

MASTER THESIS

“The Potential Danger of Radical Patriotism to the National Security of the United States: The January 6th, 2021 Capitol Attack”

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Resumen

Esta tesis se centra en el caso del ataque al Capitolio de Estados Unidos el 6 de enero de 2021; por ello, se analizan los impactos y daño potencial del patriotismo radical. La investigación incluye un diseño de metodología narrativa y cualitativa documental con un paradigma feminista, lo que permite una revisión profunda para la descripción de los impactos en la política de la seguridad nacional norteamericana. La reflexión teórica y conceptual de este estudio enfatiza la importancia de la transformación de las estructuras hegemónicas del poder, por lo que se presenta un análisis sobre el impacto de las ideologías políticas radicales en los conflictos globales. Además, la pregunta rectora y los objetivos demuestran que el patriotismo radical es un riesgo potencializado, por lo que se debe hacer un examen relacionado con este en los estudios globales de seguridad nacional. De esa forma, la investigación se organiza en capítulos para construir una base documental que contextualiza el ataque al Capitolio de Estados Unidos del 6 de enero de 2021. Posteriormente, el bagaje del marco teórico sustenta la metodología y orienta la investigación al describir los conceptos clave que ubican los riesgos potenciales del caso, los cuales se analizan con literatura académica y archivos periodísticos; con ello, se evidencian los impactos en la seguridad nacional de Estados Unidos. Por último, las consideraciones finales implican una crítica argumentativa y científica sobre las causas del ataque, por lo que este trabajo resulta pertinente para las discusiones actuales en los estudios internacionales de conflicto y paz para la transformación política.

Palabras clave: peligro potencial, patriotismo radical, seguridad nacional, ataque al Capitolio, perspectiva feminista.

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the attack on the United States (U. S.) Capitol on January 6th, 2021; therefore, the impacts and potential damage of radical patriotism are analyzed. The research includes a narrative and qualitative documentary methodology designed with a feminist paradigm, allowing an in-depth review of the impacts on American national security policy. The theoretical and conceptual reflection of this study emphasizes the importance of transforming hegemonic power structures, thus presenting an analysis of the impact of radical political ideologies on global conflicts. Furthermore, the guiding question and objectives demonstrate that radical patriotism is a potential risk, so its related examination is warranted in global national security studies. Thus, the research is organized into chapters to build a documentary base that contextualizes the attack on the U. S. Capitol on January 6th, 2021. Subsequently, the theoretical framework supports the methodology and guides the research by describing the key concepts that identify the potential risks of the case, which are analyzed using academic literature and journalistic archives. This highlights the impacts on the U. S. national security. The final considerations involve an argumentative and scientific critique of the causes of the attack, making this work relevant to current discussions in international conflict and peace studies for political transformation.

Keywords: potential danger, radical patriotism, national security, Capitol attack, feminist perspective.

Introduction

On January 6th, 2021, a historic and unprecedented event shook the foundations of the U. S. known for its highly patriotic and loyal citizens. The country experienced a violent and shocking attack on one of its most emblematic buildings, the Capitol. One might assume that this event was perpetrated by enemies of the nation; however, it was carried out by citizens radicalized by the extreme right and then-President Donald J. Trump.

Among the attackers were active and retired members of the military, individuals sworn to protect the nation's sovereignty even at the cost of their own lives. Ironically, they became to be one of the greatest threats to national security. One of the protesters who turned into a rioter was Ashli Babbitt, a member of the U. S. Air Force, who unfortunately died while attempting to forcibly enter the Speaker's Lobby, where government members were taking refuge from the attack (Barry, Bogel-Burroughs and Philipps, 2021). Likewise, other groups involved were right-wing extremists, including Proud Boys, Groypers, Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, QAnon conspiracists, and others (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, pp. 499-530).

In that sense, this thesis explores in depth how these extremist groups became involved in the attempt to take over the Capitol and prevent the ratification of Joe Biden's victory as the following President of the U. S. (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 358).

It is estimated that between 2000 and 2500 people attacked the Capitol on January 6th, 2021 (BBC News, 2022). Of these, 1600 people were convicted afterwards of charges related to the attack (Choi, Matthews and Cohen, 2025), with 300 linked to 50 far-right groups (START, 2023). This means that the 300 members of right-wing groups must have had some communication with each other to have successfully entered the Capitol, which was guarded by many police officers, as the important ceremony of ratifying Biden's victory as President was taking place inside.

In the second place, it is necessary to mention that at least 1300 citizens not belonging to extreme right-wing groups decided to attack their own Capitol and attempt to prevent a vital democratic process, essentially committing treason against their own nation. This phenomenon raises significant questions about the state of patriotism and political engagement in the U. S., highlighting a deep-seated issue that threatens the very foundations of democracy.

The event mentioned in the previous paragraphs is extremely rare coming from a patriotic country like the U. S., where citizens learn to love their country starting at a young age, with activities such as the Pledge of Allegiance, which they perform daily, and where patriotism can

be seen in their media consumption habits. Most of the media they consume, both for entertainment and information, are produced locally. By only seeing themselves on television and other media, their perception increases that their lifestyle is the norm worldwide, and that, in the U. S., both things and people are as they should be everywhere, enhancing the patriotism of the inhabitants, giving them the impression that they are the global norm (Fuller, 2006). Mentioning this, the question arises: How can it be that, in a patriotic nation, citizens turn against the guiding principles of their own country, such as democracy and the people's right to elect their governors, and attack their own Capitol? The explanation of this complex situation will be part of what this thesis aims to resolve, delving into the psychological and sociological factors that drive such behavior.

The last piece in the complex puzzle that seems to be the Capitol invasion is the participation of then-President Donald J. Trump, who, having lost the 2020 presidential election, participated in and disseminated misinformation campaigns claiming unprecedented electoral fraud in the U. S., fraud that resulted, according to Trump, in the "usurpation" of his victory as President of the U. S. (Common Cause, 2023). The lies told by Trump and his team ranged from asserting that voting machines were altered by Venezuela to interfere with the elections to claiming that government workers responsible for counting votes made extraordinary efforts to count multiple votes for his political opponent and hide votes that were for him (Yoon, 2023).

Trump and his campaign team shared their conspiracy theories about the elections, using their personal social media and news outlets willing to participate in spreading the misinformation (Seitz and Klepper, 2020). Some of the presentations by Trump's allies in news reports about electoral fraud resulted in defamation lawsuits, including one where Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell, two of Trump's most important lawyers, appeared on Fox News asserting that Smartmatic and Dominion Voting Systems machines were altered and did not count votes correctly, giving votes that were for Trump to Biden. Both companies sued Fox News and the two lawyers for defamation (Reuters, 2023). This demonstrates that some of Trump and his team's allegations about the elections had legal repercussions; but, as shown in this thesis, most of the claims about electoral fraud were false and served to further polarize the political landscape.

To explore the topic of the Capitol attack effectively, this thesis is divided into the following chapters: "What role did patriotism play in the attack on the Capitol?" Here, the topic of America as a patriotic nation is explored with the objective of finding out what patriotism had to do with the attack on the Capitol. Next, in "What happened during the attack on the Capitol building?", the necessary context leading up to the attack is investigated, from the moment Trump claimed the

election was stolen until the moment the attack happened, and all the necessary context to understand what led to the attack is provided. Who participated in the January 6th attack? Here the participants of the attack will be described. Finally, the question of why this attack happened is answered. At the end of the thesis, these questions are answered, providing a clear understanding of how radical patriotism can pose a threat to national security, with the January 6th, 2021 attack serving as a case study.

This thesis employs a narrative methodology within a feminist paradigm, analyzing various accounts of the events of January 6th, 2021. Through this approach, this research aims to construct a cohesive narrative that highlights the potential negative implications of extreme patriotism for U. S. national security. This approach allows a nuanced understanding of how various narratives and ideologies contributed to the events surrounding the Capitol attack, providing insights into the complex interplay of political, social and psychological factors that led to such a dramatic event. Hopefully, the understanding of this incident can prevent another instance like this in the future.

Justification

Extreme patriotism as a potential risk to the national security of the U. S. is a matter of vital importance. If this topic is not investigated, the events of January 6th, 2021 could recur, potentially leading to even more severe consequences. If citizens were to successfully attack essential installations and processes for the functioning of the U. S. as a nation, in the worst-case scenario, they could generate a "revolution" or, in a less severe case, impede vital democratic processes, casting doubt on the stability of the country and its system of government. This could lead to severe and lasting consequences for the nation and its ideology, creating widespread chaos and uncertainty. For these reasons, the magnitude of this thesis would be relevant to the entire population of the U. S., as it addresses a critical issue that affects national cohesion and security.

The significance of this thesis is substantial because understanding how excessive or extreme patriotism in a nation can affect its security and stability could fundamentally change how a country perceives national pride. Currently, it is widely accepted that love for one's own country is positive for national cohesion and unity, which is undeniable. However, it is not often considered what happens when this pride for one's own nation becomes excessive, at least this phenomenon is notably present in the U. S. (Fuller, 2006). If the excess of this positive mechanism of patriotism can have effects as harmful as they were once positive, as happened in the Capitol attack, it

would be highly valuable to explore the topic in depth. Something that is understood can be combated and prevented, helping to avoid new situations where U. S. citizens rebel against their country and the principles of its Founding Fathers, such as the right of the population to elect their highest representative by majority vote. This understanding could also lead to strategies to mitigate such risks and foster a healthier form of patriotism.

The greatest vulnerability of this research topic is that the events of January 6th might not have been as influenced by an apparent extreme patriotism as they were by an external agent. This agent radicalized previously positive social cohesion and constructive patriotism, which I will explain later. If so, the main cause of the Capitol attack would not be an excess of patriotism but an agitator who took advantage of people's devotion to their nation. In this case, the research topic would still have some relevance, as understanding the factors that radicalized ordinary citizens could help ensure these conditions are not repeated. However, the previous assumption would reduce the relevance of this investigation, making it vulnerable to criticism that it might not address the root cause of the issue.

The research topic of this thesis is investigable, given the extensive and diverse range of publicly available documentary information. Among this information is a comprehensive report by a special committee formed to thoroughly investigate the incident; detailed reports from government institutions like the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); numerous serious journalistic articles from recognized sources such as PBS News, AP News, and The New York Times; and multiple databases. The abundance of serious and reliable information available about the January 6th, 2021 events makes the topic perfectly suited for a documentary review. Thanks to the method used for the thesis being purely documentary, the topic is viable, as it does not require external funding, and the research costs are merely labor hours. This approach allows a thorough examination of existing data without additional financial burdens, making it an efficient and effective way to explore this critical issue.

Question

Is extreme patriotism a risk to the national security of the U. S., and can this risk to national security be demonstrated using the events of January 6th, 2021 as a reference point?

Problematization

The attack on the U. S. Capitol by its own citizens on January 6th, 2021 with the aim of preventing the transfer of power to the legitimate winner of the elections, Joe Biden, is an

unprecedented problem. A small part of the population attacked the social order, intending to impose their will over that of the rest of the nation. During the attack, between 2000 and 2500 citizens participated (BBC News, 2022), leaving a dark stain on the reputation of the U. S. and the cohesion and tranquility of its citizens.

Although the number of deaths at the Capitol is debatable, as several people died from heart attacks while four police officers took their own lives days after the incident (Farley, 2021), it could be argued that the total figure of 10 fatalities is justified. This is because, had the Capitol attack not occurred, those who suffered heart attacks might still be alive, as they would not have been exposed to the traumatic scenes that triggered the cardiovascular event. Perhaps, if they had been in a less crowded and more accessible location, they could have received timely medical attention to save their lives. Additionally, the police officers might not have suffered the trauma of being overwhelmed by citizens of their own nation, seeing the people they swore to protect turn against them, which could have been enough to make anyone lose their sense of purpose in life and perhaps consider taking their own life. Furthermore, the families of the victims cite the attack as the catalyst for their relatives' suicides (Farley, 2021). The only death that all parties agree was directly caused by the events of January 6th, 2021, is that of Ashli Babbitt.

However, even if these deaths were extremely tragic, they are not the main problem. The primary issue is the uncertainty, division, precedent and potential danger generated by the incident. This creates uncertainty by questioning the stability of social constructs, such as public order, stability of the democratic system, and justice. This is particularly evident looking at the fact that former President Donald J. Trump did not receive punishment; and there is a possibility that, if he wins future elections, he could grant presidential pardons to all of those involved in the riot, including himself, as he has promised to do if he returns to the presidency (Fadel and Manuel, 2024).

Continuing from the previous paragraph, and as it is discussed in the body of this thesis, Trump is a highly polarizing figure, and so is the bipartisan electoral system of the U. S. itself. The fact that there are only two major parties as viable options (with independent parties having minimal participation in elections) and that these parties are in opposition to each other regarding the values they represent (Liberals vs. Conservatives) lends itself to significant political division among voters. Donald Trump, by representing values more aligned with the extreme right than moderate right, and by questioning established precepts that other candidates do not dare touch, such as the right to abortion, becomes an even more polarizing figure than usual. He is seen as

the downfall of the left and the savior the right has been waiting for generations, someone willing to cross all lines to impose extreme right-wing values.

Finally, for the problematization section, the fact that Donald Trump did not receive significant punishment for his role in the Capitol attack sets a dangerous precedent. It demonstrates that Presidents of the U. S. are so much above the law that they can play a role in attempting to subvert elections and not face any consequences. Moreover, they can even run again for the presidency, as Trump did (Colvin, 2024). The act that the President of the U. S. is above the law in all imaginable aspects is a factor that Trump has shown, and it is a problem that Congress and future Presidents should address. The potential danger of a President being untouchable by the law is immense, as such a President could be compromised by foreign forces or could single-handedly destroy the U. S. democratic system in an attempt to establish tyranny, or simply due to incompetence.

Donald Trump showed the American people that Congress and the House of Representatives do not have as much control over the President of the U. S. and the decisions they make as was once believed. Regarding the aforementioned issue, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU, 2024) initiated a petition to ask Congress to amend the law, so that Presidents are no longer immune to the law. The group expressed: "Tell Congress: pass a constitutional amendment restoring presidential liability, because those who criminally abuse the office must be held accountable. No one is above the law: we elect Presidents, not kings" (par. 1). This quote perfectly encapsulates the point: while Presidents are not subject to the same scrutiny by the law as ordinary citizens, there is a huge potential danger where all it takes is someone with bad intentions to not only end the U. S. but, as the U. S. is the world's largest superpower, potentially end the world as we know it.

Bibliography to be Used

An important bibliographical source that should be described for this academic work is the final report of the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022), as it provides a very reliable account of the events that transpired. This document was presented to Congress on December 22nd, 2022, during the 117th Congress, second session, under designation number 117-663. This document is described in the following paragraphs, and I will explain why it is an essential resource for any academic paper that attempts to analyze anything pertaining to the January 6th insurrection attempt. Additionally, any potential weaknesses that this document may have are discussed.

The final report is a document issued by the U. S. House of Representatives (2022), under resolution number 503. This report was commissioned to thoroughly investigate the events surrounding the attack on the Capitol and its causes, as well as to recommend measures to prevent such incidents in the future. The document characterizes the attack as an act of terrorism against the U. S. (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 29), although it notes that most of those involved were charged with sedition rather than terrorism (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 1). Another primary purpose of the report is to provide accurate and reliable information, demonstrating that there was no fraud in the 2020 elections. To achieve this, most of the witnesses cited in the report were Republican leaders or representatives, ensuring that there would be no doubt about the fact that Democrats did not steal the elections.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Select Committee presented testimonies from over 70 individuals during nine public hearings, most of whom were Trump's advisors on electoral matters. The hearings even included testimonies from those who helped spread the narrative that the election had been stolen (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, pp. 29-30). Given this information, the final report of the Select Committee is considered an important bibliographical resource for this investigation project.

In addition to compiling objective testimonies from both the prosecution and defense, these testimonies have already been utilized in court and have undergone rigorous scrutiny, making them highly reliable. The report's 845 pages contain considerable material to address many questions posed by this work. Another advantage of the report is that it relies on its own information, so its citations come almost exclusively from self-referenced material. While this could be viewed negatively under ordinary circumstances –since citations and bibliographic material should ideally come from various sources–, this is not necessarily a drawback. The Select Committee's work did not follow conventional methodological processes but, given that the U. S. government has abundant resources and personnel, it can produce a reliable and accurate self-referenced document. As they are the only ones with access to this material, they alone have the capacity to create a document of such magnitude and clarity as the final report.

The report properly cites all its sources, assigning each citation a number and referencing that number at the end of the chapter with the corresponding citation. The citations are numerous and provide important context to understand the source of the content. So far, everything said about the report has been positive; however, it also has some negative points, starting with the already mentioned tendency to self-reference, although, as previously noted, this is not necessarily bad. The second negative point about the document is that, being so extensive, it

becomes somewhat convoluted and difficult to follow, complicating its understanding and proper processing. Additionally, it does not follow a linear timeline, which further complicates its comprehension. To conclude, all the negative points of the document are resolved by using more official and reliable sources, which was done during this thesis.

The final report is not the only source consulted, because multiple complementary sources are also utilized, such as journalistic articles from serious and reliable sources well established in the field, like AP News, which has been operating since 1846 and has won 56 Pulitzers for its publications over the decades (Ad Fontes Media, n.d.a). In the case of Ad Fontes, it is an organization responsible for checking the reliability of media outlets, using an evaluation system from 0 to 64, where 0 is the worst possible rating and indicates that the source is not reliable, and 64 is the best possible rating, indicating that the source is very reliable and has little bias. Ad Fontes considers a newspaper that scores above 40 to be good and one that scores below 24 to be poor or deficient (Ad Fontes Media, n.d.a). In that sense, AP News received a score of 45.04, making this news outlet a reliable and trustworthy source.

Continuing with the news outlets consulted and their reliability, The New York Times has a score of 41.06 on Ad Fontes' reliability scale, which places it as a reliable source (Ad Fontes Media, n.d.b). PBS News, following the same scale, has a reliability score of 43.39 (Ad Fontes Media, n.d.c). CNN, another frequently consulted source, has a score of 42.12 (Ad Fontes Media, n.d.d). In the case of CBS, this received a score of 42.50 (Ad Fontes Media, n.d.e), while the BBC scored 44.73 (Ad Fontes Media, n.d.f).

These were the main news pages consulted, and they all pass Ad Fontes' tests on reliability and bias of media outlets, meaning that the sources used are reliable and the data obtained from them withstand scrutiny. Additionally, articles containing the authors' names were prioritized to make the bibliography more complete and the information more reliable. In some cases, numerous articles were consulted to verify a specific piece of data; for example, in the study of the Proud Boys as actors in the January 6th Capitol attack, the final report, as well as websites such as ADL.org and JustSecurity.org were consulted. This led to a clearer context about the involvement of the Proud Boys and cross-checked the sources used.

Likewise, multiple websites with the .org extension were used, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.a): "Used at the end of internet addresses to show that the address belongs to a group or company that is not established to make a profit" (par. 1). Being non-profit organizations, their reliability is higher, as they have nothing to gain from sensationalist reports or

exaggerations of the truth, at least not economically. Some of the most used .org sites were Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the ACLU (n.d.).

On the other hand, official government websites were also consulted, especially for the purpose of extracting legislation, such as the First Amendment, which was extracted from an official government page with the record of American amendments (United States Congress, n.d.). In addition to the previously mentioned sources, pages like texastribune.org were consulted, where official journals are published with updates on legal cases, such as the defamation lawsuit against Alex Jones. Finally, organizations responsible for data collection, such as Gallup.com, were consulted, where statistics on citizens' perceptions regarding Iraq and the war the U. S. waged against that country were reviewed.

In short, bibliographic sources with high reliability were prioritized because they were official or recognized sources that enjoy prestige within their industry, along with an exhaustive cross-referencing of data. These standards helped to ensure that the information presented in this thesis is as accurate as possible and that the investigative standards for a master's thesis are met.

Methodology

For this thesis, a narrative methodological study with a feminist paradigm is employed. The study is analytical, qualitative, and involves indirect data collection. In brief, it is based on bibliographic research, where no interviews are conducted. It is qualitative, because no statistical investigations are carried out, and no numerical results are produced, only qualitative outcomes. The information is obtained indirectly, since no direct interviews of any kind are conducted, nor are new sources of information created. Also, the study is narrative because it investigates different versions of a single event to arrive at the most reliable version of the facts and to provide an explanation of their occurrence. Finally, this investigation follows a feminist paradigm because it explores power relationships and their impact on the January 6th Capitol attack.

Hypothesis

Radical patriotism was the main reason why the United States of Americas Capitol Building was attacked on January 6th, 2021.

Objectives

1.- Describe what happened before and during the January 6th attack on the Capitol Building of the United States of America.

2.- Describe the circumstances that led to the January 6th attack, including blind patriotism and the radicalization of right-wing Donald J. Trump Followers.

3.- Describe the main actors of the January 6th attack on the Capitol Building of the United States of America.

4.- Describe why the January 6th attack on the capitol Building of the United States of America happened.

What Happened Leading to January 6th, 2021?

On January 6th, 2021, the Capitol of the U. S. was attacked by an unexpected group: its own citizens. However, it was not the entire American population that stormed the Capitol; rather, a determined number of groups with specific characteristics and connections to one another were involved, primarily united by their support for then-acting President Donald J. Trump. The groups that participated in the Capitol riot are listed in the following chapter. In this chapter, we examine what led to the attack and how it unfolded, starting with Trump and his team claiming that the election was stolen and concluding with the dispersal of the rioters on the day of the attack.

It all began before the night of the U. S. election, when Trump planned to declare himself the winner of the 2020 election before all the votes had been counted. If he lost to Biden, he intended to claim that fraud had occurred. This information comes from a recording of a call on October 31st, 2020, obtained by the Select Committee for the final report. In this call, then-Chief White House Political Strategist Stephen Kevin Bannon informed some associates in China that Trump would declare himself the winner on election night and, if he lost, would assert that fraud had taken place (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022).

As noted in the previous paragraph, even before knowing the election outcome, Donald Trump had a contingency plan in case he lost, a plan that contradicts the U. S. Constitution and the responsibilities of an elected President. The mentality that led Trump to take such drastic measures is evident in Stephen Bannon's call:

If Trump is losing by ten or eleven o'clock at night, it's going to be even crazier. He's going to sit right there and say, "They stole it. I'm directing the Attorney General to shut down all ballot places in all 50 states". He's not going out easy. If Biden's winning, Trump is going to do some crazy stuff. (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 196)

In the quote we do not see the mentality of a President but that of a business tycoon who, regardless of the circumstances, refuses to accept defeat. This attitude is ideal for a businessman leading a large company, willing to do whatever it takes to win and make a profit. While this

mindset can be effective in the world of business, it can also be taken to extremes that may be immoral or even illegal. A President requires negotiation skills but should not adopt a victory-at-all-costs mentality, especially when it comes to personal victories rather than the nation's well-being. The peaceful transfer of power from one President to another is essential to maintain order and uphold the democratic process. Any attempt to undermine legitimate elections leads to instability, chaos and conflict.

Why declare victory and claim the election was stolen? This is due to a phenomenon described in the final report as the "red mirage". This phenomenon refers to the discrepancy between the mail-in ballots cast by Republicans and Democrats. Specifically, Democrats tend to use this voting method more than Republicans, and mail-in ballots take longer to be counted. As a result, even if it appears that Republicans have won on election night, if the race is close and the Republican candidate seems to have a narrow lead, there is still a chance that the Democratic candidate could prevail once all votes are counted. When the mail-in ballots are eventually tallied, they may provide enough votes for the Democratic candidate to secure victory.

Historically, the mail-in ballot system has not been problematic; no other presidential candidate in U. S. history has declared himself the winner before all votes for selecting the next President have been counted. This is precisely what happened on election night: Trump chose a moment when it looked like he had won and called for the counting of remaining votes to stop, claiming they were fraudulent (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022).

Building on the previous paragraph, Trump and his team exploited the red mirage effect and the confusion it generated to declare themselves the winners of the 2020 presidential election before all the votes were counted. To enhance the effectiveness of this strategy, Trump began discrediting the mail-in voting system prior to the election. For instance, on April 8th, 2020, months before the election, Trump tweeted: "Republicans should fight very hard when it comes to statewide mail-in voting. Democrats are clamoring for it. Tremendous potential for voter fraud, and for whatever reason, it doesn't work out well for Republicans. @foxandfriends" (as cited in U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 201). This demonstrates that the then-President had an elaborate plan to use lies and intimidation to attempt to alter the election outcome. The evidence presented in the preceding paragraphs indicates that Trump did not genuinely believe the election was stolen; rather, his claims were part of a violent strategy aimed at maintaining power at any cost, including undermining American democracy.

Moreover, absentee voting is essential as it enables individuals with disabilities, health conditions, or responsibilities that hinder their ability to vote in person to exercise their right to

choose their governing body. The mail-in voting system implemented during the 2020 election was particularly significant due to the global COVID-19 pandemic (Hall, 2020). Without the option of voting by mail, individuals at the highest risk of contagion would have been unable to participate in the electoral process, potentially jeopardizing their lives. In that sense, discontinuing the absentee voting system would effectively deny a vulnerable segment of the population their right to vote.

In addition to that, the purpose of mail-in voting is not to ensure that both political parties receive an equal number of votes; rather, it is to provide an opportunity for individuals who might otherwise be unable or unwilling to vote to participate in the democratic process. This system serves as a crucial mechanism to enhance voter accessibility and ensure that all citizens can exercise their right to vote, particularly in times of crisis. A study by Hall (2020) reveals that the number of votes cast by mail for the two major U. S. political parties has historically been quite similar: the research indicates that the Democratic Party's historical advantage in mail-in voting over the Republican Party is just 0.7 %.

Such difference in votes would typically not be enough to decide an election. However, during the 2020 election, several states had electoral college votes that were so close that a 0.7 % margin could significantly influence the outcome. This is illustrated in a quote from Simpson's (2021) work on the closeness of the elections: "Biden did manage to increase his Electoral College victory by winning a further two states by narrower margins, Arizona by 0.3 % (49.4 % v. 49.1 %) and Georgia by 0.2 % (49.5 % v. 49.3 %)" (par. 4). As shown, mail-in ballots did influence the 2020 election; despite this, the purpose of mail-in voting is not to ensure equal votes for each candidate but to provide more opportunities for people to choose their leaders for the next four years.

After election night, Trump and his legal team, led by Rudy Giuliani, began filing lawsuits in multiple state courts, claiming voter fraud and seeking to void mail-in ballots. Regarding these lawsuits, Donald Trump stated: "'We've proven' the election was stolen, but 'no judge, including the Supreme Court of the U. S., has had the courage to allow it to be heard'" (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 210). However, this accusation is false: of the 62 lawsuits filed by his legal team between November 2020 and January 2021, only one was resolved in his favor, and that case did not provide evidence of electoral fraud. Therefore, the votes that were annulled were minimal (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022).

The information in the previous paragraph further demonstrates that Donald Trump and some members of his team created and spread the narrative that the election had been stolen,

aiming to maintain presidential power despite losing. As will be explained in the psycho-social analysis of Trump, he thrives on ambiguity, using it as a weapon and excelling in hyperbole. This is evident in his claims made before the courts; he selectively omits important details and, without presenting any evidence, asserts that he has proven fraud occurred during the elections. Furthermore, he accused judges of cowardice, claiming that none had the courage to declare that the elections were stolen. This behavior reflects his mentality and strategies, as he actively sows discord and casts doubt on the honesty and integrity of judges, all without any supporting evidence.

Trump is an especially dangerous conspiracist because he not only believes in conspiracies but also creates and propagates them. He wields these conspiracies as powerful instruments of coercion and mobilization, rallying masses who follow him with blind patriotism. His followers rarely question his words or intentions, often interpreting his faults as intentional jokes or as the elaborate strategies of a genius manipulating his adversaries.

Another factor that exponentially increases Trump's danger as a conspiracist is his ability, as President, to exert pressure on reality and reshape it to fit his narrative. A notable example of this is the Supreme Court's decision in the case of *Donald J. Trump, Petitioner v. the U. S.*, where the court ruled on the issue of Trump's absolute presidential immunity in criminal matters (Supreme Court of the United States, 2024). The court determined that while Trump has absolute immunity in civil matters, his immunity in criminal matters is not absolute but it is limited to acts performed within the scope of his official presidential duties (ACLU, 2024).

Is it not dangerous to give an individual so much power? This situation is reminiscent of the time of monarchy, where only God could judge the king, as God placed the king as the leader of the people. Therefore, attempting to judge the king's actions would be akin to trying to judge God's actions (Saenger, 2023). David Cole, Legal Director of the ACLU, articulated the potential effects of the court's decision on Trump's future behavior:

On purely partisan lines, the Supreme Court today, for the first time in history, places Presidents substantially above the law. It ruled that former President Trump cannot be prosecuted for deploying Justice Department officials to pursue his own criminal ends. And with respect to other presidential actions, it announces “presumptive immunity”, and offers only a vague and unworkable standard that is likely to mire the case against former President Trump in years of litigation without holding him accountable for his criminal conduct in resisting the peaceful transfer of power. (ACLU, 2024, par. 4)

Therefore, as David Cole (as cited in ACLU, 2024) rightly points out, it is highly dangerous to place Presidents above the law. For democracy to function effectively, everyone must be treated equally under the law; this is why Lady Justice is depicted as blind, because everyone should be judged in the same manner, regardless of their status or wealth.

In addition to the issue of elevating public officials above the law, there is also the concern that future Presidents may act with impunity, knowing they are practically immune from legal consequences. As long as their criminal actions can be vaguely connected to their presidential duties, they could betray their nation without facing punishment. This concern is particularly relevant in Donald Trump's case, as the Supreme Court's ruling has suggested that he is above the law. If he wins the election again, he may attempt to retain power illegally at the end of his term, knowing he can do so without facing accountability.

What Happened During the Attack on January 6th, 2021?

The Ellipse

On January 6th, 2021, the day of the Capitol attack, Trump delivered a speech to his supporters at the Ellipse that lasted approximately one hour (Naylor, 2021). The Ellipse is a strategic point for quickly reaching the Capitol, as it is located, according to Google Maps, just 11 minutes by car and 42 minutes walking from this location.

Approximately 53 000 of his supporters attended the speech, nearly half of whom refused to enter the designated area for the talk, because they would have to pass through a security checkpoint where they would go through a metal detector and any weapons would have been confiscated. This should have protected the then-President (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 585). Upon learning that his supporters were not being allowed into the speech area, Trump became furious. According to Cassidy Hutchinson Trump said: "I don't [fucking] care that they have weapons. They're not here to hurt me. Take the [fucking] mags away. Let my people in. They can march to the Capitol from here. Take the [fucking] mags away" (as cited in U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 585).

This demonstrates that Trump had blind faith in the support of his followers and was aware that many of them came armed to hear his speech. At the end of his address, he urged his supporters to march toward the Capitol to protest the certification of Joe Biden's victory. Specifically, Trump said:

So, we're going to walk down Pennsylvania Avenue. I love Pennsylvania Avenue. And we're going to the Capitol, and we're going to try and give [...] our Republicans –the weak ones because the strong ones don't need any of our help– the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country. So, let's walk down Pennsylvania Avenue. (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 586)

Pennsylvania Avenue is the street that leads directly to the U. S. Capitol from the Ellipse. In short, Donald Trump asked his 53 000 supporters who had gathered to hear him speak at the Ellipse to march to the Capitol, fully aware that they were armed. With this information, it is evident that his intention was to incite significant disturbances at the Capitol. Although he was very careful with his language to avoid giving a direct order for an attack, his rhetoric, the context of the date of his speech, its location, and his previous statements indicate that what happened that day was precisely part of his plans.

During his speech at the Ellipse, Trump made a series of statements that incited the audience to attack the Capitol and his Vice President, Mike Pence. He said: "I hope Mike is going to do the right thing. I hope so. Because if Mike Pence does the right thing, we win the election" (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 37). Here, as previously mentioned in this document, we can see how Donald Trump places the entire burden of "rectifying the election" on Pence. This indicates to his followers that all they need to do to achieve their goal is to pressure Pence enough to do what they want: specifically, to demand that he returns votes that Trump and his team consider fraudulent to their respective states. This was a power that Pence did not possess, and even if he attempted something without authority, he would be committing crimes against his nation and its guiding principles.

However, in addition to asking Pence for something unreasonable and illegal, the then-President refused to accept a "no" as an answer. Pence was the missing piece in his puzzle for achieving electoral victory illegally. His determination to force Pence to comply with his wishes was so strong that he was even willing to accuse his Vice President of treason, inciting lethal anger among his supporters toward him, anger that nearly cost Pence his life during the attack on the Capitol.

Trump was prepared to see the attack on the Capitol escalate to its maximum expression, as he was willing to march with his supporters down Pennsylvania Avenue to reach the Capitol, an action that his Secret Service had to deny him due to extreme danger. Even as President of the U. S., it would have been extremely risky for him to march alongside his supporters, making it exceedingly difficult for his security team to protect him during the journey (U. S. House of

Representatives, 2022, pp. 73-75). Tony Ornato, the former Deputy Chief of Staff, recounted Trump's reaction upon learning that he would not go to the Capitol:

Trump said something to the effect of, "I'm the f***ing President, take me up to the Capitol now". After Engel relayed, they had to return to the White House, Trump reached up to the front of the vehicle to grab the steering wheel. Engel grabbed the President's arm and said, "sir, you need to let go" (Hendry, 2022, par. 6).

This quote illustrates the then-President's willingness to reach the place of the riot with his supporters; it demonstrates that he fully intended to be there and he was even ready for violence to do so. What would have happened if Trump had reached the Capitol on January 6th is impossible to know; nevertheless, if we are allowed to speculate, it is most likely that violence would have escalated, since the Commander-in-Chief of the U. S. Armed Forces would have been physically backing up the attack. Although this remains speculative, contextual evidence suggests that Trump was willing to take the Capitol by force; he was prepared to orchestrate an insurrection.

Almost at the end of his speech at the Ellipse, Donald Trump said: "And we fight. We fight like hell. And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore" (WEHCO Media, 2021, p. 24). Most of the time, Trump was able to give his followers instructions indirectly and cryptically to maintain plausible deniability, but in this specific instance, he failed. The command in this quote is direct and clear: "fight with everything you have, or your beloved country, one for which your ancestors sweated, bled and died, will disappear. It will no longer be yours; it will belong to the leftists, Antifa, immigrants, or whoever the current boogeyman may be. And that is not where the horror story ends: the enemies will lead the country to ruin and destruction in every possible and imaginable aspect".

To be precise, Trump was clearly indicating to his followers that they either fought to the utmost extremes or there would be no country left to fight for afterward. He associated his loss as President with the end of the U. S. in the minds of his supporters. Therefore, the consequences of him losing the candidacy would not be typical, a slightly different national policy compared to other candidates: his loss meant the "end of an empire" and, perhaps, even of the world. Again, we see that Donald Trump's mentality is not that of a conventional politician who accepts defeat and prioritizes respect for the law and the Constitution over his political career and ego. In Trump's case, his ego is so immense that he equates his loss as a presidential candidate with the end of his country. His behavior suggests that he would prefer to see his country burn rather than lose; it is the mentality of an unyielding businessman willing to do anything to win.

The Attack on the Capitol, a Step-by-Step Review

In this subsection, we find a step-by-step description of what happened during the Capitol attack on January 6th, 2021. For this thesis, it is important to understand what occurred inside and around the Capitol during the attack to comprehend the immediate and future impacts and consequences of the events. The lead-up to the attack has already been described in this work.

At 1:00 p. m. on that fateful January 6th, the “protesters” breached the first police barrier outside the U. S. Capitol. Meanwhile, Trump was finishing his speech at the Ellipse. From this moment on, the situation transitioned from a protest to an attack, because crossing police barriers goes beyond a peaceful demonstration (Lonsdorf et al., 2024). As could be observed, the people present at the speech at the Ellipse were not yet at the Capitol, but it was later shown how the conflict escalated when individuals who arrived from the Ellipse joined the “protest”.

Shortly after the attackers breached the first barrier set by authorities at the Capitol, Nancy Pelosi, the House Speaker, declared the congressional session initiated at 1:05 p. m. (Lonsdorf et al., 2024). Then, at 1:30 p. m., the rioters breached the last barricade set up by Capitol security and, half an hour later, broke windows of the building to gain access (Lonsdorf et al., 2024). Around 2:00 p. m., Trump’s supporters who were at the Ellipse arrived at the Capitol; we can arrive at this conclusion because Trump finished his speech at approximately 1:10 p. m. Considering it takes about 42 minutes to reach the Capitol from the Ellipse, Trump’s supporters should have arrived around 1:52 p. m., coinciding with one of the most critical points of violence during the Capitol attack: the entry of protesters into the building.

This moment is especially significant because entering a solid and permanent structure requires more violence and criminal intent than breaching an improvised police barricade. This marks a conscious or unconscious escalation in violence in the minds of the attackers and represents a point of no return since, legally, the severity of crimes intensifies upon entering a restricted government building.

At 2:20 p. m., the Senate was called into recess due to the danger posed by the invaders inside the building to the senators and other government representatives. At this same time, the building went into lockdown (Lonsdorf et al., 2024). The next significant moment occurred around 3:11 p. m. when the attackers were about to breach the Speaker’s Lobby, where most of the public officials inside the building were taking shelter. In a desperate attempt to protect the officials, a security officer fired at those trying to force their way through the door, fatally wounding

Ashli Babbitt. After the shot was fired, specialized security forces arrived to remove the attackers from the more restricted areas of the building (Lonsdorf et al., 2024).

Ashli Babbitt was a member of the U. S. Armed Forces, having served in the Air Force for 14 years and participating in active combat in two different wars. At the time of her death, she was 35 years old (Barry, Bogel-Burroughs and Philipps, 2021). Having been in the military, it is clear that Babbitt had a particularly deep sense of patriotism toward her country, as she was willing to serve and even die for it. Her brother had this to say about her:

“My sister was 35 and spent 14 years in the military; to me, that’s most of your conscious adult life”, said Witthoeft of Lakeside, California. “If you feel like you gave most of your life to your country and they don’t listen to you, it’s a hard thing to take in. That’s why she was upset”. (Barry, Bogel-Burroughs and Philipps, 2021, par. 12)

Blind patriotism (which is explained in detail later) led Babbitt to believe Donald Trump when he claimed that the election was “stolen” from him, and her great patriotism drove her to march to the Capitol and defend what she believed was just. It is a real shame that the egocentrism of a politician cost an American heroine her life. This situation demonstrates that Trump had a relationship with his followers that went beyond what is typically seen with a political figure; he aimed to make them feel loved and heard. To achieve this, he employed the tactic of using Twitter (which will be explained later) as one of his presidential communication channels, where he could avoid censorship and oversight of his messages while establishing a more direct connection with his followers, making them feel listened to. This can develop into a parasocial relationship where his supporters believe they have a more personal connection with him than they do, resulting in greater trust and loyalty toward him.

This relationship is manufactured by Trump, and the evidence lies in his language. Trump said at 4:17 p. m. –almost an hour after most of those who invaded the Capitol had already left due to the shooting and the arrival of National Guard troops–: “I know your pain. I know you’re hurt. [...] We love you. You’re very special. You’ve seen what happens. You’ve seen the way others are treated [...]. I know how you feel. But go home and go home in peace” (REV, n.d., par. 1).

In this message given by Trump, we can see that his communication with his followers is abnormal for a President; it resembles that of a family member as he mentions phrases like “I love you” and “you’re special”. With this type of language, Trump forms parasocial bonds with his followers, making them feel that he is the only politician who truly listens to them. Furthermore,

this type of messaging is unprofessional for a President, because it manipulates his supporters with a false sense of closeness that results in a situation where it becomes easier for them to exhibit blind patriotism toward him. Therefore, even in the light of the evidence, they refuse to believe that he lies and that he deceives or manipulates them.

Later, at 7:54 p. m., the Republican National Committee condemned what happened at the Capitol, calling it an attack on the country and emphasizing that the events were not an act of patriotism but rather an assault on the nation (Barry, Bogel-Burroughs and Philipps, 2021). To this day, Trump refuses to deliver a similar message; however, he has never condemned the events that occurred that day at the Capitol. It makes sense that he has not done so, as condemning those actions would be tantamount to condemning himself. The message from the Republican Committee also seems insincere, as they have chosen Donald Trump as their candidate for President in 2024.

Finally, at 9:00 p. m., Pelosi reconvened the House of Representatives (Barry, Bogel-Burroughs and Philipps, 2021). Thanks to the efforts of representatives from both parties, Trump did not achieve his objective; they refused to be intimidated and resumed the day's activities as soon as possible. Because of this, his coup attempt resulted in nothing more than a delay in the certification of Joe Biden's victory by a few hours.

It is also important to know what Donald Trump was doing while his supporters were attacking the Capitol due to his influence over them (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022). It was Trump and his team who began the allegations that the 2020 elections had been stolen; they also invented and widely disseminated existing conspiracy theories related to election fraud, such as the case of Freeman and Moss. This conspiracy theory gained significant traction thanks to Giuliani and Powell, who spread it on numerous occasions on Fox News.

Regarding this, as mentioned in this thesis, the dissemination by Trump's team of the conspiracy theory accusing Freeman and Moss, a mother and daughter respectively, of committing electoral fraud in their roles as election officials turned out to have no merit, as demonstrated by various government institutions, including the FBI.

What was the reaction of the orchestrator of the attack? As should be no surprise to anyone, the then-President's reaction was inaction, which is quite significant considering that a simple tweet from him would have been enough to stop the assault on the Capitol. Evidence of this is that, as soon as Trump asked his supporters to leave the area, they did so. This demonstrates that at least Donald Trump is guilty by omission for allowing the attack on the

Capitol to continue. However, the argument that the actions of a group of citizens and organizations are not his responsibility could have some validity, but only without the pertinent context that shows the obedience of the mob to Trump and his involvement in inciting them to stop the vote counting at all costs.

The Allegations Against Donald J. Trump

During and after the 2020 presidential election, Donald Trump faced numerous allegations regarding his actions and public statements. Despite a lack of substantial evidence to support his claims, Trump repeatedly propagated unverified assertions of widespread voter fraud from the onset of Election Night. This behavior not only called into question the official results of the election but also sowed doubt among his supporters about the legitimacy of the democratic process. Despite suffering multiple defeats in court and facing opposition from his own advisors, Trump refused to accept his electoral loss. His attempts to overturn the results included pressuring Vice President Mike Pence to alter the vote count during the January 6th joint session of Congress, an action that violated constitutional procedures. In addition, Trump attempted to improperly influence the Justice Department by seeking out and contacting officials willing to make false statements and manipulate data to support his unfounded allegations of voter fraud. This effort to manipulate the judicial system revealed a lack of respect for the values of fairness and legality.

These actions sparked a profound debate about the integrity of the electoral process in the U. S. and challenged the fundamentals of the rule of law and the peaceful acceptance of election results in American democracy. When Trump took office, his then-rival for President, Hillary Clinton, stated, "Donald Trump is going to be our President. We owe him an open mind and a chance to lead" (Holpuch and McCarthy, 2016, par. 2). This illustrates that, when Trump won the election in 2016, Clinton conceded and urged her supporters to respect the Constitution and accept him as their new President. This is the sacred duty of a President: to protect the people's decision and uphold the Constitution.

In a coordinated effort, Trump led the campaign to obtain and send false election certificates to Congress and the National Archives. He also pressured members of Congress to challenge legitimate voter rolls in several states and intentionally validated false information in federal courts. Trump summoned thousands of supporters to Washington for January 6th, urging them to march on Capitol Hill despite knowing that many were extremely angry and some were armed.

During the violent assault on the Capitol at 2:24 p. m. on January 6th, Trump sent a social media message publicly condemning Vice President Pence. He did this despite the ongoing violence and his duty to uphold the law. Trump refused repeated requests to call his violent supporters to order, allowing the attack to continue while he watched it unfold on television. This inaction not only prolonged the violence on Capitol Hill but also impeded the congressional procedures for counting electoral votes, jeopardizing the safety of Capitol security personnel and legitimately elected members of Congress.

Altogether, these actions by Donald Trump constituted a conspiracy to overturn the legitimate results of the 2020 presidential election. Such actions could have potentially provoked a civil war, something not seen in the U. S. since 1865 (McPherson, 1988).

On the other hand, the intelligence community and law enforcement agencies identified early planning for acts of violence on January 6th, including specific plans by groups such as the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, who ultimately spearheaded the attack on the Capitol. These agencies specifically warned about the possibility of violence on Capitol Hill as January 6th approached, sharing this information with the executive branch, including the Secret Service and the President's National Security Council. However, intelligence gathered prior to January 6th did not indicate likely involvement from Antifa or other leftist groups in violent counter-demonstrations or attacks on Trump supporters that day, as the then-President suggested (Financial Times, 2020). In fact, on January 5th, intelligence agencies indicated that some leftist groups were advising their members to stay home and not participate. Ultimately, none of these groups played a significant role in the attack on the Capitol.

To conclude, neither the intelligence community nor law enforcement fully anticipated the planning by Trump and his associates to reverse the certified election results. They did not foresee Trump's provocation in his speech at the end of the election shutdown, nor did they expect him to urge the crowd to march on the Capitol or to escalate the riot with a tweet condemning Pence. Additionally, they failed to anticipate the full scale of the violence that would follow or that Trump would refuse to ask his supporters to leave the Capitol once the violence began.

Psychosocial Analysis of the Character of Donald Trump

Since the inception of Donald J. Trump's political campaign, he has championed specific ideals centered on restoring the country to what he describes as the American Dream: a place where effort and hard work are always rewarded, and where falling into poverty is attributed solely to excessive idleness or vice. Trump claimed to offer something that had been "lost" during an

era of abundance in the U. S. This sentiment is encapsulated in his famous slogan, "Make America great again", which he used as a closing statement during his 2016 presidential nomination speech.

This phrase raises an important question: Great for whom? Certainly not for minorities, as evidenced by the fact that Jim Crow laws, which enforced racial segregation –particularly against African Americans– were only abolished in the mid-1960s (National Park Service, 2018). Furthermore, slavery was permitted in the nation until it was abolished in 1863 with Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and ratified in 1865 with the 13th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution.

Trump's significant advantage lies in his ability to communicate directly with the public through platforms like Twitter, bypassing the filters of his media team and White House advisors. A notable example is the tweet that incited the January 6th insurrection: "Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!" (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 499). This direct line of communication allowed him to disseminate information that appealed to his followers, even if it was misleading or false. Such unchecked power is inappropriate for a state representative; the highest authority in a nation should always communicate with substantiated and verified facts. Otherwise, he risks manipulating his followers, as people tend to view those in positions of power as reliable sources of information, believing they act with integrity. Given the potential influence of his words, this becomes particularly concerning.

Former President Trump employs tactics similar to those of a fortune teller to connect with his followers. He uses vague language that allows a broad audience to identify with his messages. A clear example is his well-known slogan "Make America great again", which he tweeted on Election Day, November 8th, 2016, as "Let's make America great again". The ambiguity of this phrase enables individuals to interpret it in their own way, allowing them to recall a time when they believed the U. S. was great, regardless of whether that belief is historically accurate. This is the power of effectively applied vague language: it creates the illusion of a deep and cohesive connection. In Trump's case, it fosters a semi-cult-like following among those who idolize him and follow him blindly. As Edelman (1985) stated:

In short, it is not "reality" in any testable or observable sense that matters in shaping political consciousness and behavior, but rather the beliefs that language helps evoke about the causes of discontents and satisfactions, about policies that will bring about a future closer to the heart's desire, and about other unobservables. (p. 11)

Vague language also makes it difficult to refute arguments, as the speakers can always claim that their message was misinterpreted and adjust their statements in response to evidence presented against them. A clear example of this occurred during Trump's 2016 presidential campaign when he asserted on at least three occasions that then-President Barack Obama and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton were the founders of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). When given the opportunity to clarify his remarks by a sympathetic reporter, he doubled down instead. Radio host Hugh Hewitt suggested: "I know what you meant; you meant that he created the vacuum. He lost the peace", to which Trump replied: "No, I meant he's the founder of ISIS. I do" (McCaskill, 2016, par. 8). After CNN's morning show challenged reports on this matter, Trump tweeted: "Ratings challenged @CNN reports so seriously that I call President Obama (and Clinton) 'the founder' of ISIS & MVP" (McCaskill, 2016, par. 2). This example illustrates Trump's tendency to make vague or contextless statements and then assert that he was misunderstood when confronted.

However, the phrase "Make America great again" did not originate with Donald J. Trump. One might reasonably assume that such a famous slogan in recent politics would have been conceived by the person who claims to have invented it, but this is not the case. The phrase was first used on a campaign pin during Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign, which is now preserved in the Smithsonian's archives. This demonstrates that Reagan was the first to adopt the phrase as his main campaign slogan, albeit with a slight variation: "Let's make America great again" (Smithsonian Institution, n.d.). According to the same article, Bill Clinton was the second person to use this celebrated phrase during his 1992 campaign. Although it was not the primary slogan of his campaign, it played a significant role in his messaging (Smithsonian Institution, n.d.).

Continuing the idea from the previous paragraph, it is not inherently wrong to build upon the work of others in politics; however, it is disingenuous to claim authorship of campaign material that you did not create, especially when a central theme of your campaign is fighting against the corrupt elites who use communication channels to spread lies and misinformation. A clear example of this is Trump's well-known expression "fake news". Grynbaum (2019) reported on February 1st, 2019 that, while Trump takes credit for popularizing the phrase, he does not acknowledge that it has contributed to diminishing trust in external scrutiny regarding information. Likewise, Sulzburger (2019), publisher of The New York Times, interviewed then-President Donald Trump regarding his continued use of the phrase "fake news". During the interview, Sulzburger (2019) expressed concern, stating:

I guess the concern I want to raise is the effects that this broad-based attack on journalism and journalists continues to have, which seems to be growing. It particularly appears to be escalating abroad among those who aren't covering your administration. (par. 2)

With this, Sulzberger (2019) pointed out that Trump's sweeping accusations against the press are contributing to an increase in violence against reporters; in this context, "broad" serves as a synonym for "vague". In that sense, these ideas illustrate how Trump's use of vague language serves as a tool to resonate with as many voters as possible. By being ambiguous, he allows constituents to fill in the blanks with their own ideologies, thereby avoiding polarization. But in addition to employing vague language, Trump often retracts his statements or claims he was misunderstood. This vagueness in speech acts as a political tool for manipulation, enabling him to evade accountability and antagonize his critics. Given that Trump was not only a figure of influence and power in the U. S. but also around the world, his rhetoric inadvertently contributes to the oppression of journalists in other nations.

Mike Pence served as Donald Trump's Vice President. In his acceptance speech as the Republican presidential candidate in 2016, Trump said of Pence that he was proud to have at his side the next Vice President of the U. S.: Governor Mike Pence of Indiana. He stated that the same economic success that had been brought to Indiana by Mike would be brought to America. It was said that Mike was a man of character and accomplishment and that he was the right man for the job. The only change regarding Pence from the time when Trump made those remarks to the time when he accused him of treason during the Capitol attack in 2021 was Pence's refusal to betray his nation by declaring that the election had been stolen.

Another reason Trump labeled Pence as a traitor was his request for Pence to "return" votes to their home states for verification and official validation during the ratification process of Biden as the next President. Pence correctly argued that he did not possess the authority to perform that procedure, emphasizing that his role in the event was merely ceremonial (Farley, 2023). Therefore, Pence's life was put at risk during the Capitol attack due to Trump's allegations against him, with attackers heard shouting "Hang Mike Pence" (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 38). The situation escalated for Pence after Trump tweeted:

Mike Pence didn't have the courage to do all that should have been done to protect our country and our Constitution, giving states a chance to certify a corrected set of facts, not the fraudulent or inaccurate ones which they were asked to previously certify. The USA demands the truth! (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 38).

These events demonstrate former President Donald Trump's willingness to manipulate information and leverage the loyalty of his followers to achieve his political aims and reshape public perception. This behavior reveals his disregard for both the truth and the democratic process. In this specific instance, he showed that he was more interested in surrounding himself with individuals who would follow his orders without question, rather than seeking out the most qualified people for the job, regardless of whether their actions violated the law or undermined the very principles of democracy and American identity.

Who Attacked the Capitol on January 6th, 2021?

Cantwell (2021) testified that, if the President of the U. S. was out on TV telling the world that the election had been stolen, what else could be believed by him as a patriotic American who had voted for the President and wanted to see the country thrive as he had thought it was?

This chapter aims to answer the question of who attacked the capitol, and to describe how patriotism may have been a motivating factor for people to march to the Capitol with the intention of “protesting”. Also, there is some interest in exploring why groups, that would typically not be involved in any sort of direct political demonstration, come together to rebel against Joe Biden's victory. There will be a special emphasis on the Proud Boys.

Regarding the participants of the attack, it is known that the groups and individuals who attacked the Capitol were accused, among other things, of seditious conspiracy, which consists of: “to overthrow”, “to oppose by force”, or to use “force to prevent, hinder, or delay the execution of any law of the United States” (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 501). This is significant because it demonstrates the country's intention to bring serious charges related to the incident, charges that pertain to an attempt to overthrow the government. This categorizes the attack as an attempt to prevent the U. S. government from carrying out vital functions necessary for its operation. In short, the attack was among the most serious possible and proves that the event posed a risk to U. S. national security. Preventing the democratic processes that form the foundation of the U. S. is, by definition, a threat to national security. An attempt to disrupt the transfer of power to an elected President also represents a massive threat to national security and is especially serious, since it does not stem from an external threat but rather from divisions within the population, social discontent, and the use of misinformation as a political tool.

Although at the beginning of this master's thesis, the plan to explore the multiple participants of the January 6th 2021 attack existed, upon an extensive investigation of the Proud Boys, I decided that a thorough description and analysis of the Proud Boys would better suit this

thesis instead of many small descriptions of all the actors that were involved in the attack, as there were 50 far right groups involved. A description of each one or even of just the main ones would be unproductive. In the Proud Boys we find the answers for the questions posed for this chapter of the thesis, so there is no need to describe more of the January 6th attackers.

The Proud Boys

Who Are the Proud Boys and What Role did They Play in the Attack on the Capitol on January 6th, 2021?

The Proud Boys are a far-right extremist organization founded by Gavin McInnes in 2017. McInnes is a co-founder of the significant media dissemination group Vice Media (ADL, 2025). As can be seen, from the beginning, the Proud Boys had economic resources and access to political connections due to their creator's position as co-founder of a major media company. These contacts allowed them to be the most influential right-wing group during the Capitol attack, having the endorsement not only of important political figures but also of Donald Trump himself, which is explored in the following paragraphs.

The ideology of the Proud Boys can be summarized in the words of their creator as “western chauvinists who refuse to apologize for creating the modern world” and “long for the days when girls were girls and men were men” (ADL, 2025, par. 22). The word *chauvinist*, according to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.b), means “believing or showing an unreasonable belief that your own country or race is the best or most important. [...] Believing that or behaving as if women are naturally less important, intelligent, or able than men” (par. 1-3). This demonstrates that, from their origin, the Proud Boys perceived themselves as a racist, misogynistic and transphobic group, values that align them, although the Proud Boys take a much more radical stance than traditional, with the values of the American right-wing, conservative and nationalist. In other words, the country of origin is above everything else and seeks the dominance or privilege of the self-perceived original group, in this case, the white majority or the “Americans”.

The values of the Proud Boys also align with those of Donald Trump, probably because he endorsed them during his 2020 campaign, an endorsement described in the following paragraphs. We can see the alignment of Donald Trump's values with those of the Proud Boys in 2022 when he played a significant role in the abolition of *Roe v. Wade*, a legal precedent that made abortion legal at the federal level in the U. S. (ACLU, 2024).

Trump's efforts to abolish the universal right to abortion in the U. S. are a clear display of misogyny, as they compromise the bodily autonomy of the country's residents, nullifying their right to decide about their own bodies and reducing options for women not to become mothers in the case of an unwanted pregnancy. Any attempt to justify the abolition of abortion with religious commandments is immediately discredited by the First Amendment of the U. S., which guarantees that the government will not make laws based on any religion, ensuring the separation of church and state (United States Congress, n.d.). This topic of Trump and religion is discussed in more detail in the following chapters of this thesis.

On the other hand, there is an ideological point that Trump shares with the Proud Boys, that is, the tendency towards racism, observable when he stated, in 2015 at Trump Tower, that Mexico sends rapists to the U. S. in the form of illegal immigrants. The words he used were the following:

The US has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems.

Thank you. It's true, and these are the best and the finest. When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. (Time, 2015, par. 8-9)

In the quote, it is evident how Trump generalizes about a vulnerable group, exploiting the statistical probability that among them there might be a criminal, as he does not provide any statistics or solid examples to support his claim. Moreover, within any group of humans, by simple probability, there will be those who break the law and exploit the system, just as there will be those who stand out positively and support social welfare. What Trump does with this is a process known as "othering", which, according to the Montreal Holocaust Museum (n.d.), involves isolating one group of people from another through slander, making the group appear different from the other in a negative way, denigrating and even stripping them of their humanity. This process ends in an "us vs. them" mentality and prepares society to become hostile towards the vulnerable group and commit inhumane atrocities against them.

Transphobia is another characteristic that Trump shares with the Proud Boys, as seen at the end of his 2024 political campaign, where his team paid for ads with an evidently transphobic message. Romano (2024) describes one of the ads as saying, "Kamala even supports letting biological men compete against our girls in their sports" (par. 3). Here, he takes one of the most

controversial topics regarding transsexuality in the U. S., the right of trans athletes to participate in sports. The topic is controversial because, in certain cases, it is considered that the transitioned athlete may have an advantage over “native to the sport” athletes. The debate between Smallwood and Burton (2023) perfectly illuminates the controversy, although from a measured and respectful perspective of both sides. In the debate, they address points such as the right of trans athletes to be fully considered by their new sex and the possible advantages and disadvantages that one of these athletes would have when competing.

One of the key points in the debate about transsexuality is in areas such as weightlifting, where it is presumed that someone who had access to male hormones associated with greater muscle mass and strength than female hormones would have an advantage over those who did not. This argument does not take into account the disadvantage that taking hormones to transition and maintain the transition can imply: the side effects of these hormones can be a significant disadvantage in a hyper-competitive athletic environment. This topic is controversial and highly complex, and it depends on individual circumstances, so each case where a transsexual athlete competes is different; therefore, it is incorrect for a society to judge and exert social pressure to ban all transsexual athletes. The deliberation about the participation or non-participation of a trans athlete in a specific event should be solely the responsibility of the committee of that discipline, as they theoretically have the necessary training to make the decision and have access to the athletes' studies where they can see the medical parameters necessary to make decisions regarding the athlete's fitness to compete.

Banning an entire group for exercising their right to live their sexuality and gender in the way that makes them happiest is insensitive and cruel. However, the severity of the act goes beyond the cruelty of exclusion; it is once again the practice of othering, of disqualifying a group and vilifying them by highlighting selected controversial aspects of the group to discredit the entire group. In this case, the narrative is “the evil transsexuals enter events they don't belong to and dominate the competition” or, more clearly, “the transsexuals are taking your place and your children's place in sports”.

In the U. S., only 0.06 % of the population is transgender (Flores, Herman and O'Neill, 2022). In sports, the exact number of transgender athletes is not known, but it is estimated that there are five from kindergarten to twelfth grade and approximately one hundred at the collegiate level. Trump spent USD 40 million on ads with the purpose of defaming the transgender community (Romano, 2024), and to spend this amount of money to discredit 0.06 % of the population is an unprecedented display of discrimination and hatred by a U. S. President.

The issue of Trump and his transphobia is important because it illustrates the process by which he discredits a group, and this process can be extrapolated to the attack on the Capitol on January 6th, 2021, where he also used othering processes to divide the population into "us v. them", those who "made the right decision" and voted for him and those who did not, "condemning the country".

Continuing with the idea of the "original American" or "true American", in the case of the U. S., this is impossible to establish because, from the country's inception, it has been a mix of different cultures and people from different nationalities. USA Hello (2022) states that the U. S. has received many migrants since the 17th century, and 40 % of its population is not white. It is observed that the U. S. is a very non-homogeneous country, especially when compared to countries like Japan, where the number of foreign residents is only 2.7 %, meaning that the rest of the population, 97.3 %, is Japanese, making it a highly homogeneous country (SwissInfo, 2024). This is even reflected within the group of the Proud Boys, which, despite having white supremacist overtones, has members who are not stereotypically American, such as their leader at the time of the Capitol attack, Enrique Tarrio, who is Cuban-American. This demonstrates that even in white supremacist groups, it is difficult to distinguish what exactly an "American" is (ADL, 2025).

The Proud Boys were the extremist group with the most relevance and involvement during the attack on the Capitol on January 6th, 2021. They were involved in the planning and execution of the attack. From the beginning, they knew they did not have enough men to carry out the assault, so they planned to use Trump's followers to gather enough people to prevent the ratification of Joe Biden's victory as President of the U. S. This phenomenon is described by Joscelyn (2024): "The group's leadership likely knew that they did not have enough men to overrun the Capitol themselves, so they planned to rile up the so-called 'normies' or 'normiecons' –that is, thousands of Trump supporters– on January 6th" (par. 7). According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.), a normie is "a normal, average, or ordinary person: a person with mainstream attitudes, interests, etc." (par. 1). According to this definition, when the Proud Boys talk about normies, they refer to Trump supporters and the Republican Party with more normal or standard social tendencies, not radical ones. This could help explain why seemingly normal citizens, not members of any extremist association, attacked their own Capitol under the influence of radical protestors which were present.

Prior to the attack, they organized into groups with a determined hierarchy, with the objective of preventing the transfer of power to Biden. The group's organization can be observed

in the members who were arrested after the attack; these individuals came from different parts of the country, requiring solid logistics to transport their members from their hometowns to the capital (Joscelyn, 2024). The determined hierarchy, along with the predetermined tactics used to motivate the protesters to enter the Capitol by breaking police lines, clearly indicate premeditation. They indicate that there was a plan to take the Capitol by force and prevent the ratification of Joe Biden's victory in the presidency, a plan that perfectly aligns with Donald Trump's interests for that day, exemplified by the speech he gave at the Ellipse, which was previously discussed in this work.

The strategy of using the protesters on January 6th, 2021 to attack the Capitol, as previously mentioned, is reminiscent of guerrilla tactics or paramilitary operations, where a small number of elements influence the civilian population that is discontent with the regime or shares ideals with the insurgent or invading movement to overthrow or obstruct the actions of the ruling group. This was precisely attempted during the Bay of Pigs incident in Cuba, where a small group of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operatives tried to use the civilian population to overthrow the then ruler [Fidel Castro] (JFK Library, 2024). In that case, the attempt to oust Castro failed because the CIA did not have the general approval of the population towards the ruler. They thought that being a dictatorial regime, the population did not want the dictator and would be willing to take the option that the U. S. offered them to gain freedom and, with it, democracy. According to JFK Library (2024), “the success of the plan depended on the Cuban population joining the invaders” (par. 8). But the Cuban population not only refused to join the coup attempt but also proceeded to help capture the CIA operatives who arrived on the island.

Although the situation of the Bay of Pigs is not an exact comparison to the attack on the White House, as one attempt was carried out by foreign forces that did not fully understand the socio-political environment of the country they were invading, while the other was carried out within the same country by individuals who were already proven followers of the cause (as they were present at a rally in favor of it), many parallels can still be found between the two situations. Starting with the most evident, in both cases, an attempt was made to radicalize a civilian group to achieve revolutionary objectives, using a small force of infiltrators.

One of the main reasons why the Capitol attack was successful and the Bay of Pigs incident was not is the type of patriotism involved. In the Bay of Pigs case, the population showed positive patriotism towards their country's regime (regardless of whether this is ethically good or bad, it is still a display of patriotism beneficial for the established social order) by defending the status quo and refusing to fight against their government. However, the January 6th protesters

who became rioters showed blind patriotism: with little pressure and incitement from the Proud Boys, the civilians stormed a high-security government building while processes were underway to safeguard and ratify the country's democracy through constitutional measures. It could even be argued that the January 6th protesters showed blind patriotism from the moment they attended the rally, as it was a rally to try to compromise the American people's right to choose their leader, a rally they attended deceived by their idol and then-President, who took advantage of their blind patriotism to manipulate them.

The attempt by a minority to overturn a decision legally made by the majority of the country's citizens, regarding who would be the next President, is a clear example of the effects that blind patriotism can have on a nation. Of course, in this instance, it was not blind patriotism in its natural state (without alterations or provocations) that caused the incident, but rather blind patriotism manipulated by a political group with a specific goal. Although blind patriotism was not the decisive factor in the attack, it had a significant impact, both on extremist groups willing to do whatever it takes to see their vision of an illegal country realized, and on citizens who were manipulated by appeals to their unconstructive patriotism to attend the rally and subsequently join the riots.

The main reason why the Proud Boys are the most prominent extremist group in the Capitol attack is due to the endorsements they received from important right-wing political figures. One of the most significant instances of this was when Roger Stone gave them his approval. Stone was a prominent political advisor to several right-wing Presidents, including Trump. Stone was especially close to members of the Proud Boys in 2018, where he took multiple photos with their members, used them as private security, and even made and posted the group's oath on social media (ADL, 2025). That such an important political leader as Stone is so close to a radical group is extremely concerning, as it gives political influence to a group whose guiding principles are discrimination and misogyny, an entity that compromises the safety and well-being of a significant portion of the nation's population.

The most important political figure associated with the Proud Boys is Donald J. Trump himself, who in 2020, when asked to state a message against the Proud Boys, said: "Stand back and stand by" (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 507), as it was mentioned before. The Proud Boys took this as a badge of honor, ecstatic that Trump addressed them directly and asked them to "stand by", implicitly saying that they should wait for future orders, that he would need them in the future.

Trump's support greatly benefited this radical organization, so much that days after the message, their numbers tripled, and they began to wear and sell clothing with the famous phrase and their representative colors, yellow and black (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 508). It is an unprecedented fact that the President of a nation associates with extremists, which implies that he himself associates with the values that the Proud Boys represent, a fact already mentioned in the previous paragraphs. Donald Trump endorsed the extremist group because he shares their ideology and because they were a force willing to march for his interests and go to any lengths to please him and gain his recognition.

Returning to the topic of the Proud Boys on the day of the attack, they did not wear their traditional uniform of yellow and black clothing; instead, they donned ordinary clothes to blend in with regular attendees at the demonstration. This decision was reportedly made under orders from their leader, Henry Enrique Tarrio (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022). This could have been an attempt to avoid detection by authorities so they could evade accountability for their actions that day or to create an impression that those trying to subvert the election were ordinary citizens rather than political extremists.

The most likely interpretation is that they wanted to look like ordinary citizens demonstrating against their government and demanding “justice” for what they perceived as election theft. This image is much more compelling, because people are more inclined to empathize with fellow citizens fighting for justice than with political radicals seeking to impose their ideals through force. The evidence that the Proud Boys were not trying to avoid consequences by abandoning their traditional colors lies in their previous behavior: when they marched in support of Trump or his ideals, they consistently wore their colors proudly as part of a cherished uniform, even committing crimes while wearing these uniforms. A notable instance occurred during the demonstration in Downtown Washington in December of 2020, particularly around Black Lives Matter Plaza, where hundreds of Trump supporters donned the aforementioned black and yellow uniforms (Hermann, Lang and Williams, 2020). During this demonstration, there were fights, property destruction, assaults on police officers, and resistance against arrest. A total of 33 individuals were arrested during this event, comprising both pro-Trump protesters –including Proud Boys– and anti-Trump protesters, such as Black Lives Matter activists (Hermann, Lang and Williams, 2020).

This dispute is just one example of the multiple violent demonstrations in which the Proud Boys have participated since 2016, the year their extremist group was founded (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022). Since then, they have consistently worn their uniforms during violent

demonstrations, seeking to provoke confrontations with those who oppose their far-right ideals. This indicates that their choice not to wear their recognizable uniforms during the January 6th attack was intended to make them appear as ordinary citizens rather than to hide their identities, because in the past they never did so, even when it resulted in arrests.

As it can be observed in this chapter about the Proud Boys, they are the perfect medium to describe how different radical groups interacted with Donald J. Trump and his team. Through them and their involvement in the events of January 6th attack, the process through which “normal” Trump supporters were pushed to break into the capitol building is exposed, showing that, small groups of right-wing extremists riled up the crowd present during the January 6th protest to attack the capitol. Finally, the Proud Boys were shouted out by Trump, when he said to them: stand back and stand by, showing a direct connection to them, making them ideal to make a comparison between their ideals and Trump’s.

The Role of Different Types of Patriotism in the January 6th Attacks

According to Baumeister (2025), patriotism is “a feeling of attachment and commitment to a country, nation, or political community” (par. 1). This definition is straightforward but, when complemented by the four components of patriotism –“a strong love for the country of birth, having the country as a strong defining characteristic, caring deeply for the well-being of the country, and being willing to make significant sacrifices for it” (Nathanson, 1997, p. x)–, we arrive at a more comprehensive understanding.

As indicated by this definition, patriotism is generally viewed as beneficial for a country's national security. So, why did a group of individuals, consisting of Republican voters and right-leaning political groups perceived as highly patriotic, attack the U. S. Capitol, jeopardizing not only state security but also the very principles it upholds: liberty and democracy? Can the emphasis on fostering patriotism among U. S. citizens have negative consequences? Did then-President Donald Trump use the people's patriotism to inspire the attack? These questions will be explored in the following part of the thesis.

Blind and Constructive Patriotism

According to Schatz and Staub (1997), patriotism can be divided into two categories: constructive and blind (or unconstructive). The former refers to a type of patriotism that is willing to criticize the object of its affection, while the latter blindly idolizes that object, refusing to accept

any debate about its greatness or correctness. In the U. S., most voters tend to support the same party election cycle after election cycle, regardless of the candidate or their proposals.

According to the Pew Research Center (2024), 65 % of voters are already affiliated with a party –either Democrats or Republicans–, while only 35 % identify as independents. Among these independents, 31 % lean toward a party, exhibiting behaviors almost identical to those affiliated with a party. Therefore, for practical purposes, only 4 % of registered voters are truly independent, demonstrating behavior consistent with constructive patriotism. In contrast, 96 % already know for whom they will vote even before the presidential candidates for their party are publicly announced, reflecting a tendency toward blind patriotism.

As observed, most voting preferences are typically established before elections begin. However, this does not necessarily mean there is no variation among voters. According to the same Pew Research Center (2024), which covered the period from 1994 to 2023, there was a variation of 4 % between registered voters of both parties throughout the analyzed period. This indicates that some voters changed their party affiliation during certain election cycles; however, this variation is not substantial. This information is relevant to this thesis because it illustrates how deeply rooted Americans are in their chosen political parties, along with their values and principles. It paints a scenario in which it does not take much to alienate voters of one party from those of another and create hostilities between them, leading to events such as those on January 6th.

Authors like Conover, Searing and Crewe (2004) did research on the perception of the American population regarding what makes a good citizen, and they found that voting is the main consideration. In contrast, the British population does not perceive voting as a key factor to be an “exemplary citizen”. This means that the right to vote and the right to fair elections are crucial to the American national identity. The interpretation that this sacred right is being violated could lead a portion of the nationalistic population to attack their own country, believing it is corrupt and must be returned to its correct form.

Such an event occurred during the January 6th Capitol attack, when the then-acting President persistently spread lies about the legitimacy of the election, proclaiming it had been stolen and appealing to the patriotism of his followers to incite them to invade the Capitol in an attempt to alter the election results. He sought to retain power for a second consecutive four-year term. In other words, Donald Trump manipulated the blind patriotism of his supporters to do his bidding, using it to legitimize his empire and lies, and to maintain his hold on power. As a matter

of fact, during a 2019 interview about the U. S.-China tariff war, Donald Trump looked to the sky prophetically and proclaimed that he was “the chosen one” (Cillizza, 2019). In his book, Trump and Schwartz (2009) had this to say about hyperbole:

The final key to the way I promote is bravado. I play to people's fantasies. People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That's why a little hyperbole never hurts. People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It's an innocent form of exaggeration, and a very effective form of promotion. (p. 58)

The President of a nation cannot constantly use “an innocent form of exaggeration”. While hyperbole may be an effective strategy for a businessman to make deals, honesty and integrity – both in character and actions– are vital for a successful mandate as a leader. A President should not look up to the sky and proclaim himself “the chosen one”, only to later claim it was merely a metaphor or a form of eloquence. Supporters who, even when confronted with actions unworthy of a President, continue to treat his behavior as a game or amuse themselves by viewing him as a walking meme or some sort of genius manipulating the media to keep himself in office, are exhibiting blind patriotism.

The U. S. as a Patriotic Nation

Since preschool, children pledge allegiance to the flag daily, promising loyalty to it and to the nation. Most public educational institutions throughout the U. S. are required by law to have teachers lead the Pledge of Allegiance on all school days. Failure to comply with this requirement can result in penalties for public schools. Only the states of Arizona, Hawaii, Vermont and Wyoming do not mandate the pledge by law (Freedom Forum, n.d.). This practice is relevant to the present thesis because it serves as a clear example of a U. S. instrument used to instill patriotism –essentially, love for the country– in the population. Reciting a daily oath of loyalty to the flag and the nation fosters social cohesion among citizens. This tool or symbol is particularly effective as it is employed during formative years.

In the late 1930s, two young brothers named Gobitas refused to recite the Pledge of Allegiance for religious reasons. As Jehovah's Witnesses, they found it blasphemous and contrary to their beliefs to pledge allegiance to the flag of the U. S., as their loyalty could only belong to their God (Freedom Forum, n.d.). The two children were expelled from school for their refusal, prompting their parents to sue the school district. After winning in several lower courts, the case reached the court of appeals, where it was determined that being forced to recite the pledge did

not infringe upon the children's rights. Consequently, their refusal could be interpreted as insubordination, making the decision to expel them legitimate and lawful (Freedom Forum, n.d.). One of the reasons the court ruled in favor of the school district rather than the Gobitas family was the importance of maintaining national cohesion. The court stated:

So far as the Federal Constitution is concerned, it is within the province of the legislatures and school authorities of the several States to adopt appropriate means to evoke and foster a sentiment of national unity among the children in the public schools. (Supreme Court of the United States, 1940, p. 586)

Similarly, Justice Frankfurter of the court of appeals remarked regarding the resolution of the Gobitas case: "National unity is the basis of national security. To deny the legislature the right to select appropriate means for its attainment presents a totally different order of problem" (p. 595). As indicated by these quotes, the court considered that the national cohesion fostered through the patriotic act of honoring the flag was so crucial that it even outweighed the Gobitas children's right to a free education. Furthermore, these statements highlight the significance that the U. S. places on patriotism as a means to achieve national unity, illustrating that patriotism is a fundamental part of American culture. From childhood, citizens are instilled with a sense of duty to honor and respect their country.

This paper explores how love for one's country can evolve into something that poses a danger to national integrity. This paragraph demonstrates that the U. S. is an exceptionally patriotic nation and suggests that patriotism can transform into something negative, such as blind patriotism, which stands in contrast to constructive patriotism, an essential component for the health of a state, especially one as large and culturally diverse as the U. S.

Between 1923 and 1945, the Pledge of Allegiance read: "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the U. S. and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all" (Britannica, 2025a, par. 1). This is significant because it was not until 1945 that the phrase "under God" was added after "one nation" (Crawford, 2015). The addition of this phrase was particularly important due to the Cold War. It aimed to distinguish the American population from the Soviet Union, as devotion to God was a key aspect of American identity at that time, while atheism was central to Soviet ideology (Kirby, 2017). This illustrates how patriotic symbols are employed in the U. S. to differentiate itself from other cultures, highlighting the nation's individuality and guiding principles. It is somewhat ironic that children were compelled to recite the Pledge of Allegiance until 1943, even when they had religious objections, only for a religious tone to be added in 1945, a tone that remains in the pledge today.

The First Amendment guarantees freedom of religion and stipulates that no religion shall be prioritized over another under the law. However, as noted in the previous paragraph, one of the most important national symbols of the U. S. mentions God: "One nation under God". This is problematic because it presents the U. S. as a religious and devout nation, which contradicts the intent of the First Amendment. Although the phrase from the anthem does not specify a particular God, it is evident from the context that it refers to the Christian God. According to the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI, 2024), 63 % of residents in the U. S. are affiliated with some branch of Christianity. Another contextual clue regarding the God referenced in the Pledge of Allegiance is the time when the amendment was enacted; as mentioned earlier, it was introduced during the Cold War. This timing is significant because it highlights the need for American patriotism, which aimed to distinguish American values from those of its adversaries. As Kirby (2017) notes, "Truman made religion America's ideological justification for abandoning wartime cooperation with the Soviet Union. Eisenhower used religion to persuade the world that America was a force for good in the international arena" (par. 1). This illustrates that patriotism is a powerful tool that can help a country achieve its national objectives. In the specific context of the Cold War, patriotism was used alongside religion to portray Russia –once a key ally of the U. S.– as a godless enemy threatening the very essence of the American way of life.

The situation of the Gobitas brothers would repeat itself in 1943 when the Barnett sisters were expelled from their public school for refusing to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. In this case, the situation escalated further, as authorities threatened to send the sisters to a reformatory school and imprison their parents (Supreme Court of the United States, 1943). Similar to the Gobitas case, the Barnett family decided to sue, and this time the court ruled in favor of the family. To this day, the case of *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* (Supreme Court of the United States, 1943) sets a precedent for the right of American students to refuse to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The fact that the U. S. once mandated young students to pledge allegiance to the flag by law –despite this violating their religious rights and freedom of speech– demonstrates how crucial the formation of patriotic citizens is to the U. S. as a nation. This commitment to patriotism shows that even though freedom is one of their founding values, they were willing to compromise it in favor of national unity. In short, the Gobitas case illustrates how important patriotism is to the U. S.

The U. S. is a patriotic nation out of necessity; its vast geographical expanse and the diverse ethnic backgrounds of its inhabitants make patriotism essential. Without a strong sense of belonging and love for one's nation, this large country could fragment into many smaller entities.

There is already a growing desire for secession in the U. S., with states like Alaska, Texas and California showing significant support for separation from the Union. In Alaska, 31 % of the population favors secession; in Texas, 31 %; and in California, 29 % (Orth, 2024). These high rates of separatism are driven by the polarization of political parties in the U. S. and the prevalence of blind patriotism over constructive patriotism. This topic is explored in the next chapter.

Continuing with the ideas from the last paragraph, another reason for patriotism in the U. S. is its status as a military power. In 2023, the U. S. spent USD 916 billion on its military, making it the country with the largest military budget in the world. The combined military budgets of the four nations that rank below the U. S. amount to just over half of its budget. China, which has the second-largest military budget, spends USD 296 billion annually, equivalent to only 32.31 % of the U. S. budget (Tian et al., 2024). In terms of active military personnel, the U. S. ranks third with 1 328 000 service members, following China and India (Statista, 2024). These figures clearly illustrate the military power of the U. S., indicating that it holds military supremacy globally and is highly focused on militarism. This is where patriotism plays a role; according to U. S. objectives, it serves as a constructive tool to instill a sense of sacrifice for the nation and to build a national identity in which being a soldier and going to war are viewed as honorable actions. The number of active-duty personnel in the U. S. reflects the effectiveness of this mechanism, as does the general approval of the U. S. military among citizens.

In the U. S., 60 % of the population believes that the military is a positive institution (Pew Research Center, 2024). While this may seem low, it is typical given that the U. S. employs patriotic propaganda to bolster support for the military and war efforts. A clear example of this is the Iraq War. Before the war began, public support was relatively low; according to Gallup (n.d.), in 2002, it reached its lowest point at 52 %. However, by March of that same year, Gallup (n.d.) reported that 72 % of the population favored the war. This shift can be attributed to propaganda that appealed to the patriotic sentiments of the public and emphasized the imminent danger posed by the enemy to the American way of life.

Regarding this, Altheide and Grimes (2005) explain how President George W. Bush's administration used propaganda to promote the Iraq War through three key points: that Saddam Hussein was involved in the attacks on the Twin Towers, that Iraq did not meet United Nations weapons inspection standards, and that Iraq was hiding weapons of mass destruction. The authors also note that the media predominantly disseminated pro-war messages while ignoring dissenting viewpoints, making it difficult for even senators to voice opposition to the war in Iraq.

In short, the U. S. requires patriotism to maintain cohesion in its vast and culturally diverse population. “In 2020, the United States hosted, by far, the highest number of immigrants in the world, with over 50 million people born outside the country residing there. Germany and Saudi Arabia followed, with around 16 and 13 million, respectively” (Galan, 2025). As this quote illustrates, the U. S. has the greatest diversity of foreign inhabitants globally, encompassing a wide array of cultures, religions, ideals and, more importantly, perspectives on interpreting the world. To unite these many differences within its population, constructive patriotism is a necessary mechanism.

This section of the thesis explores how patriotism is employed as a tool for national cohesion, particularly through the mandatory recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools. The pledge serves to indoctrinate citizens from childhood to love and protect America and its values. Its significance is underscored by the fact that it has historically been prioritized over essential citizens' rights, such as the right to education, free speech, and freedom of religion, as demonstrated in the case of *Minersville v. Gobitis* (Supreme Court of the United States, 1940). This case showed that, at least for a time, the U. S. was willing to deny children public education if they refused to recite the Pledge of Allegiance each school day. This is especially concerning when considering that the pledge contains a religious undertone, specifically in the phrase “one nation under God”, as it was already mentioned before. Although this phrase was added after courts ruled it unconstitutional to deny children public education for refusing to pledge allegiance, it remains troubling that the most ethnically diverse country in the world incorporates a specific religion into one of its primary tools for national cohesion. This approach undermines the multitude of deities worshiped in the country and jeopardizes the separation of church and state.

Returning to the point made at the beginning of the previous paragraph, according to Statista (2024), the U. S. is the third-largest country in the world, following Russia and China. This is another reason why the U. S. needs patriotism to maintain unity and why it has gone so far as to risk the separation of church and state guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution (United States Congress, n.d.). As it was referenced in the previous paragraphs, this violation of the First Amendment occurred when the phrase “under God” was added to the Pledge of Allegiance. This addition aimed to emphasize one of the primary characteristics of the U. S. during the Cold War: its religiosity, which stood in contrast to the atheism of the Soviet Union (Kirby, 2017). Religion was used as a tool to generate patriotism among the population and to promote military propaganda by portraying the Russian enemy as pagan and opposed to God, thereby fostering a willingness among Americans to fight against a former ally from World War II.

For all the reasons mentioned in this section, the U. S. is necessarily a patriotic nation. This is important for this thesis because it is precisely this essential patriotism that was manipulated and exploited during the attack on the Capitol on January 6th, 2021. Patriotism was used to recruit both extremists and ordinary members of American society by invoking national love and the need to protect the “real American way of life”. This rhetoric then militarized these recruits by antagonizing the opposing side, namely the Democratic Party and its voters. In this context, blind patriotism is co-opted for nefarious purposes, twisting citizens' love for their country to push them toward radical actions they would not normally consider. This manipulation was a key factor in the January 6th uprising, as distorted patriotism was employed to argue that the elections were stolen by the Democrats. The narrative suggested that if the election was not corrected and the presidency granted to the “rightful winner”, it would spell the end of democracy and the “American way of life”. This topic is explored in the following pages.

A Nation Divided by Patriotism

Patriotism, intended to create unity and cohesion in a society through love and devotion to the homeland, has the opposite effect in the U. S. It fosters a deep divide between two highly polarized groups: the left and right political factions. This divide is rooted in what may be the essence of U. S. politics: a constant battle to portray the opposing candidate as incompetent, dangerous, or even evil. Such characterizations are harmful, as they not only vilify the opposing candidate but also their supporters. This vilification promotes blind patriotism among citizens. The issue is that there are not just one but two forms of patriotism: one from the right and one from the left:

[...] The 2020 presidential election further highlighted these deep-seated divides. Supporters of Biden and Trump believe the differences between them are about more than just politics and policies. A month before the election, roughly eight-in-ten registered voters in both camps said their differences with the other side were about core American values, and roughly nine-in-ten –again in both camps– worried that a victory by the other would lead to “lasting harm” to the United States. (Dimock and Wike, 2020, par. 3)

As the quote illustrates, both political factions harbor a deep fear that if one side wins over the other, the country will descend into hopelessness and chaos. This division extends beyond merely choosing the next leader; it revolves around determining the nation's destiny, with a poor decision potentially leading to the end of the “American way of life” or even the dissolution of the country itself. This fear drives both sides to resort to violence against each other, blaming one

another for making choices that steer the country in the wrong direction. As it is explored later, this significant division is partly fueled by politicians who, during their presidential campaigns, engage in extensive smear campaigns against one another.

As already mentioned, the patriotic divide is generated and exacerbated by the irresponsibility of presidential candidates, who construct narratives suggesting that the victory of the opposing party poses a threat to their lifestyle, ideology, and even fundamental human rights. Thus, elections do not merely represent a logistical change in which the most “competent” candidate leads the country for the “common good”; they symbolize the potential end of a way of life, the restriction of rights and, ultimately, the annihilation of the U. S. and its ideals. As Kleinfeld (2023) states, “American politicians are highly ideologically polarized. In other words, they believe in and vote for different sets of policies, with little overlap. This trend has grown steadily and unbroken for decades” (par. 1).

In this context, voters' patriotism is invoked –whether consciously or unconsciously– as they are incited to take action at the ballot box to defend their nation and prevent its decline or destruction. They are also encouraged to become living marketing tools, convincing others to vote for their party to fulfill their civic and patriotic duty and prevent the “enemy” from taking control of the great American superpower.

In the case of the January 6th events, there was a call to action that extended beyond merely voting or persuading others to support one’s party. There was an explicit call to take over the Capitol and “fight” for Donald Trump to be recognized as the legitimate winner of the 2020 election. A notable quote from Rudy Giuliani (as cited in REV, 2021) during the Save America rally states: “Let's have trial by combat. I'm willing to stake my reputation; the President is willing to stake his reputation on the fact that we're going to find criminality there” (par. 2). While Rudy Giuliani (as cited in REV, 2021) does not directly incite any specific actions, his language implies a call to arms, particularly with his reference to “trial by combat”. This term refers to an ancient ritual in which two individuals fight, with victory signifying not only personal strength but also divine support, suggesting that God favors those fighting for just causes (Britannica, n.d.). Additionally, the title of his speech at the Ellipse in 2021, “Save America Rally”, suggests that America is in need of salvation, implying a serious and imminent threat. Coupled with Trump's constant rhetoric about a stolen election and the dangers to democracy if this theft goes unpunished, this creates an implicit call to action. Another example of Giuliani (as cited in REV, 2021) inciting public sentiment at the Save America rally is found in his statement:

This has been a year in which they have invaded our freedom of speech, our freedom of religion, our freedom to move, our freedom to live. I'll be darned if they're going to take away our free and fair vote. And we're going to fight to the very end to make sure that doesn't happen. (par. 2)

In this instance, Giuliani (as cited in REV, 2021) directly addresses an active threat to fundamental American rights while emphasizing a commitment to fight for them. Although his message is cryptic, it is clear he refers to the Democratic Party and its members as a threat. Through this speech, he reinforces the dangerous division between "us" and "them", framing it as a conflict between good and evil, that is, Republicans v. Democrats. This way, by offering only two choices (Republicans and Democrats) the political system fosters division. Additionally, the existence of fixed political parties further entrenches this separation. Ideally, we should have independent candidates who do not identify strictly as left or right-wing but instead emphasize their competence and ability to lead the country through their proposals and track records.

The notion of belonging to a liberal or conservative ideological framework should not be a decisive factor in electing a candidate, nor should it be a fundamental aspect of their campaign. Each citizen should evaluate candidates based on their individual judgment and the candidates' proposals along a flexible ideological spectrum. This spectrum should not be rigid; it must be adaptable, reflecting the dynamic nature of human society and the evolutionary capacities of living creatures.

In other words, progress requires change and adaptation. An electoral process that features only two opposing parties will inevitably lead to division. If these parties adhere to a rigid moral code based on historical positions and use this code to shape legislation, stagnation will follow in the U. S.

It can be said that Rudolph Giuliani is a significant figure in the discussion of the 2021 attack on the Capitol, as he was Donald Trump's personal attorney at that time. However, it is essential to understand his background prior to this role. Giuliani was a prominent lawyer in New York City, serving as a private attorney and working for the New York Justice Department. He also held the position of U. S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York. In 1993, he won the election to become Mayor of New York City, where he was recognized for reducing crime rates and lowering public spending. Another notable achievement was his effective response to the September 11th, 2001 attacks, during which four commercial airliners were hijacked and two of them crashed into the Twin Towers of New York City (Britannica, 2025b).

As of 2018, Giuliani served as Donald Trump's personal attorney. In this role, he represented Trump in some of his most significant legal controversies, including the impeachment proceedings in 2019 and the attempts to subvert the 2020 election (Britannica, 2025b). Therefore, Giuliani not only fulfilled the role of Donald Trump's personal attorney, but he also became a crucial part of the marketing machine for the then-President and a key player in the plot to overturn the election so Trump could retain power. Evidence of this is found in his frequent appearances on Fox News, where he discussed alleged cases of electoral fraud, as well as his speech at the rally that took place before the attack on the Capitol on January 6th, 2021.

Giuliani and his colleague Sidney Powell, another of Trump's personal lawyers, began appearing on Fox News five days after the election concluded, where they consistently spread falsehoods about the trustworthiness of Dominion and Smartmatic voting systems, the two main companies that manufactured voting machines for the 2020 elections (Cooper, 2022). Regarding the voting machine companies, Giuliani (as cited in Cooper, 2022) had this to say: "Smartmatic is a company that was formed by three Venezuelans who were very close to, very close to the dictator, Chavez, of Venezuela, and it was formed in order to fix elections. That's the, that's the company that owns Dominion" (par. 14).

Although it is true that Smartmatic was founded in Venezuela and used in Venezuelan elections, which are not known for their transparency, the company must undergo an extensive vetting process to certify that its machines comply with security standards for U. S. elections (The Colorado Sun, 2021). On the other hand, Dominion has no ties to Venezuela and is not associated with it in any way (Feuer, 2021).

Ironically, the document previously cited is a memo from Trump's electoral campaign team. It contains information about companies that manufacture electronic equipment to facilitate the electoral process, specifically focusing on Dominion, Smartmatic and Sequoia. The memo was intended to support claims that the machines produced by these companies were used to commit fraud and alter votes cast for then-President Trump in favor of his rival, Joe Biden. However, it ultimately revealed that there was no evidence of the voting machines altering ballots and that these companies were not connected to foreign entities attempting to interfere in U. S. elections (Feuer, 2021).

This memo is relevant to the present work as it is part of a long list of falsehoods that Donald J. Trump has labeled "the big lie". These claims, made by the former President, suggest a conspiracy aimed at preventing him from serving a second consecutive presidential term. According to Trump, the conspiracies associated with "the big lie" were intended to steal an

election he believed he had legitimately won, an assertion for which there is still no evidence today. The cases discussed in this chapter, including those related to mail-in ballots and voting machines, further illustrate that there is no substantiation for any of the claims linked to "the big lie". On the contrary, these cases demonstrate that the conspiracy theory is false (Wolf, 2021).

Another case involved in the series of false conspiracy theories that constitute "the big lie" is that of Ruby Freeman and her daughter Wandrea Shaye Moss, two election workers during the 2020 election in the swing state of Georgia. The two workers were accused of interfering with the election process in favor of the Democratic candidate Joe Biden. The theory propagated claimed that Freeman and her daughter used their positions as public servants to scan Biden's votes multiple times while failing to scan Trump's votes, as Freeman was seen taking ballots out from under a table and processing them (Humes, 2023). One of the most prominent figures spreading the conspiracy theory about Freeman and Moss was Rudy Giuliani. Ruby Freeman's role was to scan ballots for recording and counting, while Wandrea Moss served as a supervisor for processing mail-in ballots during the 2020 election in Georgia. Freeman held a seasonal position, whereas Moss's role was permanent (Humes, 2023).

The accusations began when an Instagram account, allegedly belonging to Freeman, uploaded stories claiming she had interfered in the election process with help from her daughter. Accusers argued that, in addition to Freeman's posts, Republican observers –tasked with monitoring the vote count to ensure there was no fraud– left before all votes were counted. It was believed they departed because Moss told them they had to go, allowing for fraud to occur without oversight (Humes, 2023).

Within the processing team, there were two main types of employees: those responsible for cutting open the envelopes containing votes cast by citizens and those operating the machines that printed and marked official ballots with the candidates selected by voters, as well as scanning them for electronic counting. After scanning, these ballots were kept as a physical backup of the votes cast. Freeman worked in the scanning process (Humes, 2023).

At approximately 10:30 p. m., Moss asked the cutters to leave since their work for the day was complete. The absentee ballots that had not yet been scanned were methodically organized into boxes for resumption of scanning the next day. Once stored, these boxes were sealed to prevent tampering. After the boxes were sealed and placed under a table, Ralph Jones, Moss's manager, arrived at the State Farm Arena, the designated location for counting mail-in ballots. Shortly after his arrival, Jones received a call from his supervisor instructing that ballot scanners continue working through the night because more ballots would arrive the next day. If they did not

finish counting the current votes, they would miss deadlines. Following these new orders from management, the scanners began removing boxes from under the table and cutting off seals to continue processing the votes inside (Humes, 2023).

After thorough investigations by three separate government entities (the Secretary of State's office, the FBI, and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation [GBI]), each agency independently concluded that no fraud was committed by either employee or anyone else involved in this event. Specifically, during interviews and reviews of security camera footage, it was determined that Moss never asked press members or Republican observers to leave; they left voluntarily, believing that processing and counting votes had concluded for the day. Additionally, the Instagram account claiming to be Freeman and alleging voter fraud was proven to be fake and not associated with her. This exonerated both mother and daughter from any accusations of tampering with election results (Humes, 2023).

This case of false allegations of fraud is significant because it reaffirms the intentions of Trump and his closest campaign team members to spread claims that the election was stolen in Biden's favor, despite knowing that the election was legitimate and free of fraud. In the cases of Ruby Freeman and Wandrea Shaye Moss, as well as the allegations surrounding electronic voting systems, a common pattern emerges. It is evident how existing conspiracy theories, which had limited dissemination and credibility, were utilized and amplified, becoming widely propagated through social networks and media, ultimately adapting to a larger narrative: "the big lie" of election theft.

These patterns demonstrate a *modus operandi*, which refers to "a particular way of doing something" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.c, par. 1). The use of a *modus operandi* implies employing a specific methodology to achieve a certain end; in this case, the widespread dissemination of unsubstantiated conspiracy theories. These theories often have some links to reality, albeit distorted and manipulated, to appear legitimate at first glance.

In the case of the voting machines, the connection to reality is that Smartmatic does have owners of Venezuelan nationality, and its machines were used in Venezuela for elections from 2004 to 2017. The falsehood lies in the claim that Dominion is connected to Smartmatic. While Smartmatic has Venezuelan origins, each state tests the security and reliability of its voting machines according to its own standards, with most adhering to federal regulations and some following local ones (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2018).

The origin of a company should be irrelevant when proving a serious allegation such as voter fraud, especially since insinuating that voting machines commit voter fraud implies, at best, that the U. S. government is incompetent in certifying the security of voting machines and elections. At worst, it suggests that numerous corrupt high-ranking government officials are certifying fraudulent machines. Furthermore, the administration in power during the 2020 election was Republican –specifically Donald Trump's–, which would indicate that it was his own administration that allowed voter fraud. If this were true, the biggest issue for the U. S. would not be the voting machines but rather its failure to maintain election security and the presence of rampant corruption within its ranks.

In the case of the conspiracy theory involving the two election workers accused of committing fraud, the link to reality lies in the fact that Freeman did take ballots from under a table and that votes were counted after it had been stated they would not be counted until the next day. However, all this is easily justifiable when one looks beyond the surface of the facts, as did the Georgia Secretary of State. Here again, there is an implicit implication ignored by the accuser: for an employee to commit voter fraud in front of surveillance cameras and digital and physical voter verification systems, there would need to be either a serious degree of incompetence among the other election workers and a catastrophic failure of the anti-fraud systems or massive collusion among election officials at all levels.

Both cases were taken to court by the individuals or entities accused of fraud. Those perpetuating baseless allegations were sued, with both plaintiffs targeting Rudy Giuliani. Although they may have wanted to sue Donald Trump as well, his absolute immunity in civil matters while serving as President meant they could only pursue action against his team. Giuliani bore the brunt of these lawsuits, as he was primarily responsible for propagating conspiracy theories and was particularly vocal on social media and news outlets sympathetic to his political party. In the Freeman and Moss case, Giuliani was found guilty of slander and must pay nearly USD 150 million for defamation, emotional damages, and punitive damages (Polantz, 2024). In the case against Dominion, Giuliani is being sued for USD 1.3 billion (Polantz, 2021). This case has not yet been resolved; it remains in court since the verdict against him in the election workers' case led him to declare bankruptcy, which paused the lawsuit. However, in July of 2024, a judge annulled the bankruptcy status, allowing the lawsuit to continue (Knauth, 2024).

Fox News, the network that reported extensively on Dominion's alleged voting machine fraud, lost a defamation lawsuit brought by Dominion and was required to pay USD 800 million (Bauder, Chase and Mulvihill, 2023). They constantly had Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell,

another one of Trump's lawyers, on their news channel, insisting that the 2020 election was in part lost by the Trump campaign because of the “fraudulent” voting machines. As mentioned beforehand, all three parties were sued by Dominion for the propagation of the voting machines conspiracy theories, although only the lawsuit against Fox News has been settled (Reuters, 2023). According to Bieber and Leal (2025), slander is defined as follows:

A slander lawsuit allows you to obtain compensation when your reputation is damaged due to defamation. This type of legal claim enables you to recover monetary payments for losses caused when someone makes a false statement of fact about you verbally, rather than in writing. (par. 1)

According to this, winning a slander claim in the U. S. is quite complex, as you must prove that the defendant knew they were spreading lies, that there was malice behind those lies, and that the lies affected you in some way (Bieber and Leal, 2025). The fact that the lies spread by the Trump campaign led to multiple successful slander lawsuits demonstrates that, even when the burden of proof was on those defending against the lies, the courts found no evidence supporting the conspiracy theories. Even when the accused parties had to disprove the claims comprising “the big lie”, it was relatively easy to show that there was no conspiracy to steal the election from Donald Trump.

The term “Stop the Steal” was originally coined by Roger Stone during Donald Trump's nomination for the 2016 Grand Old Party (GOP) presidential candidacy, as he claimed that other GOP candidates were attempting to undermine his candidacy (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022). The phrase regained traction after Trump lost the 2020 election to Joe Biden, serving to rally his supporters around a common slogan. Alexander Ali, a prominent political agitator, joined this effort by recruiting Alex Jones, the owner of the controversial conspiracy news platform Infowars. In 2016, Trump appeared on Infowars as part of his campaign, and his political advisor Stone was a frequent guest on the show. Alex Jones emerged as a key supporter and leader of the Stop the Steal movement (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022).

It is essential to understand why Alex Jones is infamous. In 2018, he was banned from major content streaming platforms, including YouTube, Facebook, Spotify and Apple. These platforms deemed his content dangerous and likely to incite violence (Chappell and Tsioulcas, 2018). Recently, Jones faced a lawsuit that left him bankrupt: the relatives of the victims of the Sandy Hook massacre—a tragic event in which a 20-year-old man entered an elementary school armed and opened fire—sued him. This incident resulted in a total of 26 victims, mostly children (Collins, 2023). The family members sued Alex Jones because he repeatedly claimed that the

massacre never happened, asserting it was staged to promote gun control measures in the U. S. He also alleged on multiple occasions that the parents and families of the victims were paid actors and that their grief was merely an act. These claims led the families to sue Jones, a lawsuit he lost in 2022, resulting in him being ordered to pay USD 1.5 billion to the plaintiffs (Asgarian, 2022).

Alex Jones is significant to this paper because he exemplifies how citizen involvement with extremist conspiracy ideologies was not a random occurrence during the January 6th, 2021 Capitol attack; instead, it was a planned event designed for these individuals to participate in. This strategy was part of Donald Trump's campaign team's efforts to engage Jones in order to appeal to his audience, which primarily consists of right-wing extremists who readily believe in conspiracy theories. Who else would spend their time tuning in to someone who can publicly claim that the massacre of innocent children in an elementary school is a government plot by left-wing extremists aimed at increasing government regulation of citizens' firearms?

Jones' participation in the Stop the Steal protests and his role in spreading allegations of a stolen election helped attract extremist groups. It is likely that the Trump team prioritized attracting extremists with right-wing ideologies in their attempts to overturn the 2020 election, as these individuals are more prone to extreme measures than the average citizen; therefore, it is easier to incite violence among extremists than among the general population. In that sense, the January 6th attack was joined by numerous extremist groups, including the Groypers, a white nationalist group led by Nick Fuentes; and the Proud Boys. Regarding the latter as mentioned in the chapter about the groups that attacked the Capitol, Everytown for Gun Safety (2020) recorded that Donald Trump stated:

[...] When asked directly "to condemn white supremacists and militia groups and to say that they need to stand down", President Trump told the Proud Boys – the far-right, Islamophobic, and misogynistic hate group– to "stand back and stand by!" before adding: "But I'll tell you what, somebody's got to do something about antifa and the left". (par. 1)

The important point for now is to emphasize that the participation of political extremists, white nationalists, and conspiracists was not incidental; it was a calculated decision by Donald Trump's team, who likely sought to attract these groups to their ranks and demonstrations because they are more inclined to take extreme measures in defense of their political ideals.

Why attacked the Capitol Building on January 6th 2021?

It would be impossible to pinpoint a single reason why the attack on the U. S. Capitol on January 6th, 2021 occurred, since the attack is a multicausal phenomenon. While some causes tend to have a greater weight in the occurrence of the event, all or most of them needed to manifest for the attack to happen. In that sense, we can mention the causes in temporal order and highlight them by the weight they had in the riot. The best place to start would be the plan of Trump and his campaign team and personal entourage to refuse to lose the 2020 election, where, even if the votes reflected Joe Biden's victory, they would do everything possible to insist that they won. This premeditated plan to claim victory in the election regardless of the wishes of the people can be seen in the final report of the Select Committee (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022), where it is stated that, on October 31st, 2020, Stephen Kevin Bannon, then-Chief White House Political Strategist, made a phone call to an associate in China, and told him that Trump would declare himself the winner of the 2020 election before the votes were finished being counted; and that, if he lost, he would ensure in the same way that he won the election. The committee investigators obtained the recording and made it public in the final report.

The recording of the call mentioned in the previous paragraph is vital to understand the Capitol attack, as it demonstrates that Trump always intended to claim electoral fraud if he lost, and it shows that the Capitol attack, or the events that resulted in the attack, were planned months in advance of their occurrence. We must remember that the allegations of Trump and his team regarding electoral fraud were what initiated, before the public eye, the events that culminated in the Capitol attack. To be as concise as possible, the Capitol attack was not a spontaneous uprising driven by public outrage over alleged electoral fraud; instead, it was a coordinated effort designed to interfere in the election. Though the execution appeared chaotic and ultimately failed to achieve any concrete goals, it did succeed in delaying Biden's ratification as President for a few hours.

The disorganized planning was likely done this way on purpose to make it difficult to trace any collusion to defraud the elections, or to always have the option of plausible deniability, with Trump exclaiming that he was only using hyperbole, and that people did not have the intelligence to understand that he was not speaking seriously. He himself confesses in his book (Trump and Schwartz, 2009) that he is a fan of using hyperbole (p. 58), and he has used it as an excuse on multiple occasions, such as when, as already reported, looking at the sky, he claimed to be "the chosen one" to fight against China with tariffs. This was in front of journalists who were interviewing him, and when he was questioned about why he had said something so strange, he

said that it was only a metaphor, a form of eloquence that the media had misrepresented and misinterpreted (Cillizza, 2019). This denial to accept defeat and to admit that he is wrong is a personality trait that remained from his days as a businessman, where never admitting defeat and always finding a way to win is admirable to a certain extent. However, this same characteristic in the hands of the President of the most powerful nation in the world is dangerous, as the Capitol attack can well attest.

The second major event that led to the Capitol attack was the dissemination of what is now considered "the big lie", which was a series of conspiracy theories spread by Trump and his team where there were multiple alleged instances in which electoral fraud was committed with the purpose of Donald Trump losing the election. Among the various theories, this work identifies two as the most widely disseminated and influential, which were repeatedly promoted by Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell on Fox News, both leading to defamation lawsuits.

The first theory claims that the machines to automate the process of voting from Smartmatic and Dominion Voting Systems were manufactured by Venezuela with the purpose of interfering in the elections and giving the victory to the candidate who was most to their liking (Cooper, 2022). The local government and federal instances such as the FBI investigated the allegations and did not find any instance in which the voting machines had altered any vote. It was proven that the machines had no capacity to change the votes from one candidate to another, and that in addition, any ballot processed by the machine had a physical backup, so achieving fraud with these machines was virtually impossible (Cooper, 2022). Both voting machine companies sued Fox News and Donald Trump's lawyers Sidney Powell and Rudy Giuliani. While the companies reached a multi-million dollar settlement with Fox News, the lawsuits against the lawyers are still pending (Reuters, 2023).

The second lie spread by Trump's team and especially Giuliani was that arising from a video where an election worker is seen taking a box from under a table, opening it, and processing the votes that were contained there. The theory asserts that she was processing votes improperly, counting multiple times votes in favor of Biden or counting apocryphal votes. After conducting an investigation, Trump's team disseminated and amplified the theory, discovering that the woman seen committing the alleged electoral fraud worked processing votes and her name was Ruby Freeman, who worked with her daughter, Wandrea Shaye Moss, who was the supervisor of that vote counting section, and they pushed the theory that mother and daughter were involved in an elaborate electoral fraud (Humes, 2023). However, after another investigation by the local government and federal government organizations, it was concluded that mother and daughter

did not commit any type of fraud, that the votes stored under the table had been left there according to protocol to leave them ready for the next day, but one of the bosses decided that it was better to continue working through the night to finish the count faster, which is why the mother took the box from under the table and began to process the votes that were there (Humes, 2023).

Afterward, mother and daughter sued Giuliani for defamation and the emotional damage caused by being harassed by Trump fanatics who accused them of having betrayed the country based on the conspiracy theory. Mother and daughter won the case and Giuliani was ordered to pay a multi-million dollar sum in compensation (Polantz, 2024).

The third factor that led to the attack on the Capitol was the relationship that Trump and his team formed with extremist right-wing groups, where Trump himself said about the Proud Boys when he was asked to give a message against them: "Stand back and stand by" (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 507), which the radical group took as an endorsement from the President. Roger Stone, an important advisor to Donald Trump, even recorded a video making the oath of the Proud Boys (ADL, 2025).

Stone also associated with Alex Jones, a famous conspiracy theorist who fell into disgrace after accusing parents of children massacred in a school shooting of being paid actors and being sued by them for defamation and emotional damage, losing a multi-million dollar amount (Asgarian, 2022). The first approached the conspiracy theorist by attending his conspiratorial news program Infowars and even took Donald Trump to the program on one occasion (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022). Stone associated with Jones in order to attract his delirious audience to Donald Trump's fight to subvert the elections, and he also had a relationship with the group of right-wing radicals known as the Oath Keepers (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022). To conclude, although there were more radical right-wing groups involved with Trump and his team, these are the main ones. Therefore, Trump's close relationship with radical groups demonstrates that he attracted them on purpose to the Capitol on January 6th, 2021; he knew that the extremists would do his dirty work for him to try to subvert the 2020 elections without having to get his hands dirty.

The fourth factor that led to the Capitol attack was the constant instructions from Trump to his followers to do precisely that: attack the Capitol. His instructions began with his tweet "Big protest in D. C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!" (U. S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 499). Later, on the same day of the attack, he gave a talk to his followers in the Ellipse, a park very close to the Capitol, where he constantly incited people to fight to prevent the ratification of

Biden's victory (Naylor, 2021). In these two instances, Trump incited his followers to behave violently during the demonstrations on January 6th, 2021.

Finally, the fifth and last factor that led to the Capitol attack was the blind patriotism of Donald J. Trump's followers, which led them not to question the then-President, even when the evidence that his conspiracy theories about a stolen election was demonstrably false. The same blind patriotism caused a small push from the radical groups to cause Trump's non-radicalized followers to cross police blockades and enter the Capitol by force (Joscelyn, 2024).

In short, this thesis and the materials used to support it prove that the Capitol attack was something orchestrated, which took months of planning, planning that on some occasions seemed chaotic and improvised, perhaps because the perpetrators did not have the capacity to devise something better, or perhaps because they wanted to leave the trace that leads towards them diffuse and difficult to follow. What is certain is that Donald Trump put the stability and security of the entire nation at risk for the simple whim of refusing to lose.

Conclusion

The hypothesis of this thesis was not proven. While radical patriotism did play a role in the attack on the Capitol, this role was relatively minor compared to the political and conspiratorial machinery that instigated the incident. In simpler terms, radical patriotism was not found in a naturally occurring state during the Capitol attack; it was then-President Donald Trump who radicalized the patriotism of his followers and drove them to commit the attack. Therefore, it is not necessarily the case that there is a constant, inherent blind patriotism among U. S. citizens; instead, in the specific instance of the Capitol attack, a "normal" sense of patriotism was amplified and distorted among Trump's followers. This suggests that the underlying issue is not an inherent flaw within the American populace, but the deliberate manipulation of their existing sentiments by a powerful figure for political gain. Further research is needed to fully understand the extent and mechanisms of this radicalization process.

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