

# NETWORK-ENABLED ANARCHY:

How Militant Anarcho-Socialist Networks Use Social Media to Instigate Widespread Violence Against Political Opponents and Law Enforcement

**Joel Finkelstein**, *Corresponding Author*

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

**Alex Goldenberg**, *Author*

The Network Contagion Research Institute  
alex@ncri.io

**Sean Stevens**, *Author*

New York University

**Pamela Paresky**, *Author*

University of Chicago

**Lee Jussim**, *Author*

Chair, Distinguished Professor, Department of Psychology  
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

**John Farmer**, *Author*

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

**John K. Donohue**, *Author*

NYPD Chief of Strategic Initiatives (Ret.)

PRESENTED BY  
**RUTGERS**

Miller Center for Community  
Protection and Resilience

POWERED BY



## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Three tactics characteristic of extremist online communities have allowed them to become influential in recent years: 1) they use memes as propaganda [1], 2) they employ sophisticated communication networks for both planning and recruiting, making use of both fringe and private, online forums [2], and 3) they organize militias, and inspire lone wolf actors for violent action [3, 4].

On social media, memes—images, videos, and/or slogans—permit extremists to plant hateful [5], antisemitic [6] and/or revolutionary [7] ideas in the public eye. Often, they are disguised with humor or through using coded language, and originate in online forums [5, 6]. The somewhat private nature of these forums allows extremist groups to use them to shield themselves from view while sharing extremist ideas and coordinating action. [8]. Finally, many extremist movements, from radical Jihadi to libertarian-anarchists, now use social media memes and other propaganda to recruit for militias with apocalyptic and revolutionary ideology (such as global Jihad or apocalyptic confrontations with police) [3, 9]. Organized violent networks that support these ideas generate both lone-wolf [10] and cell-like [11] attacks against law enforcement and the general public.

During opportune moments of vulnerability, these groups take advantage of social unrest over major events such as the Covid lockdowns and George Floyd's killing. The target of much of the recent outrage in these events has been the most visible institutional manifestation of state authority and raw power: the police [4].

Extremists use opaque memes and coded language at a massive scale. They often communicate simultaneously across several web platforms as well as in the offline world. Our previous, big data approach in unveiling online emerging threats was rapid and proved effective. It helped to overcome the shortcomings of manual investigation<sup>1</sup> and qualitative characterization which, by themselves, cannot meet the challenge of analyzing such an enormous and multi-component system. Our research was the first to provide an in-depth characterization of the emerging threats against police by the extreme libertarian-anarchist movement, the Boogaloo; our assessment proved accurate, with terror attacks against law enforcement appearing only months after the report, including fatalities.

To date, though there have been anecdotal claims of similarly organized, violent anti-fascist and anarcho-socialist extremism, those claims have not been clearly supported by evidence. We thus deployed the same mixed computational/open source investigation approaches that we used to uncover threats of libertarian anarchist violence in order to determine whether we could detect potential threats of anarcho-socialist extremism.

Our primary research question was whether memes and codewords, private or fringe online forums, and hybrid real-world/online militia—the three characteristic tactics that support outbreaks of extremist violence for both Jihadi and Boogaloo extremism—are also prevalent in anti-fascist and anarcho-socialist groups.

We articulate three specific aims to address this research question:

- Do anarcho-socialist memes and codewords, like those of Jihadi, Libertatrian-anarchist, and white supremacist extremists groups, appear during episodes of political violence?
- Are anarcho-socialists extremists employing fringe and private online forums to communicate and recruit followers in the same ways in which Jihadi groups and libertarian anarchists do?
- Are there anarcho-socialist online/real-world hybrid militias and weapons enthusiast groups that mirror libertarian-anarchist extremist groups such as the Boogaloo which constitute a potential threat to the public and to law enforcement?

---

<sup>1</sup> Manual investigation involves individual researchers looking at links and investigating users one click at a time.

To analyze the use and prevalence of memes and other coded language and activity, we performed analyses on over ten million social media comments ranging from mainstream platforms (such as Twitter) to fringe online forums on Reddit. Throughout the research, we examined whether the same extremist themes and actions that are characteristic of both Jihadi and Boogaloo extremists—themes such as violent revolution, martyrdom, and having a utopian narrative, and actions such as terror attacks—are also found in extremist groups espousing anti-fascism and anarcho-socialism.

**TOPLINE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

SUMMARY TABLE			
Characteristic	ISIS	Boogaloo	Anarcho-Socialist extremists
Apocalyptic beliefs	✓	✓	✓
Utopian legends/narratives	✓	✓	✓
Use of private or fringe internet forums	✓	✓	✓
Organized militia	✓	✓	✓
Use of creative memes and online propaganda	✓	✓	✓
Martyr narratives	✓	✓	✓
Cell-like terror attacks	✓	✓	?
Lone wolf terror attacks	✓	✓	✓
Highly strategic recruitment/operational security measures	✓	✓	✓

- Though these findings are preliminary and should serve as a basis for future research, we can draw several conclusions from what we discovered:
- An online structure supporting anarcho-socialist extremism appears to be rapidly growing.
- Many of the features of anarcho-socialist extremism seem to parallel the key tactical structures documented in libertarian-anarchist and Jihadi extremism: Use of memes, cloistering in fringe and private online forums and organizing militias.
- The appearance of posts with anti-police outrage and/or memes and coded language increased over 1,000% on Twitter and 300% on Reddit in recent months during social justice protests.
- Extreme anarcho-socialist fringe online forums on Reddit use memes calling for the death of police and memes for stockpiling munitions to promote violent revolution.
- Extreme anarcho-socialist fringe online forums on Reddit underwent growth in membership and participation during the quarantine and recent social justice protests.
- Anarcho-Socialist militias which explicitly glorify Martyr narratives, classic authoritarian narratives, and revolutionary narratives are now formally organizing—and are growing.
  - » Groups such as the Socialist Rifle Association have more than doubled in membership since quarantine.
- We find evidence that both militia and anarchist networks play key roles in the recent social justice protests from controlling perimeters at CHAZ [CHOP] to coordinating nation-wide anarchist-inspired violent protests online.
- We find evidence that regional feeds for highly interconnected anarcho-socialist militias and violent anarchist networks are proliferating rapidly across Twitter, Reddit and Facebook (Appendix table 1).

- We find evidence of innovative cyber strategies being used on Twitter by anarchist networks and shared by socialist forums on Reddit: for example, links for 3-D printed weapons, instructions for using laser technology to blind targets, and real-time online coordination of offline rioting and anti-police violence such as setting fires, throwing projectiles, and using fireworks/munitions.
- We find evidence that violent anarcho-socialist networks played an active online role in preparing for and coordinating real world riots nation-wide and in real time.

### **SECTION 1: ANARCHO-SOCIALIST ASSOCIATED, POLITICALLY CHARGED MEMES AND CODEWORDS THAT DEHUMANIZE<sup>2</sup> TARGETS (POLICE, IN PARTICULAR) PROLIFERATED IN TANDEM WITH THE RECENT PROTEST EVENTS.**

Given the recent occurrence of mass demonstrations and the notable violent conflicts with police [12, 13, 14] which arose concurrently with peaceful protests, we first examined whether the use of anarcho-socialist associated internet memes appeared, as they did for other extremist leanings [6], during these protest events.

One of the features of online behavior we observed in our previous research is that politically charged memes, slogans, and codewords tend to fluctuate in response to terrorist attacks and also in response to violent protests. Given that both domestic terrorism and violent protests occurred during the recent protests, this led us to wonder whether extremist, anarcho-socialist memes and coded language may also appear in response to such events.

We began by identifying specific memes and codewords that have historically appeared in more radical and revolutionary elements of the political left. The popular ACAB meme, code for “all cops are bastards,” was historically popularized largely in the violent British anarchist culture in the 1960s [15], has achieved some notoriety in press, and is listed in the hate symbol database by the Anti-Defamation League [16] and thus appeared to be a strong starting point for understanding anarchist-related and anti-police memes. To identify related slogans, memes, and codewords, we analyzed other hashtags associated with ACAB on Twitter (figure 1).

Along with political but non-violent BLM-related slogans<sup>3</sup> and calls to defund police, hateful codewords and memes, such as Fuck12 (fuck or the cops) or FTP (fuck or fight the police), appeared as associated<sup>4</sup> hashtags with the ACAB meme on Twitter as confrontations with police escalated.

Using these discovered terms and other related slogans<sup>5</sup>, we next examined the magnitude and dynamics of the use of codewords and memes associated with ACAB on social media. We ran an analysis on the timeline of the overall use of codewords such as ACAB, 1312 (the numerical code for the same), FTP, fuck12, and outright slurs like fuckthepolice and pigs. Use of comments with these terms reached increases of nearly 300% on Reddit (supplementary figure 1) and >1000% on Twitter, even excluding retweets (figure 1) as the protest movement grew.

2 For the purposes of this document, the definition of dehumanization we are using is the process of describing a person or group that deprives them of “positive human qualities” (*Lexico/Oxford*) or the portrayal of a person “in a way that obscures or demeans that person’s humanity” (*Merriam-Webster*).

3 Note that BLM hashtags were the overall most trending hashtags on Twitter during this time. ACAB was not among the top associated hashtags for the BLM hashtag itself.

4 The “associated hashtags” function works by aggregating all tweets created by using various filters (in this case, the presence of the term ACAB in the tweet) and then counts each hashtag associated with the result, and sets and ranks the hashtags by the number of occurrences in descending order.

5 Codes and slogans were selected both via the previous analysis as associated in figure 1 (top right) and via discovery of other codes during research. We created a topic network on ACAB (see Appendix figure 8) specifically for discovering these terms. In addition, we found ACAB-related memes—like 1312—several times in images of real-world graffiti.

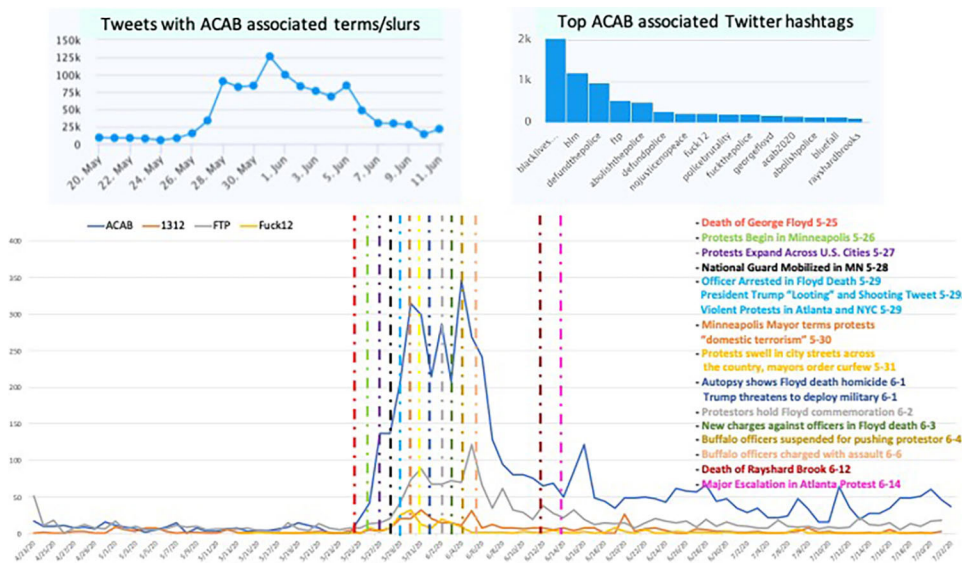


Fig 1. Top Right: ACAB's most closely associated hashtags on Twitter over a 10 day period ending in 6/21/20 reveal a variety of both political and dehumanizing codewords/memes as the most prominently associated hashtags. Top Left: Anti-police codewords on Twitter (retweets excluded) over a 20 day period ending in 6/11/20 show the growth of dehumanizing codewords/memes in tweets such as ACAB, Fuck12, FTP, 1312, fuckthepolice, and pigs over the course of recent protests. Bottom: a plot of the frequency of anti-police memes/codewords in comments on "verified" Twitter feeds and a timelines (colored vertical lines) along with major events (as listed by the New York Times in footnote #5) around the George Floyd protests shows memes/codewords escalating and fluctuating over the course events during the protests and returning closer, though not completely, to baseline afterwards.

Examining Twitter’s verified feed, we found that before the death of George Floyd, anti-police terms were not widely used on Twitter. By eye, the graph in figure 1 depicts a substantial change which occurs in the use of the term ACAB on the day the video of George Floyd’s death was circulated on social media. Though this is not a causal analysis, the use of these terms appeared to fluctuate during the course of major events<sup>6</sup> during the protests and escalated during the swelling riots in Minneapolis.

We found an escalation of the use of several kinds of anti-police memes and codewords over the course of the protests. Use of these codes then decreased as protest activities diminished. Notably, however, rather than a return to baseline (defined as the period before Floyd’s death), across Twitter and Reddit, the chart depicts a sustained increase (over 300%) in the use of ACAB (2 tailed TTEST  $p < .01$ <sup>7</sup>) in the month following the protests (Reddit Data in Appendix figure 1)

While these data are only preliminary, they nevertheless suggest that traditionally anarchist, anti-police memes, slogans and codewords fluctuated in sync with the recent political protests and unrest.

6 We selected headline events listed directly by the New York Times in their formal timeline on June 10th though we included Rayshard Brooks’s death and subsequent riots since they occurred after the piece.  
 7 We compare a range of the 30 days previous to 5/25/20 (Death of Floyd) and 30 days after the end of the Atlanta riots starting 6/20/20.



**ACAB-LINKED MEMES APPEAR WITH CLEAR CALLS FOR VIOLENCE VIRTUALLY AND ARE USED TO SYMBOLICALLY OUST STATE AUTHORITY AND MARK TERRITORY IN THE REAL WORLD**

We next sought to explore qualitatively whether dehumanizing propaganda accompanies ACAB-like memes on social media and whether these memes appear in the real world. ACAB and its family of related memes appear on social media with clear images of violent incitement, but these anti-police memes/codewords also appeared in the real world at sites of major demonstrations across the country [15]. Protesters tagged ACAB and similar memes on government buildings, courthouses and fallen statues. While most memorials commemorated the Confederacy, in Portland, a statue of George Washington [17] was forcibly taken down by protesters as “ACAB”, “Fuck cops” and “F12”, were displayed across the statue in spray paint. The same fate met the statue of Ulysses S. Grant [18], in San Francisco.



Fig 2. Top Left: Portland, OR. Fallen statues of George Washington appeared with tagged incitement memes, F12 and ACAB, amid other slogans. Top Right: New York, NY. Buildings were tagged with memes/codewords by protesters. Bottom Left: High quality meme-images of ACAB appear on Instagram and Pinterest and depict explicitly violent incitement against law enforcement along with other codewords/memes such as 1312 (a numerical code for ACAB). Bottom Right: ACAB memes possess distinct variants and meanings for incitement on social media.



Fig 3. 1312 an ACAB meme displays mark the territorial boundaries of CHAZ, the former autonomous zone in Seattle. (Note the Marxist terminology: “People’s Republic.”)

To certain protesters then, ACAB-associated memes are meant to protest against unjust authority, government, and police. The targets are symbolic. The police represent the present authority of the government to enforce laws, while public buildings such as courthouses are instrumental in the capacity to fashion and uphold authority. Statues and monuments serve to memorialize that authority. In Seattle, for instance, CHAZ (the “Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone,” also known as CHOP “Capitol Hill Occupation Protest”) was constructed to oust the police so protesters could implement autonomous self-rule. Here, protesters literally marked their territory with spray painted ACAB, 1312, and FTP memes (figure 3).

The consequence of ousting police in Seattle would later cast a shadow on several fatalities that occurred in their absence. On June 20<sup>th</sup>, in CHAZ, CNN reported in an interview with local police that “a violent crowd prevented officers safe access to the victims,” after a shooting occurred that would leave one victim dead and another critically injured in the occupied zone [19], while incidents of criminal lawlessness and additional fatality would soon emerge [20].

## **SECTION 2: AN ILLUSTRATION OF ANTI-POLICE SENTIMENT AND VIOLENT, REVOLUTIONARY CONTENT IN SEVERAL LARGE, EXTREMIST ANARCHO-SOCIALIST, FRINGE ONLINE FORUMS.**

Given our previous analysis suggesting the importance of subcultural forums for incubating seditious political ideas, conspiracy, and hate, we next sought to examine whether similar networks of subcultural forums might underlie revolutionary sentiment and dehumanization in anarcho-socialist spaces.

Using ACAB again as an initial lens, we began by identifying the subreddits (subcommunities on Reddit) that use the meme the most. The analysis in figure 4<sup>8</sup> identified that subreddits who most commonly employ the term include explicitly anarchist subcultural forums, as well as r/chapotraphouse (~150,000 members), a recently banned [21], extremist, and socialist-leaning subreddit, along with subreddits which feature police brutality.

To examine sentiment towards police, we next generated a topic network (up to November 2019; see [5] for methods on how we generate topic networks) taken from over 10 million comments on r/chapotraphouse on the seed term “cop,” months before the quarantine and protests. The topic network of “cop” portrays terms like “extrajudicial,” “impunity,” “innocent,” “bystander,” and “unarmed” in the same context as “murder” and “kill” (full graph in Appendix figure 2). Interestingly, the topic network contextualizes themes of protests and riots near characterizations of police as violent paramilitary and jackboot thugs. ACAB appears directly next to “cop” in the topic network and a word cloud clarifies how slurs and demonization surround the term as it is used in the r/chapotraphouse subreddit. Anarcho-socialist subcultural forums thus appeared to be prominent participants in the use of anti-police outrage codewords, slogans and memes. However, our analysis also shows that many communities including sensationalist and political groups use these terms on Reddit which don’t necessarily advocate violence or terror. Thus, we next sought to qualitatively characterize explicitly socialist and anarchist communities based on their content to understand whether any of them might harbor ideological hate and political violence.

A qualitative investigation on Reddit revealed evidence of a network of interconnected subcultural forums, several with attached, private chat groups, which broadcast socialist, anarchist, and/or communist leanings, and evince themes like demonization and dehumanization of police and political opponents as well as violent insurgency.

These subcultural forums include the recently banned Chapotrathouse and related subcommunities such as r/moretankiechapo (in which “tankie” refers to authoritarian, hard line Stalinists), r/dankleft (roughly 100,000 members), a radical board which produces cartoonish and dehumanizing political memes, and r/socialistRA (roughly 55,000 members), a left-wing gun-enthusiast activist group and spoof of the NRA known as the Socialist Rifle Association (SRA), which describes itself as “working class, progressive, anarchist, socialist, communist, eco-warrior, animal liberator, anti-fascist, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, PoC, LGBTQ-plus.” Along with its group for posting memes depicting violence, r/SRAweekend, it boasts tens of thousands of followers on Reddit, Twitter, and Facebook.

8 The “associated subreddits” function works by aggregating all comments on Reddit using various term/object filters (in this case, the presence of the term ACAB in the comment) while tallying occurrences of the term in each subreddit. It then ranks the subreddits with their associated tallies by the number of occurrences in descending order.

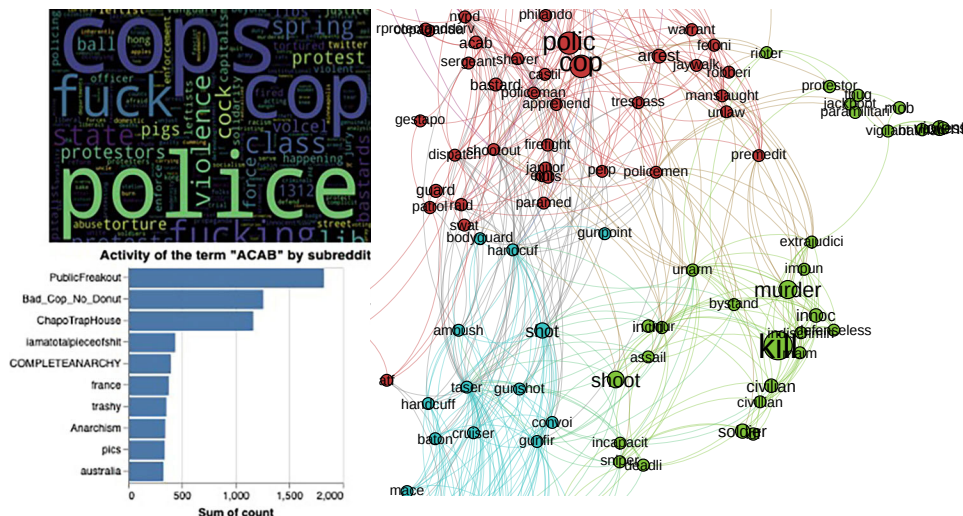


Fig 4. Bottom Left: Top subcommunities for use of "ACAB" on Reddit. Top Left: A word cloud for the ACAB meme/codeword on Reddit's r/ChapoTrapHouse for a 20 day period ending on June 3rd. Right: A topic network for the term "cop" taken from millions of comments on r/chapotrighthouse months before COVID-19 shows reactive outrage and violent depictions in terms like "indiscriminate," "gestapo," and "vigilante."

Akin to the content we found when investigating the Boogaloo, dehumanizing memes and cartoonish calls for violent insurgency were present in all three communities and, by eye, r/dankleft appeared especially productive and creative in sharing these memes. Several of these memes were in the top (and most upvoted) posts of the day and thus representative of the material that is popular in these subcommunities. As illustrated in figures 5, 6, 7, and 8, we find that all of these subcommunities "upvote" memes, which reach the front page of the subreddit, that explicitly endorse violent insurgency and armed revolution, including memes that contain tactical information such as links that promote 3D-printed weapons and the use of encrypted communication.

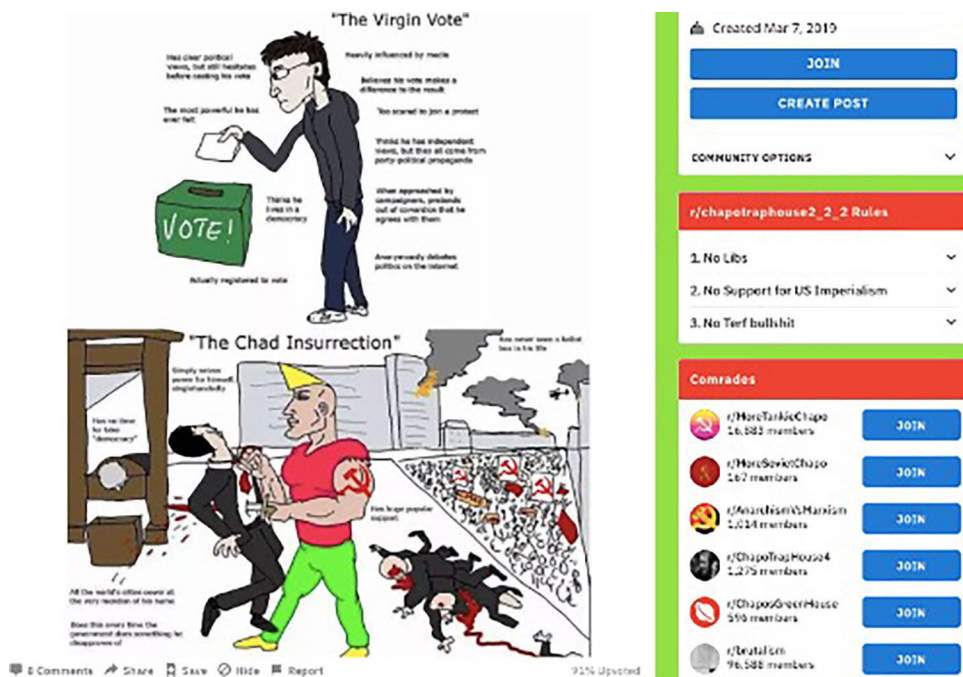


Fig 5. A top-voted, front-page meme in r/chapotrighthouse2\_2\_2, one of numerous offshoots of the extremist subreddit, mocks civic participation and cartoonishly glorifies murderous insurgency. In the bottom right corner, Reddit's recommendation engine suggests numerous connected subcultural forums supporting the authoritarian left, including moretankiechapo. Tankie is the term for a hard line Stalinist.





Fig 6. Top: Weapon “loadouts”, coupled with literature from both the anarchist and communist literature and ANTIFA slogans are among the most frequent posts on r/socialistra. Bottom: Similarly, colorful memes supporting violent revolution, merchandise, including military badges and propaganda, as well as instructions for encrypted messaging appear in this community.

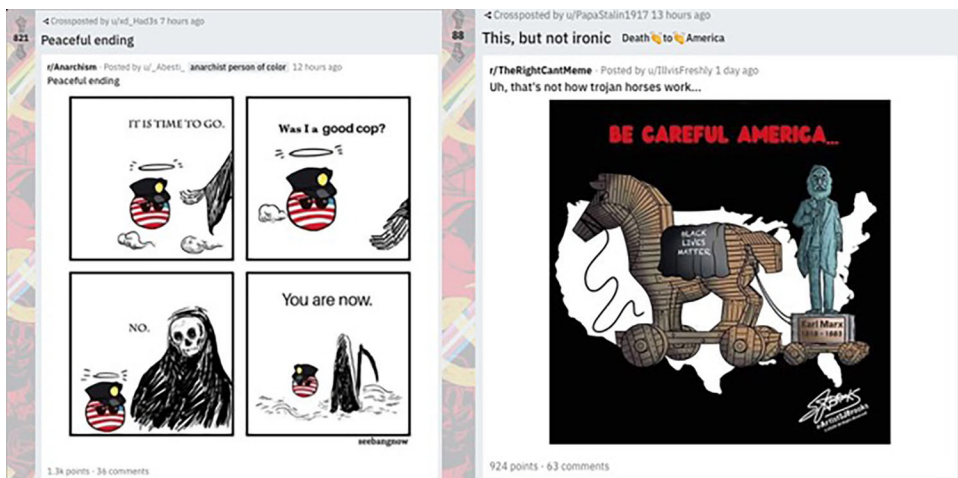


Fig 7. On r/dankleft, Left: “The only good cop is a dead cop” meme becomes the most upvoted image of the day. Right: A user with a moniker “PapaStalin1917” encourages the use of recent BLM protests to disguise authoritarian insurgency, while encouraging “Death to America.”

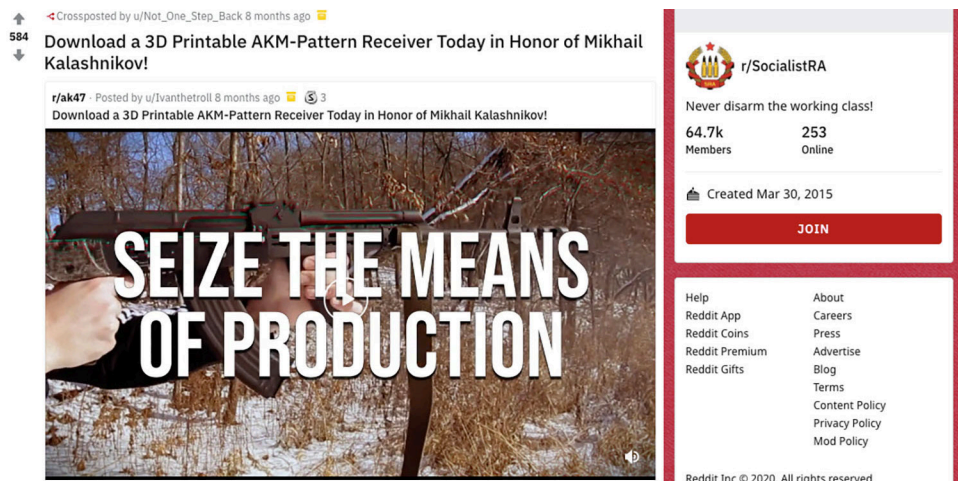


Fig 8. Links to 3D printable munitions and modifications becomes a top post on r/socialistRA

**SECTION 2.1: ANARCHO-SOCIALIST GROUPS ARE EMPLOYING ONLINE FORUMS WHICH ARE GROWING IN SUBSCRIBERS TO RECRUIT SUPPORT AND FOLLOWERS LIKE OTHER EXTREMIST GROUPS DO**

Given the toxic nature of these communities, we next ran an analysis on the growth and activity on these subcultural online forums over the past three years. As depicted in figure 9, we find that these communities, after rapid, recent growth in membership, reached record participation over quarantine and the recent social justice protests. Though activity in Reddit grew overall by ~20% over the course of recent quarantine (see Appendix figure 6), we find surges far outpace that in these communities with increases of over 400% in activity on both r/chapotrathouse and r/socialistra.

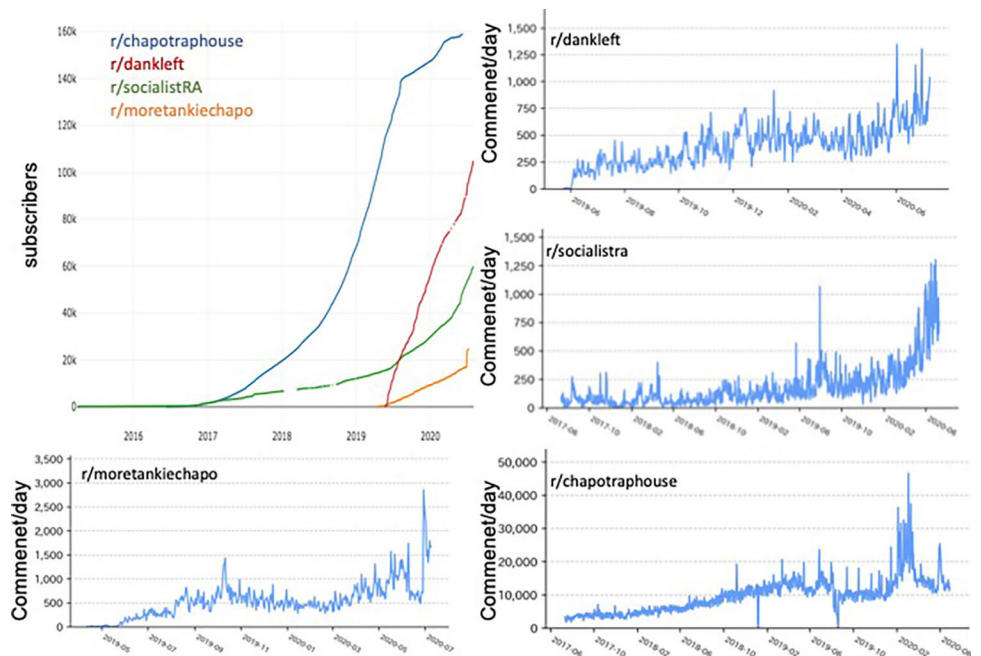


Fig 9. Left: Subcultural forums r/dankleft, r/socialistra and r/chapotrathouse and r/moretankiechapo show increased subscriber counts<sup>1</sup> in recent years. Right: r/dankleft, r/socialistra r/moretankiechapo and r/chapotrathouse show sustained surges in participation as measured in total comments shortly after quarantine and into the social justice protests.

1 Graph retrieved from <https://subredditstats.com/r/chapotrathouse>.

**SECTION 3: DO ONLINE/REAL-WORLD ANARCHO-SOCIALIST MILITIAS AND WEAPONS ENTHUSIAST GROUPS EXIST AND IF SO IS THERE EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THEY CALL FOR VIOLENCE?**

Given our previous analysis suggesting the prominence of martyrs, revolutionary militia movements and new network-enabled militant capability by the extreme libertarian-anarchist groups like the Boogaloo [4], we examined whether parallel movements, narratives and capabilities might operate within the militant elements of anarcho-socialist groups.

An open source intelligence gathering revealed not only a martyr narrative, but an episode of ideological terror. On the dawn of July 13<sup>th</sup> 2019, Willem Van Spronsen armed with an AR-15 “ghost gun” (which is a firearm either assembled from a home delivered kit or made with a 3D printer and untraceable by law enforcement) died in a shootout with Tacoma law enforcement while firebombing an ICE detention facility. [22]

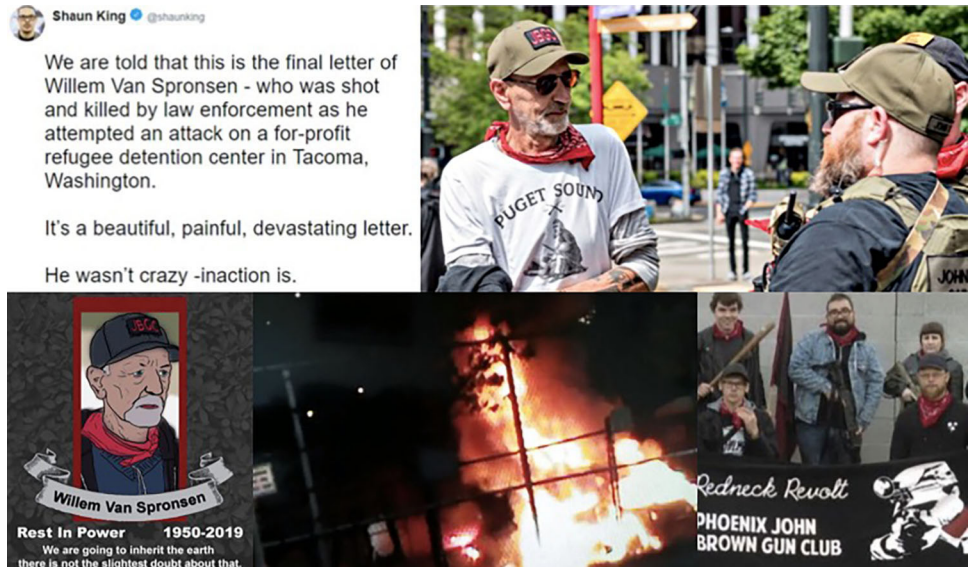


Fig 10. Top Right: Willem Van Spronsen featured speaking with other members of the Puget Sound John Brown Gun Club, a far left militia which boasts over 45 chapters<sup>1</sup> across the United States (Bottom Right). Spronsen would soon become memorialized in martyr mythology (Bottom Left) after his death during a firebombing a shootout in an ICE detention facility in Tacoma, WA (Bottom Center). Sean King, a prominent left leaning luminary publicly martyrizs Spronsen's death and praises his heroism.

<sup>1</sup> The last available source ([here](#)) on this was from 2017 and the number is likely to be substantially higher now.

Immediately following his death, his manifesto appeared on r/Chapatrighthouse and within hours, on Facebook and Twitter with support by prominent left wing political figures. In his manifesto, Spronsen calls to his “comrades” to undertake a “revolution” against “the forces of evil,” embodied by the “predatory state” and its “fascist hooligans,” [23] evidencing the intended initiation of an armed, mass revolutionary confrontation against law enforcement.

### The John Brown Gun Club/Redneck Revolt

Notable among images of Spronsen is the appearance of a red bandanna, a symbol to designate both a far left militia known as the John Brown Gun Club (of which Spronsen was an active member) and an affiliated group called the “Redneck Revolt,” an explicitly revolutionary<sup>9</sup> militia which is prominently linked in the socialistRA subreddit. Members of the Puget Sound John Brown Gun Club (PSJBC, figure 10), were actively patrolling Seattle’s Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ) during its instantiation in June. The organization also helped fill in gaps in the barricades surrounding CHAZ and regularly patrolled the perimeter. [24]

### The Socialist Rifle Association

In addition to more recreational and meme-based activity as a subreddit, the Socialist Rifle Association is now organized as a 501-c4 nonprofit social welfare organization, intentionally styled after the NRA. The organization started as a comical meme/inside joke but notably, since incorporating, the organization has more than doubled, growing from 3,000 to 8,000 active, card-carrying members (Figure 11) since February [25, 26] alone. As shown in supplementary figure 5, the group enjoys increasing notoriety on Reddit and their affiliated subreddits post memes portraying genocidal dictators and violent revolution.

<sup>9</sup> Rothschild, T. (2019). Multiplicity in Movements: The Case for Redneck Revolt. *Contexts*, 18(3), 57-59.





Fig 11. Top: Members of the [Redneck Revolt](#) appear in uniform in mass shows of arms. Middle Left: The Socialist Rifle Association (SRA)—an organization whose numbers have more than doubled since February—literally feature Marxist revolutionary slogans regularly on member cards. Middle Right: A pig, which is a derogatory term for law enforcement officers, was a shooting target displayed by West LA SRA. Bottom: West Los Angeles Socialist Rifle Association [target shooting desert](#).

### The Youth Liberation Front (YLF)

With over 20,000 followers on Instagram and over 30,000 followers (having grown 50% between July 15<sup>th</sup> and August 1<sup>st</sup>), the Portland YLF describes itself as a “decentralized network of autonomous youth collectives dedicated to direct action towards total liberation.” The group leverages social media to offer tactical advice during rallies and the group explicitly supports violent tactics, lionizes Willem Van Spronsen (figure 10), and to avoid being identified, generally dresses in black, covering faces and hands. According to the *Seattle Times*, “the group’s leadership appears to embrace the radical Northwest legacy of the ‘black bloc’ whose acts of vandalism roiled the 1999 Seattle protests during a meeting of the World Trade Organization.” [27]

An open source investigation gathered evidence that these groups boast numerous online feeds which share content, and several are region specific. All of these anarchist/socialist militant groups and networks are proliferating rapidly across Twitter, Reddit and Facebook (Appendix table 1).

### Strategic Innovation of Cyber Capabilities

Though more research is needed to examine how widespread and widely adopted these practices are, the YLF promotes strategic social media capabilities, such as cyberswarming (calling online followers to a real-world scene as depicted in Appendix figures 5 and 6), and promotes the use of “network-enabled mobs.” These capabilities enable it to coordinate real-world action among connected protesters not only regionally, but across large geographic distances.

Figure 12 shows an instructional meme where on-the-scene mobs explicitly organize into regiments to attack police with projectiles (range soldiers), commit arson and throw fire (fire mages), as well as blind police officers with high powered lasers (light mages). Online, memes and graphics are to be developed and disseminated in real time, while group members in online forums both recruit reinforcements and act as sentinels watching over the real-world “battlefield,” using online communication to report real-time-strategic updates on police positions. At the center of this hybrid network-enabled mob are non-violent protesters who, akin to human shields, are tasked to absorb, record, and post online any acts of violence by police.

Recent arrests in and around Portland and elsewhere serve as evidence of the wide adoption of these strategies and the simultaneous appearance of all of these elements [28]. In fact, as far away as New York City, reports of well-organized violence with advanced communication capabilities and a sophisticated division of labor emerged during the George Floyd protests [29].



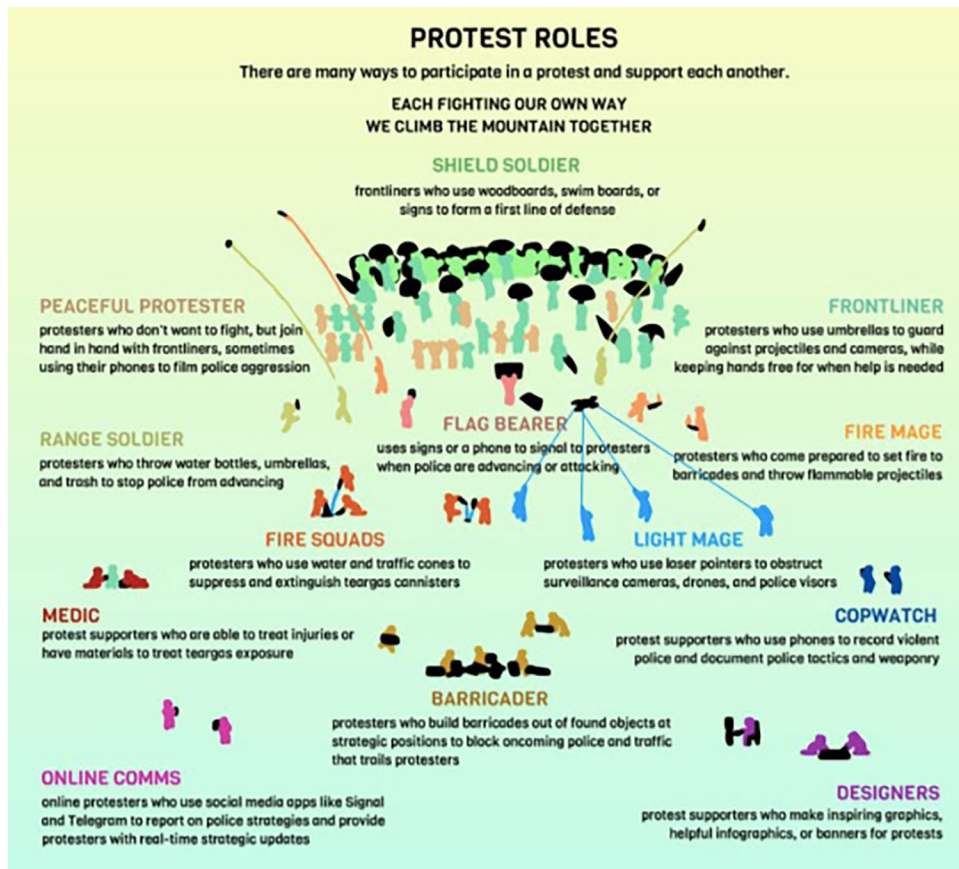


Fig 12. A meme detailing division of labor and comms appears on the social media feed of the PNW Youth Liberation Front creating a “network enabled mob.”

One important feature of the network-enabled mob is its capacity to frustrate the ability of law enforcement to detect directed ideological attacks. A core group of actors are able to mobilize lawlessness and violence. If it becomes widespread, the network-enabled mob enables a structure capable of adaptation and evolution especially if it reappears over consecutive days of unrest (figure 12).



Fig 13. The PNW Youth Liberation Front, an organization that organizes network enabled mobs with sophisticated division of labor and communication capabilities and explicitly endorses violence shows evidence of martyr narratives (Left), iterative learning in mob behavior (Center) and iterative appearances for this learning (Right).

**THE #J25 CAMPAIGN ILLUSTRATES THE SIMULTANEOUS COORDINATION CAPACITY OF THE NETWORKED ENABLED MOB**

We found that distributed anarchist networks prepared, executed, and propagandized simultaneous rallies on July 25<sup>th</sup> across the United States in a coordinated campaign with the hashtag/code “#J25” resulting in riots being declared simultaneously in four cities: Portland, OR, Richmond, VA, Eugene, OR, and Seattle, WA. [30, 31, 32]

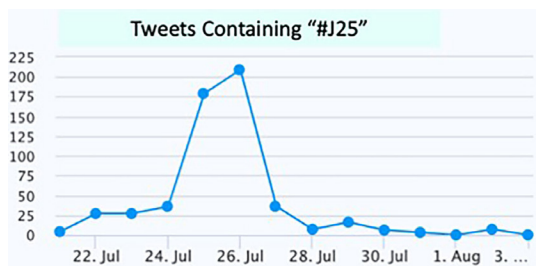


Fig 14. A frequency analysis of the #J25 campaign shows slight increases in the use of J25 days before the riots on July 25<sup>th</sup> with a peak that day and the following.

A frequency analysis in figure 14 on Twitter revealed the hashtag appearing in a sparse number of tweets, but several of these proved influential and had hundreds or thousands of likes and retweets/comments. Courthouses and police precincts were targeted by agitators in each case. Furthermore, tactical activity including the use of lasers, projectiles, arson, and improvised explosives and fireworks, showed remarkable uniformity across all four cities. Memes and real-time interactivity between local anarcho-socialist online feeds showed strong signs of interaction with mob activity in several of these instances.

**Preparation**

On Twitter: Anonymous (a digital hacker collective), the Youth Liberation Front (both Seattle and Portland feeds), Its Going Down<sup>10</sup> (one of the largest online sources for Anarchist news, recently banned from Facebook<sup>11</sup> for extremist content, with close to 90,000 Twitter followers) and several other groups began by coordinating a nationwide protest planned for July 25<sup>th</sup> in over 20 cities in solidarity with Portland’s standing riots.

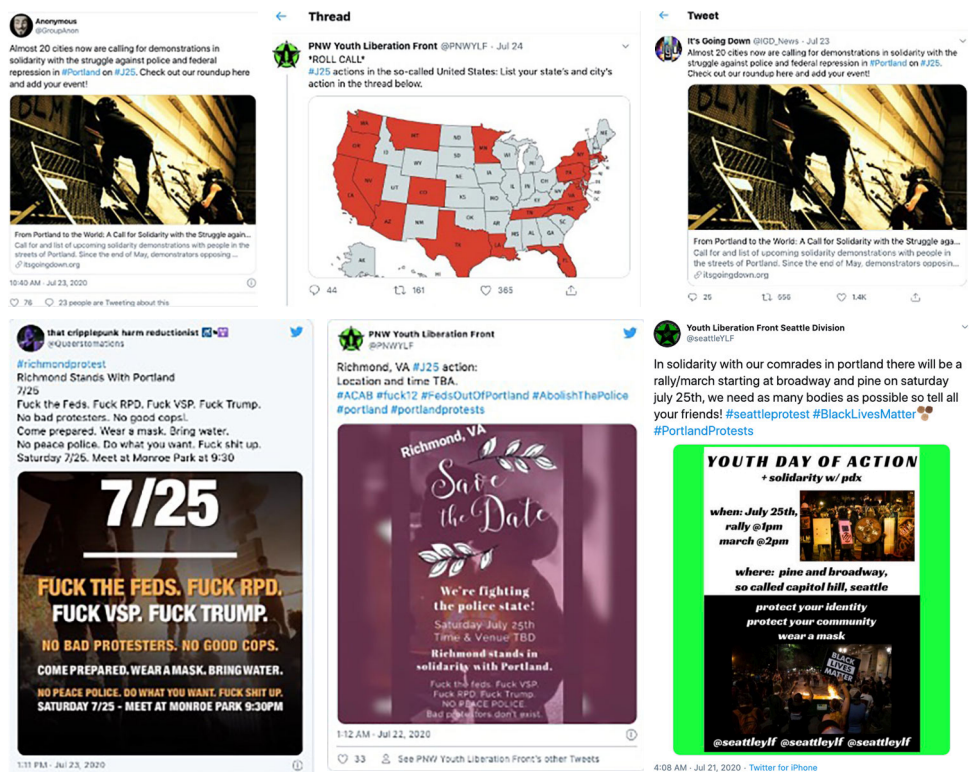


Fig 15. Distributed national and regional anarchist and/or socialist associated feeds organize 20 (#J25) protests across the country in solidarity with the ongoing riots in Portland. Slogans include: “Do what you want, fuck shit up.” and “We’re fighting the police state!”

10 In the aftermath of the #J25 events, Its Going Down produced a “roundup analysis” on the event, which it termed a rebellion. IGD’s analysis is written with revolutionary and celebratory language. <https://itsgoingdown.org/thousands-take-to-streets-in-solidarity-with-portland-youth-jail-set-on-fire-in-seattle-garrett-foster-killed-in-austin/>  
 11 <https://itsgoingdown.org/on-facebook-banning-anarchist-and-antifascist-pages-the-digital-censorship-to-come/>

### Planning and Execution

The following events were reported in major national news sources including ABC, CNN and Bloomberg [30, 31]. These event and tweets referencing these events by anarchist and socialist feeds are listed and referenced below:

Portland, July 25<sup>th</sup>–26<sup>th</sup>, 2020:

- YLF feeds direct mob preparations and map out tactical plans before the event begins (figure 16).
- YLF feeds call out tactical information, monitor police perimeter and real-time location during riots (figure 16).
- Reports of laser attacks, fireworks and projectiles thrown at police and ongoing attacks against Portland’s Hatfield Courthouse.

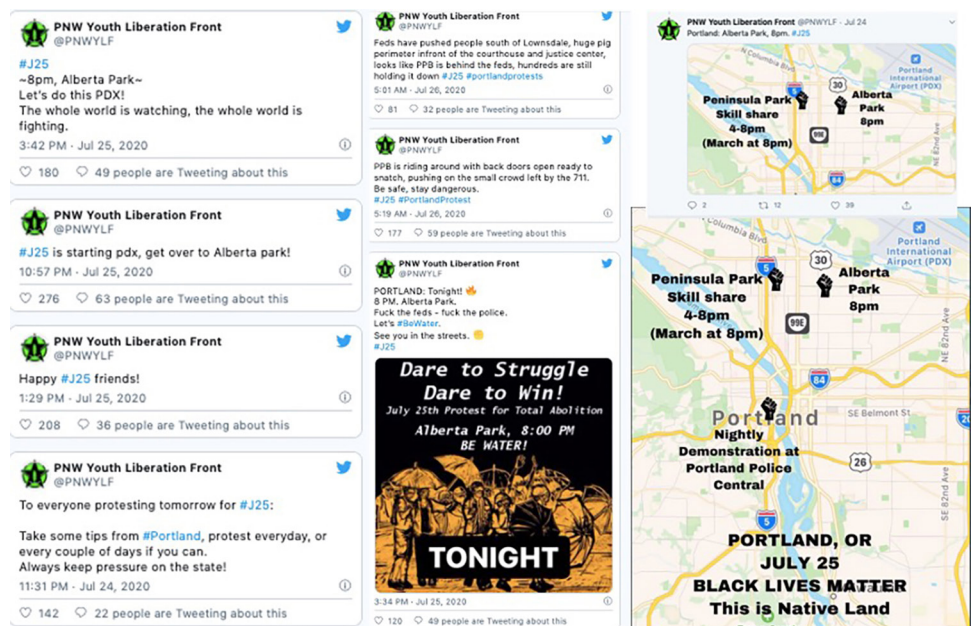


Fig 16. PNW Youth Liberation Front Twitter feed shows high levels of coordination with local real world protest activity during #J25 protests.

Seattle, July 25<sup>th</sup>–26<sup>th</sup>, 2020:

- Local Feeds in Seattle call for attacks against the precinct for J25 days before the attack (figure 17).
- Rioters begin throwing explosives and rocks at police.
- An officer’s leg is injured by an explosive and the officer is hospitalized.
- Rioters lay siege to the perimeter of the police precinct, spray-painting and attempting to disable security cameras.
- A rioter breaches the precinct’s fence line.
- An explosive device blows out the side wall of the precinct, leaving an 8-inch hole.



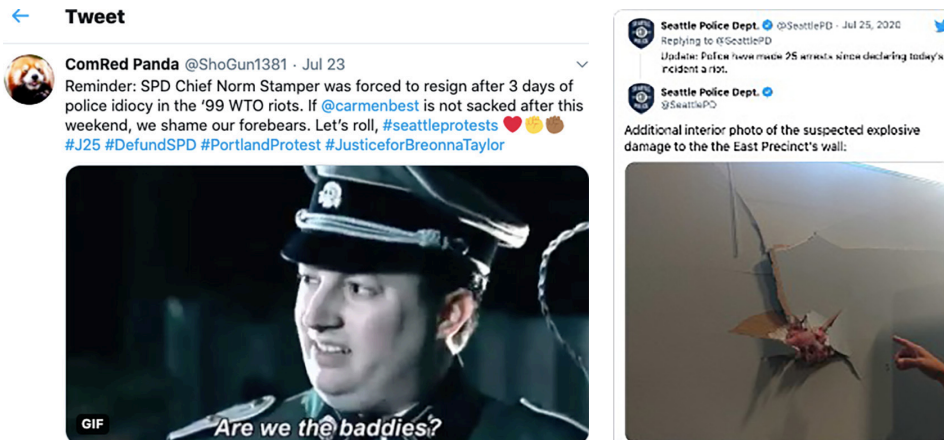


Fig 17. Local Seattle anarchist activist feeds call for sacking the police precinct, which subsequently faces mobs that blacken security cameras and blow out the precinct wall with an IED.

Richmond, July 25<sup>th</sup>–26<sup>th</sup>, 2020:

- Rioters begin throwing explosives and rocks at police.
- Rioters firebomb municipal trucks which were parked by the city to block off access to the police precinct
- Rioters break through police tape, breaching perimeter of the police precinct and bombard it with fireworks and lasers.



Fig 18. Richmond police report burning vehicles, fireworks and laser attacks against the police precinct during coordinated #J25 events.

A recent tactical assessment report amassed from across the nation by the NYPD intelligence and counter terrorism bureaus [34] as well as episodes reported in mainstream media during the recent riots reveal a sober picture of an ongoing low grade insurgency with targeted, ideological attacks by anti-government extremists. These attacks appear to mirror many of the anarcho-socialist memes and tactics the report details above:

- Rioters barricaded and attempted to burn down a police precinct in Portland on August 5<sup>th</sup> with more than 20 officers and civilian employees trapped inside the building. [35]
- Spray-painting over security cameras and breaking the entrance with a 2x4, rioters heavily barricaded the entryway and then lit a fire using an accelerant inside the precinct.
- Similarly, NYPD reported Molotov Cocktails being thrown into vehicles fully occupied by police officers.



NYC-Socialist Rifle Association Retweeted  
**SRA South Florida Chapter**  
 @SFLSRA

What is happening in [#Portland](#) right now is simply a dress rehearsal for the rest of this country. The time to get prepared and organize is NOW comrades. Only together will we be able to repel the spectre of fascism that has fallen on this country.

6:21 PM · Jul 18, 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)

---

**Seattle Antifascists**  
 @RainCityAntifa

EVERY CITY! EVERY TOWN! BURN THE PRECINCTS TO THE GROUND!

7/19/20, 1:25 AM

[r/liberalgunowners](#) · Posted by [u/Thomas200389](#) 12 days ago

Puget sound gun club patrolling The autonomous zone which was set up and being run by the protesters in cap hill. It's a Self contained and guarded zone for protesters to get food , medical treatment , and sleep. Police have willingly pulled out of the area for de-escalation.

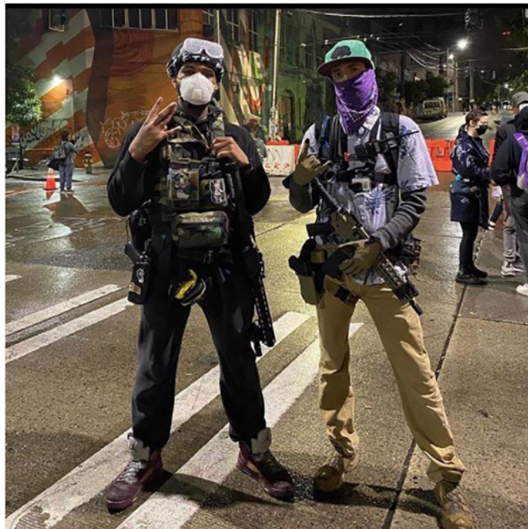


Fig 19. Local Seattle anarchist activist feeds call for sacking the police precinct, which subsequently faces mobs that blacken security cameras and blow out the precinct wall with an IED.

- Police Bomb technicians discovered commercial grade fireworks with nails embedded in the mortar shell in a Federal Building after the building was vandalized by protesters in Atlanta, GA.
- Commercial fireworks are modified with not just shrapnel, but chemical accelerants or compressed aerosols.
- Molotov cocktails are being modified with incendiary burn paste to extend burn time and being thrown at courthouses and police vehicles.
- Incendiary devices were thrown into courthouses wrapped in chain-link fence to inhibit arrival of first responders.
- Along with 3D printed weapons modifications, recipes for thermite are shared online among anarcho-socialist groups.
- Protesters have doxed police officers, posted their home addresses and the names and pictures of their spouses—intelligence reports of claim protesters surveil and stalk officers leaving work in personal vehicles.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This list of events scratches the surface of several such episodes over a nationwide escalation over the course of recent protests. Even as these sophisticated groups recruit members in uprisings, activists are voicing concern that protests are being increasingly overtaken by violent resistance to police and becoming less about the important work of social justice reform and racial equality. [36] Quarantine, economic hardship, social unrest, and ideological attacks against law enforcement provide extremists from white nationalist to anti-fascist with fodder for recruitment. Without tools for law enforcement to detect the planning and coordination of these cyber swarming events, police will be operating blind.

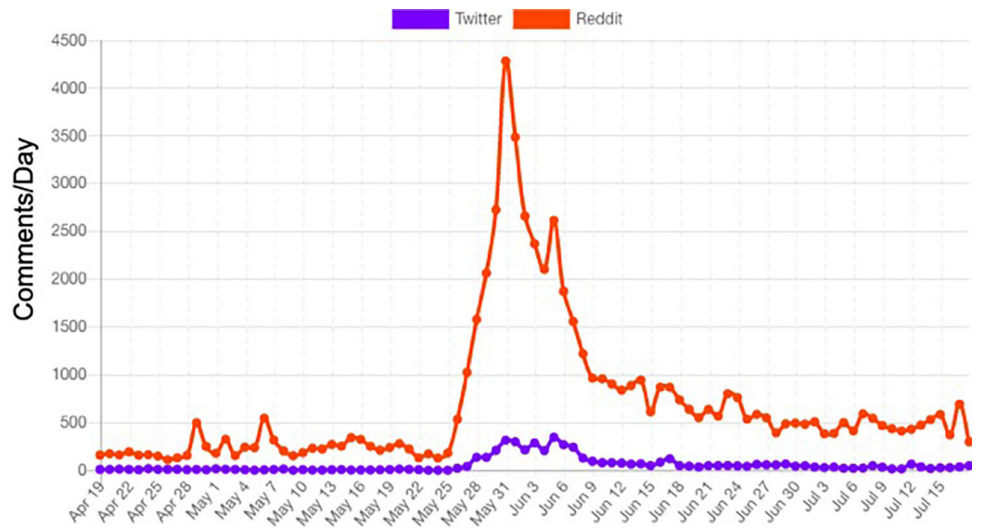
While this report is suggestive rather than conclusive, these data hint that insurgent behavior, stochastic terror and even attacks on vital infrastructure may be fomenting, and even indicate the possibility of a mass-casualty event. The need for regular, reliable and responsible reporting with methods such as those used in this briefing with similar computational techniques is now imperative.

## REFERENCES

1. Ebner, J. (2017). *The rage: The vicious circle of Islamist and far-right extremism*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
2. Davies, G., Bouchard, M., Wu, E., Joffres, K., & Frank, R. (2015). Terrorist and extremist organizations' use of the Internet for recruitment. *Social networks, terrorism and counter-terrorism: Radical and connected*, 105-127.
3. Network Contagion Research Institute, *Cyber Swarming, Memetic Warfare and Viral Insurgency* (February, 2020) (online at <https://ncri.io/reports/cyber-swarming-memetic-warfare-and-viral-insurgency-how-domestic-militants-organize-on-memes-to-incite-violent-insurrection-and-terror-against-government-and-law-enforcement/>).
4. Network Contagion Research Institute, *COVID-19, Conspiracy, and Contagious Sediton* (June 2, 2020) (online at [www.ncri.io/reports/covid-19-conspiracy-and-contagious-sediton-a-case-study-on-the-militia-sphere/](http://www.ncri.io/reports/covid-19-conspiracy-and-contagious-sediton-a-case-study-on-the-militia-sphere/)).
5. Zannettou, S., Caulfield, T., Blackburn, J., De Cristofaro, E., Sirivianos, M., Stringhini, G. and Suarez-Tangil, G., 2018, October. On the origins of memes by means of fringe web communities. In *Proceedings of the Internet Measurement Conference 2018* (pp. 188-202).
6. Zannettou, S., Finkelstein, J., Bradlyn, B. and Blackburn, J., 2020, May. A Quantitative Approach to Understanding Online Antisemitism. In *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* (Vol. 14, pp. 786-797).
7. Zannettou, S., 2019. Towards Understanding the Information Ecosystem Through the Lens of Multiple Web Communities. arXiv preprint arXiv:1911.10517.
8. Bloom, M., Tiflati, H., & Horgan, J. (2019). Navigating ISIS's preferred platform: Telegram1. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 31(6), 1242-1254.
9. El Ghamari, M. (2017). Pro-daesh jihadist propaganda. A study of social media and video games. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 14.
10. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/man-charged-deputy-ambush-scrawled-extremist-boogaloo-phrases-blood-n1230321>
11. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/alleged-followers-of-boogaloo-movement-face-charges-linked-to-protests-11592920008>
12. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/4-police-officers-shot-st-louis-protests/>
13. <https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/accounts-set-up-to-help-las-vegas-officer-shot-during-protest/>
14. <https://abc7ny.com/floyd-protest-nyc-george-protests-nypd/6223320/>
15. <https://www.gq.com/story/history-of-acab#>
16. <https://www.adl.org/hate-symbols>
17. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/19/us/portland-george-washington-statue-toppled-trnd/index.html>
18. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/20/san-francisco-statues-ulysses-s-grant-junipero-serra-francis-scott-key>
19. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/20/us/seattle-capitol-hill-chop-chaz-shooting/index.html>
20. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/7/2/21310109/chop-chaz-cleared-violence-explained>

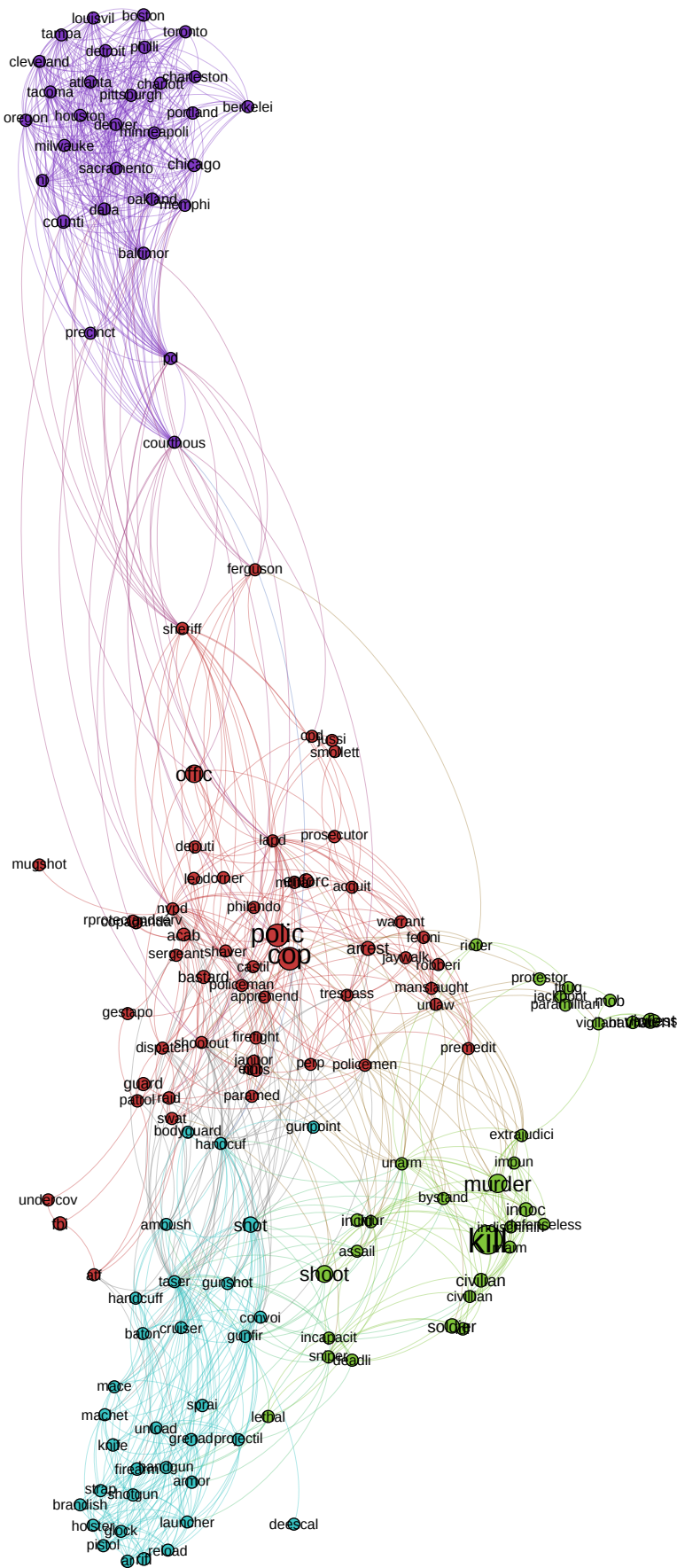
21. <https://www.theverge.com/2020/6/29/21304947/reddit-ban-subreddits-the-donald-chapo-trap-house-new-content-policy-rules>
22. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/13/us/tacoma-detention-center-shooting.html>
23. [https://mediaweb.kirotv.com/document\\_dev/2019/07/15/Manifesto\\_15897725\\_ver1.0.pdf](https://mediaweb.kirotv.com/document_dev/2019/07/15/Manifesto_15897725_ver1.0.pdf)
24. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/seattles-capitol-hill-autonomous-zone-chaz-has-armed-guards>
25. Tarr, Joe (2019-03-14). "[Socialism's safest place](#)". Isthmus | Madison, Wisconsin. Retrieved 2019-07-23.
26. "There are now 7,000 active members in the SRA!". Twitter. Retrieved 22 June 2020.
27. <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/meet-the-youth-liberation-front-the-militant-group-promoting-a-marathon-of-angry-portland-protests/>
28. <https://www.koin.com/news/protests/feds-detail-charges-against-protesters-for-hammer-attack-laser-use/>
29. <https://abc7ny.com/floyd-protest-nyc-george-protests-nypd/6223320/>
30. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/police-declare-riots-protests-turn-violent-cities-nationwide/story?id=71994983>
31. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-26/portland-and-seattle-declare-riots-texas-shooting-protest-wrap>
32. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/27/us/us-blm-protests/index.html>
33. [https://www.anarchism.net/symbol\\_bf.htm](https://www.anarchism.net/symbol_bf.htm)
34. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/NYPDTacticalAssessment.pdf>
35. <https://www.foxnews.com/us/portland-mayor-condemns-rioters-for-attempting-to-commit-murder>
36. <https://apnews.com/96be8a461ab0f3886fc1723607c926e7>

### APPENDIX



Appendix Fig 1. ACAB over both Reddit and the Twitter verified feed share overlapping peaks.

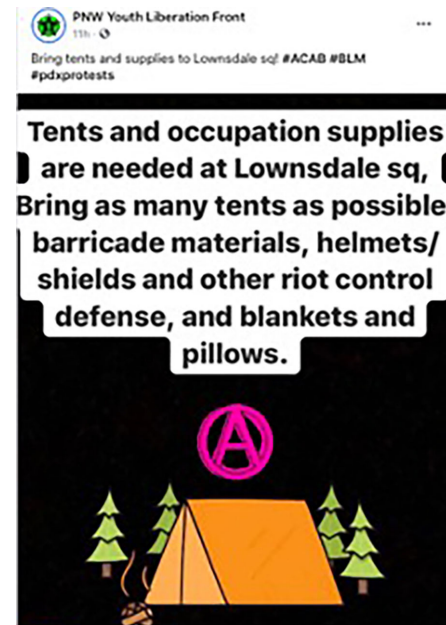




Appendix Fig 2. A complete topic network of "cop" in r/chapotrathouse.



Appendix Fig 3. Example from YLF's social media feeds calling for reinforcements during confrontations with police, a form of cyber swarming.



Appendix Fig 3. Example from YLF's social media feeds calling for reinforcements during confrontations with police, a form of cyber swarming.



Appendix Fig 5. Top: A frequency graph of comments containing the term "socialistRA" shows interest for the group on Reddit growing weekly and acutely since the protests in May. Bottom: The banner at r/SRAWeekend on Reddit comically glorifies genocidal left-wing authoritarians and gun violence.

Twitter - SRA			
Twitter Account	SocialistRA	seattlesra	westLA_sra
Followers	44.2k	3.7k	2k
Twitter Account	PhillySRA	SRA_DFW	NYC_SocialistRA
Followers	1.9k	1.8k	1.7k
Twitter Account	NEO_SRA	FrontRangeSRA	northgasra
Followers	1.5k	1.4k	1.3k
Twitter Account	AnchorageSRA	SanDiegoSRA	MadisonSra
Followers	1.2k	1.1k	1.1k
Twitter Account	sne_sra	Rifle_Tulsa	newisra
Followers	1.1k	1k	1k
Twitter Account	reno_sra	CentralOHSRA	SRA_UpstateNY
Followers	1k	1k	947
Twitter Account	SraAntonio	SRAKentucky	TriangleSRA
Followers	930	844	758
Twitter Account	austin_sra	arkansasra	SRAxECS
Followers	775	734	728
Twitter Account	PittsburghSra	WichitaSRA	olylf
Followers	726	688	627
Twitter Account	SRA_805	KansasCity_SRA	IowaSRA
Followers	569	566	468
Twitter Account	centallSRA	NorRockSRA	
Followers	364	231	

Twitter - YLF			
Twitter Account	PNWLYF	seattleYLF	RM_YLF
Followers	29.5k	5k	1.5k
Twitter Account	bayYlf	clarkylf	
Followers	198	118	

Twitter - John Brown Gun Club/Redneck Revolt			
Twitter Account	RedneckRevolt	PugetSoundJBGC	MidMoJBGC
Followers	15.8k	11.7k	978
Twitter Account	WVJBGC	TMJBGC	rjbgc
Followers	552	412	262
Twitter Account	CarolinaMtnJBGC	EFJBGC	
Followers	218	145	

Facebook				
Facebook Groups	PNW Youth Liberation Front	Socialist Rifle Association	Redneck Revolt	John Brown Gun Club
Followers	6.3k	39.8k	51k	5.8k

Reddit			
Reddit Threads	SocialistRA	SRAWeekend	redneckrevolt
Members	59.2k	8.1k	8k

Appendix Table 1. A table of major Twitter/FB/Reddit associated groups and sites associated with the Socialist Rifle Association, the Youth Liberation Front, John Brown Gun Club and Redneck Revolt as of 7/1/20.

