, this strategy unintentionally relegated conspiratorial citizens to more extreme echo chambers of the internet to such platforms as 8chan and Parler. As of this writing, Q has not been identified.

2. QAnon’s Influence on January 6 Participants

Some argue that Q played a significant role in the Capitol incident, but perhaps QAnon’s role has been overstated—an analysis of the January 6 arrestees seems to suggest so.¹⁸⁴ Although QAnon adherents attended, their motivations varied greatly—from being hard-core Trump supporters, to anti-mask activists, to replacement theory reactionaries, to members of militia groups.¹⁸⁵ According to the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, QAnon adherents were not predominantly responsible for the insurrectionary violence seen at the Capitol. For example, the consortium identified only 27 followers of QAnon out of the hundreds charged for crimes at the Capitol on January 6.¹⁸⁶ While the images of the QAnon shaman have been widely disseminated online, there is little evidence to suggest that QAnon was a proximate cause of the insurrection at the Capitol.

¹⁸² Wong, “Revealed.”

¹⁸³ Suber, “Examining Extremism.”

¹⁸⁴ Olivia Rubin, Lucien Bruggeman, and Will Steakin, “QAnon Emerges as Recurring Theme of Criminal Cases Tied to U.S. Capitol Siege,” ABC News, January 19, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/qanon-emerges-recurring-theme-criminal-cases-tied-us/story?id=75347445>.

¹⁸⁵ “QAnon Offenders in the United States,” National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, February 2021, https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_PIRUS_QAnon_Feb2021_0.pdf; Pete Williams, “Most Charged in Capitol Riot Had No Connection to Extremist Groups or One Another, Report Finds,” NBC News, March 1, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/most-charged-capitol-riot-had-no-connection-extremist-groups-or-n1259211>.

¹⁸⁶ National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, “QAnon Offenders in the United States.”

3. Q As an Insurgent Primer after January 6

As a driver of possible insurgency in the United States, Q and his or her followers may have reached their zenith on January 6, 2021. Since then, dogged prosecutions of participants at the Capitol, combined with Q's failed predictions of Donald Trump's return to office, split QAnon into two subgroups. Likewise, the alt-right's fragmentation after the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017 shows another extremist group in disarray after its highpoint. Some have attributed this division to a concerted effort by approximately 10 Virginia citizens to sue the organizers of the Unite the Right Rally, resulting in a judgment of approximately \$26 million.¹⁸⁷

Even in the face of observable evidence, conspiracy theorists may retreat deeper into their constructed reality. Indeed, some former adherents of Q rejected their socially created reality when confronted with Biden's inauguration, but such ideological collapse may have led to something more concerning. The disintegration of the movement has allowed a more extreme in-group to come to power and dominate the conspiracy discourse within the Q ecosystem. As research by David Kilcullen has shown, the violence of insurgent movements is sustained only by 2–5 percent of their members.¹⁸⁸ True believers in the Q universe are still engaging in positive honor-challenges, e.g., the crowds that gathered in Dealy Plaza in Dallas awaiting the return of John F. Kennedy Jr. and Michael Jackson.¹⁸⁹ This devotion demonstrates some of the persistent allure of Q to the now dominant in-group.

However, beyond loose coordination of the participants in the Capitol incident, data have historically shown that when QAnon believers engage in terroristic acts, they are not functioning as part of a coordinated group. In the 22 acts of terrorism that QAnon adherents have been involved in since 2018, “13 targeted private individuals, eight targeted

¹⁸⁷ Denise Lavoie, “Jury Awards \$26M in Damages for Unite the Right Violence,” AP News, November 23, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/violence-lawsuits-race-and-ethnicity-charlottesville-01d9437ec28ed71b4bae293d7e0d815d>.

¹⁸⁸ Kilcullen, “America in 2020.”

¹⁸⁹ See Anders Strindberg, Kristen Darken, and David Brannan, *A Practitioner's Way Forward: Terrorism Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Salinas, CA: Agile Press, 2014).

government entities, and one targeted a religious entity.”¹⁹⁰ QAnon before its 2021 fragmentation seemed more interested in fighting private citizens believed to be involved in child sex-trafficking than in undermining the government with violence. See Figure 7, which illustrates the targets of QAnon’s violence. QAnon adherents do not appear to be a wellspring of possible insurgent violence following January 6.

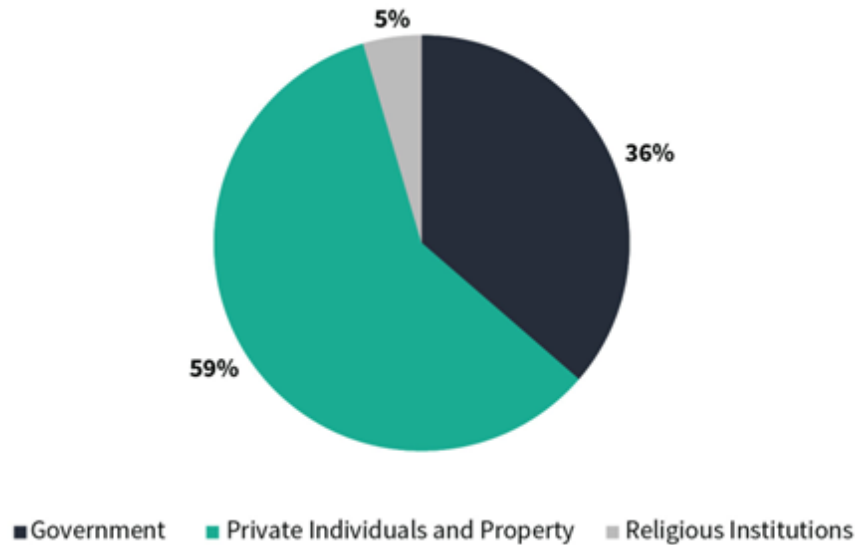


Figure 7. Targets of QAnon Violent Extremists, 2018–2021.¹⁹¹

C. INEPT OR CORRUPT SECURITY FORCES

A key component of the pre-insurgency case studies in Colombia and Northern Ireland was the illegitimacy of the police to the minority out-group. Following the Bogotazo in Colombia, Conservatives overwhelmingly made up the internal security apparatus after wholesale desertions by some, if not all, Liberal members of the police force. In Ireland, the RUC largely comprised Protestant service members. The domestic case study of Wilmington, North Carolina, was somewhat of an outlier, as the police department of the served city appeared to be “diverse” for the time; experts concur that the

¹⁹⁰ Suber, “Examining Extremism.”

¹⁹¹ Source: Suber.

city employed at least 10 black police officers before the events of January 10, 1898, so the police department enjoyed legitimacy with the majority-black city of Wilmington before the violence began. Nevertheless, white supremacist paramilitary forces beset Wilmington’s police department and forced the expulsion of its black police officers.

1. Key Concepts

Corruption is defined as the misuse of authority by a police officer, which undermines public confidence.¹⁹² Specifically, this examination of corruption sometimes focuses on African Americans’ perception of law enforcement corruption; as noted in the literature review, some scholars foresee an armed anti-police insurgency arising from the African American population.¹⁹³ However, this analysis also explores law enforcement corruption but excludes corruption pertaining to personal gain. The related concept of *perception* is thus defined as the general feelings and viewpoints of African Americans regarding U.S. law enforcement. Whether these feelings and viewpoints are factually supported is irrelevant—the perception of corruption is significant.

According to the CIA, corrupt security forces are usually a characteristic of countries advancing through the insurgency life cycle.¹⁹⁴ The primary question, then, is whether the security forces, i.e., law enforcement entities, of the United States are corrupt. Additionally, the CIA’s guide uses the term security forces to encompass not only domestic law enforcement but also friendly military forces of allied or host nations. In the discussion that follows, the term security forces refers only to local law enforcement in the United States.

Insurgency has been described by some as a battle for “legitimate” governance—i.e., the “good governance model”—and in the United States, governance begins at the

¹⁹² H. Goldstein, *Police Corruption—A Perspective on Its Nature and Control* (Washington, DC: Police Foundation, 1975), <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/police-corruption-perspective-its-nature-and-control>.

¹⁹³ Oriola, “At Risk of an Armed Anti-police Insurgency.”

¹⁹⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*.

local level.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, this exploration of law enforcement corruption begins at the local level to confirm the presence of a pre-insurgency analytical marker.¹⁹⁶ There is a prevailing current within some segments of the U.S. population that law enforcement, particularly at the local level, has a corruption problem primarily related to race.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, since the election of Joe Biden as president, there has been a greater focus on civil rights infractions at the hands of law enforcement.¹⁹⁸ Therefore, within the United States, local law enforcement corruption merits an in-depth exploration vis-à-vis a potential insurgency following high-profile murders of African American citizens—George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, for example—and the notable infiltration of the Florida Department of Corrections by Ku Klux Klan (KKK) members.¹⁹⁹ Mixed polling data show that on the one hand, support for the police is at an all-time low, but on the other, support for police is roughly at the historical average. However, controversial police shootings of African Americans have preceded this marked decline in public perception.²⁰⁰ However, some may conclude that such conflicting data are a positive indicator of public perception and trust in American policing. However, disaggregating African Americans’ feelings toward law enforcement from the general data reveals a substantial decrease in trust throughout the mid-1990s through today.²⁰¹ The continual erosion of what trust remains for police within the African American community could give rise to greater anti-police violence.

¹⁹⁵ Abigail Gage and Kyle Atwell, “Two Sides of the COIN: Good Governance vs. Compellence,” January 1, 2022, in *Irregular Warfare*, produced by Modern War Institute, podcast, MP3 audio, 44:19, <https://mwi.usma.edu/two-sides-of-the-coin-good-governance-vs-compellence/>.

¹⁹⁶ Nicolas Johnston, “Legitimacy as Political Capital in Insurgency,” *Small Wars Journal*, September 28, 2018, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/legitimacy-political-capital-insurgency>.

¹⁹⁷ Laura Santhanam, “Two-Thirds of Black Americans Don’t Trust the Police to Treat Them Equally. Most White Americans Do,” *PBS NewsHour*, June 5, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/two-thirds-of-black-americans-dont-trust-the-police-to-treat-them-equally-most-white-americans-do>.

¹⁹⁸ Matt Vasilogambros, “The Feds Are Investigating Local Police Departments Again. Here’s What to Expect,” *Pew Charitable Trusts*, May 3, 2021, <https://pew.org/3u6TFFO>.

¹⁹⁹ Jason Dearen, “Inside a KKK Murder Plot: Grab Him Up, Take Him to the River,” *AP News*, July 27, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/government-and-politics-business-race-and-ethnicity-racial-injustice-only-on-ap-2b4106de3ebcbfae85948439a7056031>.

²⁰⁰ Brenan, “Amid Pandemic, Confidence in Key U.S. Institutions Surges”; James et al., *Public Trust and Law Enforcement*.”

²⁰¹ Council of Criminal Justice, Task Force on Policing, “Policing by the Numbers.”

Although African American communities have historically been more distrustful of law enforcement than their white counterparts due to law enforcement's role in enforcing postbellum social power structures, African American trust in law enforcement has declined around 40 percent since 1994.²⁰² Notably, the divide between law enforcement and the general public's perception of high-profile police killings is stark. Only 31 percent of police officers believe that these killings reflect a broader systemic issue while 60 percent of the general public contends that these killings reflect a larger issue within American policing.²⁰³ This continual erosion of trust within the African American community and other segments of the American population could give rise to armed, politically inspired violence. Such historical lows might signal that the United States is advancing into the pre-insurgency phase of the insurgency life cycle.

2. Infiltration of Local Law Enforcement by Domestic Extremists

The FBI and Department of Homeland Security define a domestic violent extremist as follows:

an individual based and operating primarily within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power who seeks to further political or social goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may not constitute extremism, and may be constitutionally protected.²⁰⁴

In a 2006 memo, the FBI initially warned of the infiltration of white supremacist groups into the local enforcement apparatus of the United States. White supremacists pose a threat through their infiltrating or being recruited into police intelligence roles; accessing restricted areas and elected officials or protected individuals; and showing favoritism to or

²⁰² Rich Morin et al., *Behind the Badge* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2017), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2017/01/11/behind-the-badge/>.

²⁰³ Morin et al., 5, 81.

²⁰⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, 2021), 2n3.

affiliating with extremist groups.²⁰⁵ Another element raised by the FBI in this memo was the issue of “ghost skins”—members of white supremacist organizations who refrain from any overt mention or displays of white supremacy to advance their causes within law enforcement agencies. More recently, and possibly more relevant to the discussion of insurgency vis-à-vis law enforcement, the 2015 FBI *Counterterrorism Policy Guide* mentions that “domestic terrorism investigations focused on militia extremists, white supremacist extremists, and sovereign citizen extremists often have identified active links to law enforcement officers.”²⁰⁶

While extremism in the ranks of local policing is concerning, the data seem to suggest that this issue is not a driver of negative opinions of the police by African Americans. Regarding numbers of white supremacists in local law enforcement positions, no publicly available information exists, as most disclosures “[arise] through accidental discovery and scandal.”²⁰⁷ Most importantly, the perception of law enforcement has not declined substantially over the long term among the general American public, and knowledge of extremist infiltration does not seem to substantially impact African Americans’ view of American policing.

3. Controversial Police Shootings

While racial extremists within the ranks of local law enforcement do not seem to be driving negative public opinion, controversial police shootings of African Americans seem to fill that void. Data show that African Americans are over three times more likely

²⁰⁵ “Subcommittee Chairman Raskin Releases FBI Document on White Supremacists in Law Enforcement,” Official website of Representative Jamie Raskin, September 29, 2020, <https://raskin.house.gov/2020/9/subcommittee-chairman-raskin-releases-fbi-document-white-supremacists-law>; Alice Speri, “The FBI Has Quietly Investigated White Supremacist Infiltration of Law Enforcement,” Intercept, January 31, 2017, <https://theintercept.com/2017/01/31/the-fbi-has-quietly-investigated-white-supremacist-infiltration-of-law-enforcement/>.

²⁰⁶ Speri.

²⁰⁷ Minnesota Justice Research Center, *Trust in Policing: The Role of White Supremacy* (Roseville: Minnesota Justice Research Center, 2021), https://mn.gov/mdhr/assets/Trust%20in%20Policing%20The%20Role%20of%20White%20Supremacy_tcm1061-471173.pdf.

to be killed in their interactions with law enforcement than their white counterparts.²⁰⁸ Data from Harvard University further show that African Americans in metropolitan statistical areas in the Midwest and South are more likely to be killed in their interactions with police than in the Midwest and Northeast.²⁰⁹ For the first time ever, Americans, both black and white, agree that black Americans are treated differently by the police.²¹⁰ Eighty-six percent of police officers say that high-profile killings of African Americans make their job harder.²¹¹ This finding is notable as African American civil security is threatened by questionable police shootings, as are the lives of police officers—in essence posing a security dilemma between elements of the African American community and law enforcement.

4. Police Fatalities and Assaults

Although high-profile killings of African Americans justifiably receive media attention, fatal attacks and assaults on police have risen in recent years as well. FBI data may provide clues about which region of the country spawns an urban insurgency. Figures 8 and 9—deliberately excluding vehicular deaths and COVID mortality—show suspects killing police officers and regional trends in violence. Besides police officer fatalities, Figure 10 shows the rise in felonious assaults on police officers. According to reporters with the *Los Angeles Times*, “There were 60,105 U.S. officers assaulted in 2020, with about 31% reporting some kind of injuries—a 7.2% increase from 2019. And more than half that increase came from confrontations with protestors.”²¹² As political unrest mounts in response to controversial police shootings of African Americans, sustained anti-police sentiment grows. Therefore, to reduce violent assaults on police officers nationwide and

²⁰⁸ “Black People More than Three Times as Likely as White People to Be Killed during a Police Encounter,” Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, June 24, 2020, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/blacks-whites-police-deaths-disparity/>.

²⁰⁹ Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health.

²¹⁰ Morin et al., *Behind the Badge*.

²¹¹ Morin et al.

²¹² Richard Winton and Kevin Rector, “Assaults on Police in L.A., U.S. Up in 2020 amid Civil Unrest,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-10-26/assaults-on-police-up-in-2020-amid-civil-unrest>.

reduce the chance of a sustained anti-government/police movement—as experienced in Portland and Minneapolis—law enforcement agencies must be swift and transparent in their investigation of police officer criminal misconduct.

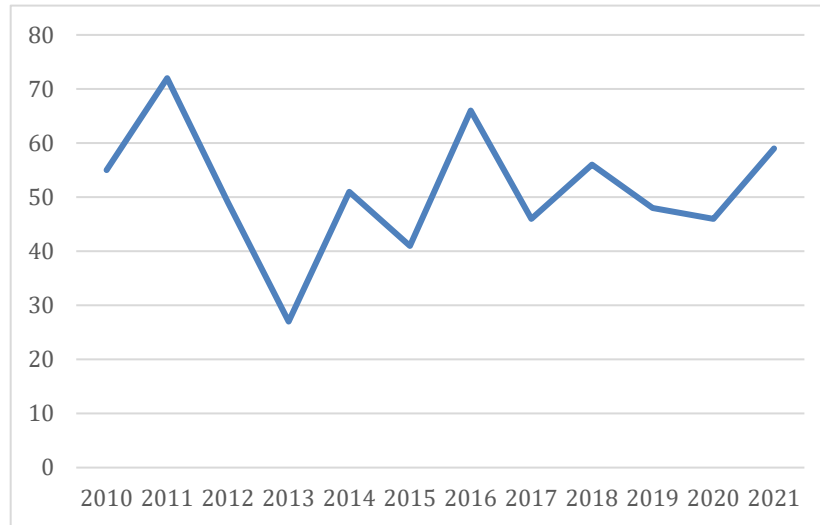


Figure 8. Felonious Deaths of Police Officers, 2010–2021.²¹³

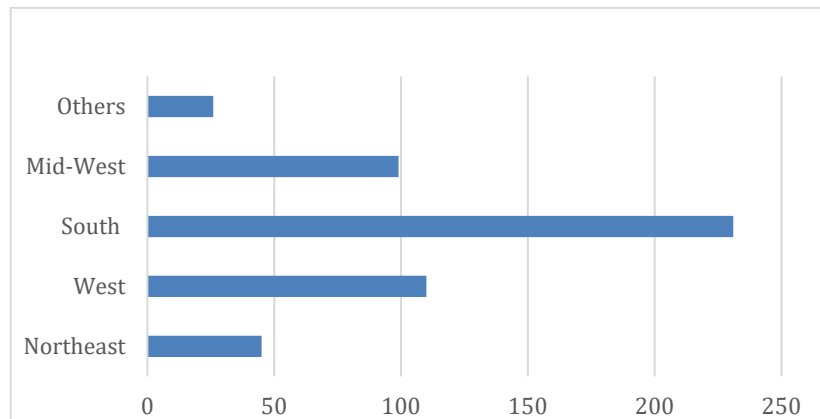


Figure 9. Felonious Deaths of Police Officers by Region, 2010–2021.²¹⁴

²¹³ Adapted from “Officers Feloniously Killed,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed February 5, 2023, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/leoka/2019/topic-pages/officers-feloniously-killed>.

²¹⁴ Adapted from Federal Bureau of Investigation.

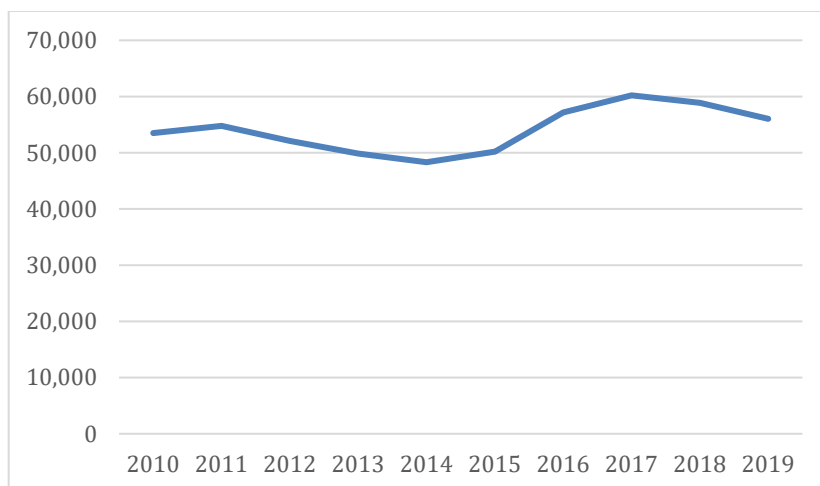


Figure 10. Felonious Assaults on Police Officers, 2010–2019.²¹⁵

5. Conclusion

After high-profile police shootings, the Ferguson effect takes hold—defined by a reluctance of police officers to make stops or initiate encounters with the general public—after the public’s reaction to the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The year after Michael Brown’s fatal encounter with police, the data reflected a drop in felonious assaults on police officers and law enforcement deaths; however, these declines were met with an overall increase in crime. Such a decrease in officer deaths and injuries may reflect law enforcement’s engaging less with the public, thereby creating a false impression that one year was less violent.

Possible insurgent violence within a predominantly African American community in the South or Midwest could follow the example of Micah Xavier Johnson. In 2016, Johnson killed five Dallas police officers and injured nine more after becoming enraged by the police shooting of Philando Castile in Minnesota. According to some reports, Johnson “visited and liked several websites dedicated to Black Lives Matter and the New Black Panthers, along with the Nation of Islam and the Black Riders Liberation Party, two groups

²¹⁵ Adapted from Federal Bureau of Investigation.

the Southern Poverty Law Center considers hate groups.”²¹⁶ While much attention is given to the influence of right-wing extremist websites, this instance highlights the danger of leftist sites as well.

Another notable example of sustained anti-police violence involved Christopher Dorner, an ex-Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officer and U.S. Navy Reserve officer who murdered four people because he felt victimized by systemic racism within the LAPD. Dorner killed police officers Michael Crain and Jeremiah MacKay while they were on patrol and Monica Quan, the daughter of the officer who represented Dorner at his LAPD termination hearing, and her boyfriend, Keith Lawrence, in retaliation for the department’s alleged racism.²¹⁷ Dorner stated, “Unfortunately, this is a necessary evil that I do not enjoy but must partake and complete for substantial change. . . . The department has not changed since . . . the Rodney King days. It has gotten worse.”²¹⁸ Interestingly enough, Dorner’s manifesto and spree forced the LAPD to examine whether there was structural inequality within the ranks. This investigation revealed that within the LAPD, there were “widespread concerns among officers and civilians that the agency discriminate [d] based on gender, ethnicity, and rank.”²¹⁹ During the manhunt for Dorner, certain segments of the American population exhibited massive support. At its height, a Facebook page titled “We Stand with Christopher Dorner” “garnered 18,336 supporters.”²²⁰ This violence seems to respond to long unaddressed grievances felt by many within the African American community in relation to perceived or real security force corruption. As echoed in Northern Ireland, a perceived or truly corrupt security force combined with

²¹⁶ Drew Griffin, David Fitzpatrick, and Curt Devine, “Was Dallas Cop Killer Micah Johnson Radicalized Online?,” CNN, July 11, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/07/10/us/micah-johnson-dallas-radicalized-online/index.html>.

²¹⁷ “Who They Were: Victims in the Dorner Case,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 2013, <https://graphics.latimes.com/towergraphic-who-they-were-dorners-alleged-victims/>.

²¹⁸ Jessica P. Ogilvie, “Christopher Dorner’s Manifesto, in Full,” LAist, February 6, 2013, <https://laist.com/news/christopher-dorners-manifesto-in-fu>.

²¹⁹ Joel Rubin and Jack Leonard, “Dorner Report Finds Concerns over Bias within LAPD,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 2014, <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-lapds-dorner-report-finds-concerns-over-bias-20141113-story.html>.

²²⁰ Michael Martinez, “Ex-LAPD Cop Gains Sympathizers on Social Media,” CNN, February 13, 2013, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/02/13/us/lapd-dorner-fans/index.html>.

transgenerational discrimination against a societal out-group fanned the flames of insurrection within the state.

D. ECONOMIC CRISIS

Americans' growing wealth gap between rich and poor and the diminishing middle class raise questions of societal unity. Wealth inequality involves two measures: wealth comprises the total assets of a particular economic subgroup, and inequality gauges the relative difference between total assets of economic subgroups. Although the United States is an extremely wealthy country with a per capita gross domestic product of \$59,500, wealth inequality has grown at an alarming rate between upper-income, middle-class, and lower-income homes since 1970.²²¹ Upper income is defined as households earning \$207,000 or more, middle income earning \$86,600 to \$206,999, and lower income earning \$28,700 to \$85,999 per year.²²² The middle class in 1970 comprised about 62 percent of the population of the United States while the upper income sat at 29 percent and the lower income at 10 percent. By 2018, the middle class had fallen to 48 percent of the population while upper-income homes soared to 48 percent of the population; however, the lower-income strata decreased by 1 percent.²²³ These stark contrasts may reveal a relatively modern lack of economic mobility, i.e., stagnation, within American society.

A key component of the incipient stage of the insurgency life cycle is an economic crisis that damages the citizenry's trust of the economic policies of the central government; the crisis can be either chronic or acute. The COVID-19 epidemic spawned multiple economic crises in the United States; however, not all economic crises are equal within a burgeoning insurgency. While general wealth inequality might be a primer, another economic indicator might be the catalyst for insurgent violence. For example, although the economic inequality of the United States is certainly a broad-spectrum condition affecting

²²¹ "United States: Economy," World Factbook, February 26, 2022, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/united-states/#economy>; Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Ruth Igielnik, and Rakesh Kochhar, *Most Americans Say There Is Too Much Economic Inequality in the U.S., but Fewer than Half Call It a Top Priority* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality/>.

²²² Horowitz, Igielnik, and Kochhar, *Most Americans Say There Is Too Much Economic Inequality*.

²²³ Horowitz, Igielnik, and Kochhar.

large demographic subgroups of the United States, issues such as unemployment inequality in the United States affect specific demographics disproportionately. In the fourth quarter of 2021, unemployment rates between black, Hispanic, and white Americans varied greatly. Within the black community, unemployment rates for those 16 and older stood at 6.7 percent, Hispanics at 4.9 percent, Asians at 3.8 percent, and whites at 3.4 percent.²²⁴

Increasing unemployment rates may reliably predict the rise of politically inspired violence. The data show that once unemployment rates hit 10 percent in the major cities of Colombia from 1962 to 1964, Marxist paramilitaries proliferated.²²⁵ Although American employment numbers seem alarming, they pale in comparison to Catholic unemployment rates in 1971 during The Troubles. The unemployment rate in Northern Ireland stood at 17.3 percent among Catholic males compared to 6.6 percent among Protestant males.²²⁶ During Spain's decades-long struggles with Basque separatists, lower unemployment rates seemed to correlate with lower levels of terroristic activity, as available recruits joined the labor market and denied valuable manpower to terrorist organizations.²²⁷ It is imperative, then, that the United States works to provide all citizens economic mobility.

Regarding insurgencies originating in foreign military occupations, Paul Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority Order 2 disbanded most of the Iraqi military and security apparatuses in 2003. By a stroke of pen, Bremer dismissed 720,000 military-age males into a country and economy in turmoil, thereby providing jihadists ample disenfranchised recruits with military training and access to military equipment to begin their years-long insurgency.²²⁸ However, given the examples of Colombia, Northern Ireland, and Spain,

²²⁴ "Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey: Unemployment Rates by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed February 26, 2022, https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee_e16.htm.

²²⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Colombia, 1930–2000," accessed February 26, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Colombia/Conservative-Liberal-struggle-1840-80#ref25340>.

²²⁶ Neil Rowland, Duncan McVicar, and Ian G. Shuttleworth, *The Evolution of Catholic–Protestant Labour Market Inequality in Northern Ireland, 1983–2014*, IZA Discussion Paper No. 11633 (Bonn, Germany: Institute for the Study of Labor, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3209730>.

²²⁷ Jake Shatzer, "Before and After Terrorism: Economic and Political Development in the Basque Country" (undergraduate thesis, Texas A&M University, 2021), 59.

²²⁸ James Pfiffner, "US Blunders in Iraq: De-Baathification and Disbanding the Iraqi Army," *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 1 (February 2010): 76–85.

unemployment levels and their relationship to possible insurgent violence require further exploration.

Although many consider the 1990s as an American decade, an economic malaise took hold, coinciding with the rise of the American militia movement. In 1992, unemployment at a national level within the United States stood at 7.3 percent in the fourth quarter emerging from the 1991 recession. Undoubtedly, events such as George H. W. Bush's allusion to a new world order in 1990 and the highly controversial events at Ruby Ridge and Waco sparked this rise.²²⁹ Fear of America's declining socio-economic standing could have pushed Americans toward the militia movement—a fear in many ways like that surrounding the COVID-19 epidemic. As economic uncertainty grew, so did the urge to understand and increase one's security; therefore, in the wake of recessions, depressions, and epidemics, paramilitaries, militias, and political violence grew more attractive.

Wealth inequality by itself might not be a contributing factor to an insurgency within a nation, but unemployment inequality may be an indicator of insurgent violence within a developed or developing country. Insurgency is in some cases a battle of governance—one can govern a highly stratified but employed populace, yet barriers to employment for a significant portion of the populace may fuel militias, paramilitaries, and insurgent vectors in nation-states. Thus, policymakers may need to develop controversial economic policies that target certain demographics, e.g., affirmative action, to keep unemployment inequality below a 10 percent threshold. The similar policy should apply to unemployed white males without a college degree.

E. HOTLY DISPUTED ELECTIONS

Within the insurgency life cycle, hotly disputed or contested elections are indicators of zero-sum political environments; in other words, one party's gain is the other's loss, and vice versa. Domestically, the electoral conditions between Republicans/Populists (Fusionists) and Democrats in North Carolina of the 1890s contributed to the insurgency life cycle and led to the only overthrow of a legally elected government in the United States.

²²⁹ "Reshaping Extremism," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2000/reshaping-extremism>.

Coincidentally, in the Wilmington case study, the Democrats feared its loss of power to a Republican/Populist ticket would bring about a zero sum.

Internationally as well, a zero-sum political environment in Colombia between Liberals and Conservatives for much of the country's history contributed to widespread low- and high-intensity political violence in the 19th and 20th centuries. For example, to curtail political violence, the Colombians instituted an "incomplete vote" in 1905 whereby the winning party would receive "two-thirds of the seats, and the remaining one-third would be allocated to the runner-up, irrespective of the specific percentages of votes."²³⁰ This attempt to specify electoral representation may have staved off violence by giving the competing party a guaranteed voice in the new government regardless of the election results.

Such political reforms by the Colombian government did not succeed entirely in appeasing Liberal competitors, so the Conservative Colombian government went even further in 1929 by instituting a proportional voting system that guaranteed even more representation to Liberal counterparts. However, some have argued that Conservatives only did this to solidify their political position lest Liberals use violence to usurp the Conservative hegemony of that era.²³¹ The Colombian government made further attempts to lessen this zero-sum powder keg within society during the National Front Era of 1958–1974.²³² During this time, Liberals and Conservatives rotated power and staffed their cabinets with members of the opposition party; however, this power-sharing agreement, while noble in its attempt to curtail violence, further drove divisions between Marxist guerillas and the Liberal Party. Even with political reforms, such as proportional voting, violence might be unavoidable.

²³⁰ Sebastián Mazzuca and James A. Robinson, "Political Conflict and Power Sharing in the Origins of Modern Colombia," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 89, no. 2 (2009): 289, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-2008-085>.

²³¹ Mazzuca and Robinson, 285–321.

²³² *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Declaration of Sitges," accessed March 7, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Declaration-of-Sitges>.

The presidential election of 1876 between Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and Democrat Samuel Tilden offers a parallel to today.²³³ Leading up to the election, when various insurgent groups, e.g., the KKK, were forming in the South, President Ulysses S. Grant engaged in arguably the first American counterinsurgency campaign via political reform, by signing the KKK Act of 1871, which added teeth to the 14th Amendment by enforcing its provisions.²³⁴ In the months after enacting the KKK law, the government sent federal military forces into 10 counties in South Carolina to subjugate the Klan.²³⁵ Likewise, the KKK Act empowered Grant to suspend habeas corpus; Grant used this power only once, in South Carolina counties.²³⁶ The 1871 KKK Act was in its third iteration; these bills empowered the government to “put federal elections under federal supervision in Southern states under military rule.”²³⁷ Federal oversight of these Southern states began during Reconstruction, was solidified under the auspices of the Civil Rights Act of 1965, and was rescinded only recently, in 2013.²³⁸ Reconstruction saw efforts by mostly white Democrats to revert to an antebellum power structure by disenfranchizing black and white Republican voters via sustained socio-political violence.²³⁹

Although Grant successfully protected former slaves with federal troops stationed in the South, Republicans—in their zeal to control the presidency—directly undermined the collective security of African Americans during the 1876 crisis by agreeing to withdraw federal troops from Southern-occupied states. The Republicans agreed to the withdrawal

²³³ Rachel Kleinfeld, “The Rise of Political Violence in the United States,” *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 4 (October 2021), <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-rise-of-political-violence-in-the-united-states/>.

²³⁴ “Ku Klux Klan Act: Further Readings,” Law Library, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://law.jrank.org/pages/8020/Ku-Klux-Klan-Act.html>.

²³⁵ Law Library.

²³⁶ Law Library.

²³⁷ “Protecting Life and Property: Passing the Ku Klux Klan Act,” National Park Service, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/protecting-life-and-property-passing-the-ku-klux-klan-act.htm>.

²³⁸ David G. Savage, “Supreme Court Kills Voting Rights Act Federal Oversight Provision,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 2013, <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-xpm-2013-jun-25-la-na-court-voting-rights-20130626-story.html>.

²³⁹ H. Leon Prather Sr., “The Red Shirt Movement in North Carolina, 1898–1900,” *Journal of Negro History* 62, no. 2 (April 1977): 174–84, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2717177>.

in exchange for Democratic support of Hayes’s presidential inauguration. The Republicans’ efforts to maintain power weakened Grant’s progress in prosecuting and disbanding insurgent groups in the American South. However, Tilden’s election might have resulted in the same outcome, as many supporters felt that Reconstruction in the South was an impediment to the Republican Party.²⁴⁰ Such political compromise with ex-Confederates directly contributed to widespread insurgent movements throughout the American South.

In 1876, three former Confederate states experienced close but uncertain presidential election outcomes: South Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida. Republicans contested the results of the 1876 presidential election between Hayes and Tilden—the Republican control of the national Electoral Commission resulted in favorable (8–7) Electoral College results for Hayes in those states.²⁴¹ Immediately, Democrats there and across the nation looked to correct this injustice through political violence, with some even calling for civil war.²⁴² Some at the time suggested that “Democratic state militias would invade Washington and send Hayes back to Ohio to rule over a Midwestern republic.”²⁴³ Threats of political violence in response to Hayes’s win enabled the rise of Democratically aligned militias that undermined the security of white Republicans and freedmen in the South.

The events that followed closely parallel those of the 2020 election. Surprisingly, former Union General George McClellan stated that any attempt by Republicans to prevent Tilden’s ascendancy to the presidency would “be met by force.”²⁴⁴ This language echoes

²⁴⁰ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Samuel J. Tilden,” accessed October 22, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-J-Tilden>.

²⁴¹ Richard Kreitner, “The Election from Our Past That Bares a Warning for 2020,” *Washington Post*, September 11, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/09/11/election-our-past-that-bares-warning-2020/>; Sheila Blackford, “Disputed Election of 1876,” University of Virginia, Miller Center, accessed March 29, 2022, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/educational-resources/disputed-election-1876>.

²⁴² Kreitner, “Election from Our Past.”

²⁴³ Richard Kreitner, *Break It Up: Secession, Division, and the Secret History of America’s Imperfect Union* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2020).

²⁴⁴ Kreitner.

that of Michael Flynn, former U.S. Army general and Trump’s national security advisor, who called the election of 2020 fraudulent. Flynn further asserted that in some cases, the military, i.e., security forces, chiefly the National Guard and U.S. Marshals, should be used to seize voting machines.²⁴⁵ Flynn even floated the idea of using the pretext of “foreign interference in the election as a justification for deploying the military.”²⁴⁶ By contrast, McClellan targeted war veterans, instead of active-duty military, exhorting them to civil rebellion.²⁴⁷ The veteran population is still actively targeted by far-right groups, such as the Proud Boys and Three Percenters, for recruitment today.²⁴⁸ In both the South during Reconstruction and the present-day United States, insurrectionary groups try to recruit veterans, in part, by appealing to their sense of brotherhood and patriotism.

Republicans and Democrats struck an eventual agreement, known as the Compromise of 1877, avoiding the specter of another civil war. However, this agreement, although halting conflict, allowed extremists in the South to legally disenfranchise and terrorize African Americans. Thus, the 1877 Compromise created the Jim Crow South: a system of laws in swaths of the American South that formed the basis of segregation.²⁴⁹ Representatives from both Hayes’s and Tilden’s camps agreed that in exchange for Democratic “support” of Hayes’s presidency, the Republicans would

- End the deployment of Federal troops in South Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida
- [Provide] economic aid in the construction of the Texas and Pacific Railroad
- Appoint a Southerner as Postmaster General
- [Commit] Federal subsidies to aid Southern rehabilitation

²⁴⁵ Alan Feuer et al., “Trump Had Role in Weighing Proposals to Seize Voting Machines,” *New York Times*, January 31, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/31/us/politics/donald-trump-election-results-fraud-voting-machines.html>.

²⁴⁶ Robert Draper, “Michael Flynn Is Still at War,” *New York Times*, February 4, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/04/magazine/michael-flynn-2020-election.html>.

²⁴⁷ Kreitner, *Break It Up*.

²⁴⁸ Corey Dickstein, “Veterans Increasingly Targets of Extremist Recruiting, Experts Tell House Panel; Republicans Blast Hearing as ‘Stigmatizing’ Vets,” *Stars and Stripes*, October 13, 2021, <https://www.stripes.com/theaters/us/2021-10-13/veterans-extremist-recruiting-political-terrorism-3231429.html>.

²⁴⁹ “Jim Crow Laws,” Georgia College and State University, accessed March 13, 2022, https://www.gcsu.edu/sites/files/page-assets/node-2213/attachments/jim_crow_educational_resource_.pdf.

- [Tacitly admit] that the South alone should resolve its racial problem.²⁵⁰

These concessions would lay the groundwork for at least two other pre-insurgency conditions in the coming centuries: inept or corrupt security forces and economic crisis.

An analysis of hotly disputed elections would be incomplete without a discussion of inflammatory rhetoric’s role in spurring conflict. President Trump’s language leading up to January 6 and his actions on that day have been likened to Indian Prime Minister Modi’s response to the 2002 Gujarat riot in India, during which religious conflict between Hindus and Muslims resulted in thousands of deaths and injuries.²⁵¹ For example, two weeks before the attack, through a tweet, President Trump stoked the fire of insurrection in his supporters: “Statistically impossible to have lost the 2020 Election. Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild.”²⁵² Then, on January 6, he declared, “We will never give up, we will never concede” when speaking to members of the crowd who later that day stormed the Capitol Building.²⁵³ Modi was criticized for stoking the flames of anti-Muslim sentiment by allowing Hindus to “vent their anger . . . [and suggesting] that the Muslim community needed to be taught a lesson following . . . [the] attack on Hindu pilgrims.”²⁵⁴ Akin to Modi’s rhetoric and that of Democrats during the 1876 election cycle, Trump’s exhortations on January 6, 2021, show the influence of a political leader’s weaponized language in a highly charged environment.

More poignant are some of Trump’s actions—or inaction—during and immediately after the attack on the Capitol. One federal judge opined that Trump’s silence during crucial

²⁵⁰ Allan Peskin, “Was There a Compromise of 1877?,” *Journal of American History* 60, no. 1 (1973): 63–75, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2936329>.

²⁵¹ “Timeline of the Riots in Modi’s Gujarat,” *New York Times*, accessed March 7, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/04/06/world/asia/modi-gujarat-riots-timeline.html>.

²⁵² Donald J. Trump, @realDonaldTrump, “Be there, will be wild!,” Twitter, December 19, 2020, 12:42 a.m., <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1340185773220515840>.

²⁵³ “Trump: ‘We Will Never Give Up, We Will Never Concede,’” January 6, 2021, BBC News, video, 1:25, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-55561627>.

²⁵⁴ Sanjoy Majumder, “Narendra Modi ‘Allowed’ Gujarat 2002 Anti-Muslim Riots,” BBC News, April 22, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-13170914>.

hours constituted tacit approval of the mob’s actions.²⁵⁵ Others, such as Kleinfeld, have suggested that Trump’s overall behavior surrounding the 2020 election has resembled a method of political dysfunction called “war by remote control,” characterized by

politicians [who] incite communal violence to affect electoral outcomes . . . Incumbent leaders who fear losing are particularly prone to using electoral violence to intimidate potential opponents, build their base, affect voting behavior and election-day vote counts, and, failing all that, to keep themselves relevant or at least out of jail.²⁵⁶

Even before his loss to Joe Biden, then-President Trump and his political allies consistently promoted a narrative that questioned the integrity of the American electoral system—like Tilden did in 1876. Even as early as 2016, Trump suggested that he would have won both the electoral and popular votes in the United States if not for millions of illegal ballots cast. As detailed by Ed Kilgore, Trump “claimed falsely in a June 2019 interview with *Meet the Press* that California admitted it had counted a ‘million’ illegal votes.”²⁵⁷ In 2018, during the mid-term elections in California, Republican leaders Paul Ryan and Kevin McCarthy alleged that voter fraud was evident because Republicans had been leading in early reporting, but then they lost due to ballots “mailed before Election Day but received afterward.”²⁵⁸

While the Wilmington insurrection involved a much more overt attack on the North Carolina voting system, indirect attacks such as the narrative questioning the integrity of the American voting system by incumbent politicians—not to mention ideological media pundits with a large audience, e.g., Tucker Carlson—are strikingly similar to the tactics in the Wilmington case, wherein a concerted effort by politicians and the media stoked insurrectionary violence in North Carolina.

²⁵⁵ Erik Larson, “Trump Jan. 6 Inaction Could Be Seen as Approval, Judge Says,” *Bloomberg*, January 10, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-10/trump-jan-6-inaction-could-be-seen-as-approval-judge-suggests>.

²⁵⁶ Kleinfeld, “The Rise of Political Violence in the United States.”

²⁵⁷ Ed Kilgore, “Trump’s Long Campaign to Steal the Presidency: A Timeline,” *Intelligencer*, February 3, 2022, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/trump-campaign-steal-presidency-timeline.html>.

²⁵⁸ Kilgore.

F. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the CIA's *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex and dynamic nature of a possible American insurgency. The key factors of past insurgencies in domestic environments—in Colombia, Northern Ireland, and post-Reconstruction North Carolina—as explored in Chapter II, provide helpful signposts for recognizing insurgency in modern America. As explored in this chapter, juxtaposing the historical cases and contemporary events in the United States with the markers of insurgency yields troubling parallels. In North Carolina, a weaponized media disinformation campaign ultimately resulted in the Wilmington insurrection, which resembled the events of January 6, 2021. In Colombia, hyperpolarization led to a zero-sum political environment that left little room for moderates—again not unlike the current political environment in the United States, where the predominant political parties routinely dehumanize their rivals.²⁵⁹ In Northern Ireland, the underrepresentation of a societal out-group within the security apparatus of the state spurred political unrest and a staggering death toll. Likewise, a culture of fear has overtaken the American people, as evidenced by the 20 million Americans who now carry firearms in public—a fact made even more alarming by the mere 2 percent of group membership needed to ignite and sustain an insurgent movement.²⁶⁰ The next chapter offers a way forward in addressing the troubling symptoms of American insurgency.

²⁵⁹ Fred Kaplan, “Is America in the Early Stages of Armed Insurgency?,” *Slate*, September 8, 2020, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2020/09/america-insurgency-chaos-trump-violence.html>.

²⁶⁰ Chris Dorsey, “Gun Sales Skyrocket amid Pandemic and Unrest Fears,” *Forbes*, June 24, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/chrisdorsey/2020/06/24/gun-sales-skyrocket-amid-pandemic-and-unrest-fears/?sh=2d30d8c62421>; Kilcullen, “America in 2020.”

IV. TELL ME HOW THIS ENDS

My research question asked to what degree the United States is in a pre-insurgency phase; however, through my research, I have found that answering this question quantitatively is unrealistic—and maybe impossible. However, through examining the CIA’s *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* and case studies of sustained violence in Northern Ireland, Colombia, and Wilmington, North Carolina, this thesis finds there are alarming indicators of sustained politically motivated violence on the horizon within American society.

A. FINDINGS

In American society, unaddressed issues surrounding controversial police killings of African Americans—George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, to name just two—can result and have resulted in large-scale insurrectionary violence, as seen in Minneapolis and Portland. Proposed political reforms, such as the George Floyd Reform in Policing Act, have stalled out in Congress. The federal government’s inaction has been met with emboldened leftist militias and extremist groups, e.g., NFAC and Antifa. These lingering grievances are not unlike the situation in Northern Ireland, where the British Unionist government for many years ignored, discriminated against, and engaged in physical violence against mostly Catholic Nationalists. With each controversial shooting in the United States, America draws closer to sustained political violence, as seen in Portland and Minneapolis or with ex-LAPD Officer Christopher Dorner in his 2013 rampage. However, encouragingly, political reforms can alleviate politically motivated violence. In Northern Ireland, once Nationalists’ political concerns were allayed by inclusion into the political process, large-scale violence subsided.

Regarding a conspiratorial culture in America, the research shows that United States has historically been a fertile ground for prominent conspiracy theories that have resulted in violence, e.g., the Salem Witch Trials and North Carolina of the post-Reconstruction era. While this thesis specifically explored the phenomenon of QAnon and

its possible role in January 6—and surmised that Q was not a primary driver of the insurrectionary violence—conspiratorial violence is not unheard of in American society.

The American political system is extremely polarized, according to data cited earlier in this thesis. In fact, polarization is at a level not seen since Reconstruction. Colombia’s experience showed that political polarization could be a prime driver of insurgent violence. The two-party system in the United States has created an environment whereby a party’s political hegemony—or control of the Senate and House—results in bending long-established rules and legislative norms to its benefit alone. Even Opsina in Colombia recognized that a zero-sum political environment was a motivator of political violence, so he pushed legislation that guaranteed the “losing” party would retain a certain number of seats in the Colombian government.

The American political framework as of this writing creates a zero-sum political environment in the United States that further disaggregates the American people into two warring factions—Republicans and Democrats. For example, in 2013, Harry Reid invoked the “nuclear option” that eliminated the 60-vote threshold for judicial appointees and adopted a majority-only process—e.g., only 51 votes were needed in the Senate to push through Obama’s appointees.²⁶¹ This toxic gamesmanship was later echoed in Mitch McConnell’s Supreme Court nomination processes for Merrick Garland and Amy Coney Barrett—the former, an unsuccessful Supreme Court nomination for Obama, and the latter, a successful Supreme Court nomination for Trump, both of whom were brought forward during contentious election cycles.²⁶²

Regarding an economic crisis, the level of unemployment or extent of economic stagnation in society correlates with the level of politically motivated violence, as demonstrated with Basque separatists in Spain, Nationalists in Northern Ireland, Marxist paramilitaries in Colombia, and predominantly white Democratic farmers during Southern

²⁶¹ Burgess Everett and Seung Min Kim, “Senate Goes for ‘Nuclear Option,’” *POLITICO*, November 21, 2013, <https://www.politico.com/story/2013/11/harry-reid-nuclear-option-100199>.

²⁶² Russell Wheeler, “McConnell’s Fabricated History to Justify a 2020 Supreme Court Vote,” *Brookings FixGov* (blog), September 24, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/log/fixgov/2020/09/24/mcconnells-fabricated-history-to-justify-a-2020-supreme-court-vote/>.

Reconstruction.²⁶³ These cases were not unlike the United States of the early 1990s, which experienced a 7.3 percent unemployment rate and a corresponding growth in militia activity, which resulted in the Oklahoma City bombing.²⁶⁴

The economic effects of COVID-19 did not affect everyone equally in the United States. Notably, the rise of political violence in America from 2019 to 2022 coincided with spikes in unemployment. This economic uncertainty combined with controversial police killings created a further security dilemma for American society. For example, in 2020, the unemployment rate for African Americans hit 16.8 percent, and the nation as a whole saw unemployment as high as 14.7 percent.²⁶⁵ These figures coincided with a level of gun murders not seen in 20 years, as 19,000 people were killed in gun murders in 2020, alongside a record number of gun sales.²⁶⁶

Furthermore, hotly disputed elections in the United States are at an intensity not seen since the election of 1876.²⁶⁷ Out of that election and the subsequent Great Compromise came the genesis of insurrection in Wilmington; the withdrawal of federal military forces created a power vacuum in the state that was filled with white supremacist insurgent gangs, e.g., the Red Shirts.²⁶⁸ President Trump’s weaponized rhetoric leading up to, during, and after the 2020 presidential election culminated in the insurrectionary violence seen at the Capitol Building. Trump frequently referenced baseless claims of a stolen election and Vice President Mike Pence’s power to reject the election results, not to

²⁶³ Shatzer, “Before and After Terrorism”; Rowland, McVicar, and Shuttleworth, *Catholic–Protestant Labour Market Inequality*; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Colombia.”

²⁶⁴ Nardone et al., “1992: Job Market in the Doldrums.”

²⁶⁵ “Unemployment Rate Rises to Record High 14.7 Percent in April 2020,” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 13, 2020, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2020/unemployment-rate-rises-to-record-high-14-point-7-percent-in-april-2020.htm>.

²⁶⁶ John Gramlich, “What the Data Says about Gun Deaths in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, February 3, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/02/03/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>; “U.S. Firearms Sales December 2020: Sales Increases Slowing Down, Year’s Total Sales Clock in at 23 Million Units,” Small Arms Analytics, January 5, 2021, <http://smallarmsanalytics.com/v1/pr/2021-01-05.pdf>.

²⁶⁷ Kreitner, “Election from Our Past.”

²⁶⁸ *South Carolina Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Red Shirts,” accessed March 12, 2022, <https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/red-shirts/>.

mention his implication that the Constitution or its rules should be terminated in the aftermath.²⁶⁹

Regarding basic services, this thesis identified two additional insurgency markers that arguably contribute to sustained domestic unrest—interconnectedness, or its absence, of civil infrastructure including roads, bridges, and public works facilities into most of the country and the presence of a security dilemma. In Colombia and the American South during Reconstruction, in the country’s interiors, insurgents could organize and mobilize without fear of government incursion into their areas of operations. In Colombia, leftist insurgents could flee into the rural countryside while, in the American South, white supremacist insurgents routinely engaged in anti-government violence, even before withdrawal of the U.S. military through the Great Compromise, by escaping into the vast rural lawless areas.²⁷⁰ However, the United States of the 21st century is a structurally connected nation, and few places could hide insurgents to congregate, train, and supply themselves without the government’s knowledge.

This research also acknowledged a security dilemma in the United States—whereby the perceived insecurity and fear of one group contributes to its arming and organizing into separatist groups or militias. For example, the rise of the Proud Boys in 2016 and the Charlottesville, Virginia, incident contributed to the formation of extremist movements on the left such as Antifa.²⁷¹ In response, their opponents do the same, and this fear and insecurity create an escalating cycle with the potential to erupt into violent conflict. Regarding a security dilemma on the other side, after Democratic electoral gains or the entry of a polarizing candidate, e.g., Hillary Clinton, into a political race, the right responds in fear as well, as evidenced by 2016 having “the greatest number of guns sold in

²⁶⁹ Kristen Holmes, “Trump Calls for the Termination of the Constitution in Truth Social Post,” CNN, December 4, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/03/politics/trump-constitution-truth-social/index.html>; Naylor, “What Pence and Congress Can and Can’t Do; Wise, “Trump Continues to Lie.”

²⁷⁰ Daniel Byman, “White Supremacy, Terrorism, and the Failure of Reconstruction in the United States,” *International Security* 46, no. 1 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00410.

²⁷¹ “Who Are Antifa?,” Anti-Defamation League, accessed November 25, 2022, <https://www.adl.org/antifa>.

any year in America’s history.”²⁷² Additional research has shown that these “new gun owners were driven predominantly by fears of lawlessness and government instability.”²⁷³ Such a response on the right may have contributed to the rise of leftist armed militias, such as NFAC, whose members have carried firearms in demonstrations across the nation.²⁷⁴ Similarly, a security dilemma in Colombia was made manifest in the pre-insurgency stage, when one party’s strengthening power resulted in the other’s move to secure itself, e.g., through forming militias.

B. RECOMMENDATION

As a solution to the pre-insurgency markers in American society, this thesis recommends that a national mandatory year of service, divided into three career tracks, be established for the nation’s youth. This year of service has the potential to reduce the probability of sustained political violence and unrest in the United States by reinvigorating a common American identity. This year of service would be modeled after Israel’s mandatory service obligation.²⁷⁵ Dedicated career tracks would include critical infrastructure; cyber; and emergency services, such as police, fire, emergency medical services, and emergency management. Notably, some agencies, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency, have volunteer programs already in place, e.g., FEMA Corps, that could serve as a framework for mandatory service.²⁷⁶ While addressing homeland and national security needs via this year of service program, programs such as FEMA Corps and AmeriCorps have created tangible economic benefits for participants.²⁷⁷

²⁷² Walter, *How Civil Wars Start*, 189.

²⁷³ Walter, 189.

²⁷⁴ Nicole Chavez, Ryan Young, and Angela Barajas, “An All-Black Group Is Arming Itself and Demanding Change. They Are the NFAC,” CNN, October 25, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/25/us/nfac-black-armed-group/index.html>.

²⁷⁵ “Our Soldiers,” Israeli Defense Forces, accessed December 18, 2022, <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/our-soldiers/>.

²⁷⁶ “FEMA Corps, Peace Corps and AmeriCorps VISTA,” Federal Emergency Management Agency, accessed December 18, 2022, <https://www.fema.gov/careers/position-types/peace-corps-ameri-corps>.

²⁷⁷ “AmeriCorps and Senior Corps: Quantifying the Impact,” Voices for National Service, July 15, 2020, <https://voicesforservice.org/research-and-reports/national-service-produces-171-return-on-investment/>.

As demonstrated in the case studies, economic instability and immobility contribute to sustained political unrest.

This proposed mandatory service obligation has the potential to address the common themes of some domestic insurgencies, such as the lack of a national identity, economic immobility, political hyperpolarization, and the distrust of security forces. While the scope of this solution is limited, there is legal, historical precedent in the United States for mandatory national service at the federal level, i.e., the Selective Service. Such a program has the potential to reestablish a common identity and goal; create career tracks for individuals to realize economic mobility; and fuel generations of diverse, well-trained candidates who reflect a changing American demographic and instill trust among historically disenfranchised communities.

Nevertheless, in other insurgencies, political reforms have not always meant an end to insurgent activity once the open violence begins. Thus, some have observed that in Malaya, Dhofar, and El Salvador, for example, “calculated brute force against civilians has been critical to counterinsurgency success.”²⁷⁸ However, while these examples are concerning, as the United States is not in an open stage of insurgency, political reforms such as a national year of service may still prove beneficial in counteracting the rise of violent extremism and separatism.

The markers are clear: the United States, while not experiencing an open insurgency, is currently in a pre-insurgency phase. Action is needed to halt the progression of the insurgency life cycle in the United States. Israel and, more specifically, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) may provide a model for America to emulate.

C. A NEW MELTING POT

An obvious similarity among Colombia, Northern Ireland, and North Carolina was the lack of a common national identity. In pre-insurgency Colombia, one was not a Colombian but a Liberal or Conservative; in Northern Ireland one was either a Unionist or

²⁷⁸ Hazelton, “Why Good Governance Does Not Defeat Insurgencies.”

a Nationalist.²⁷⁹ During Southern Reconstruction, racial identity provoked many years of violence by white supremacists. Some now argue that the United States is in the same identity predicament.²⁸⁰ Large segments of America say that the United States is at risk of losing its national identity.²⁸¹ A comparative approach between the United States and Israel, a nation with mandatory national service, may offer a path forward in easing societal ills—racism and classism—the hallmarks of America’s identity crisis.

Regarding Israel, some have described the mandatory military national service as being an “agent of socialization” in Israeli society, as some recruits encounter their first exposure to foreign cultures.²⁸² The IDF since its inception has been a strong contributor to a unified Israeli identity. Because the modern state of Israel was not formed until 1948, all of its citizens and subsequent soldiers have been from different areas of the globe with differing cultural values, ideals, and norms.²⁸³ While one commonality among Israelis has been their Jewish faith, Israeli leadership understood more work was needed to create a common national identity. The IDF filled this void through Hebrew language instruction for new immigrants and a mandatory year of service that cuts across all ethnic and cultural lines in the state of Israel. Additionally, the IDF, alongside entities such as Friends of the IDF, sponsors a variety of cultural and educational programs aimed at Israeli students to prepare them not only for military service but also for high-paying, in-demand civilian jobs

²⁷⁹ The English arguably attempted to create a common identity by outlawing the Irish language and culture with the Statute of Kilkenny in 1367. See G. J. Hand, “The Forgotten Statutes of Kilkenny: A Brief Survey,” *Irish Jurist* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1966): 299–312, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44025969>.

²⁸⁰ Isaac Chotiner, “The Collapse of American Identity,” *New Yorker*, June 29, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/the-collapse-of-american-identity>.

²⁸¹ “New Survey Reveals Americans Believe Country Has ‘Lost Its Identity,’” *Voice of America News*, April 6, 2016, <https://www.voanews.com/a/mht-quinnipiac-survey-reveals-americans-believe-country-has-lost-identity/3273301.html>; Katherine Schaeffer, “On July Fourth, How Americans See Their Country and Their Democracy,” *Pew Research Center*, June 30, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/06/30/how-americans-see-their-country-and-their-democracy/>.

²⁸² Ori Swed and John Butler, “Military Capital in the Israeli Hi-Tech Industry,” *Armed Forces & Society* 41, no. 1 (2013): 125, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X13499562>.

²⁸³ “The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel,” *Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, accessed December 3, 2022, <https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/General/declaration-of-establishment-state-of-israel>.

in the cyber sector.²⁸⁴ Israel in contrast to other Western nations with service requirements, e.g., Switzerland, represents vast languages, cultures, and customs, which the IDF must leverage to create and enforce a common Israeli identity. Relatedly, within the next two decades, the United States will experience a shift in demographic diversity, as data suggest that white citizens will be in the minority.²⁸⁵

By adopting this year of service, coupled with offering essential services career tracks, the United States can begin to solve its identity problem. In doing so, the nation can mitigate the pre-insurgency markers in American society. Economic stagnation is addressed when the service commitment comes with an in-demand skillset and a secure job. A recent study found that for every dollar spent on federal service programs, e.g., AmeriCorps, approximately \$17.00 is returned to “society [and] program members.”²⁸⁶ Real or perceived law enforcement corruption will be alleviated when diverse civil servants enter the American emergency service work force. Exposure to different races and political ideologies, for example, will lower the likelihood of sustained socio-political conflict in the United States by requiring citizens to work together for a common purpose, as illustrated by the IDF.

Oversight of this new melting pot might rest on the U.S. military due to the historical trust it has garnered among Americans. Notably, the United States already has a program in place to track and provide manpower to the armed forces during a national emergency: the Selective Service System. However, public trust in the military has declined in recent years due to politization, according to a survey by the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute conducted in 2022.²⁸⁷ For example, in 2018, 70 percent of Americans held the military in high regard; as of this writing, the number has

²⁸⁴ “IDF Program to Integrate Women into Cyber Units Raises \$1 Million,” *Jerusalem Post*, February 19, 2022, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-696886>.

²⁸⁵ Justin Gest, “What Happens When White People Become a Minority in America?,” *Foreign Policy*, March 22, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/22/us-white-majority-minority-nation-demographic-change/>.

²⁸⁶ Voices for National Service, “AmeriCorps and Senior Corps.”

²⁸⁷ Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, “Reagan National Defense Survey Conducted November 2022” (Washington, DC: Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, 2022), <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/media/359970/2022-survey-summary.pdf>.

dropped to 45 percent.²⁸⁸ Due to the historical precedent of national military service and a registration system already in place, the U.S. armed forces is a natural incubator for a national service program. Ultimately, the decision to implement a mandatory year of national service would be a complex decision involving a multitude of stakeholders—but a viable option for the United States to solve its identity problem.

²⁸⁸ Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute.

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